

CULTURAL HISTORY OF NARBERTH – UNABRIDGED

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF NARBERTH

BY VICTORIA DONOHOE

**Typed posthumously (and lightly edited) from manuscripts found among the
author's possessions by neighbor and friend, Nancy A Greene**

(02/01/2021)

**CULTURAL HISTORY OF NARBERTH –
UNABRIDGED
A CULTURAL HISTORY OF NARBERTH
BY VICTORIA DONOHOE**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Preface	i
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 – Before the Town	60
Chapter 2 – Abrasive Changes in the 1870s – The Founding of the Town (1876-1895)	130
Chapter 3 – Physical Development and Sections of Narberth (1895-1920)	197
Chapter 4 – Progressive Narberth – The Shaping of a Community (1895-1920)	257
Chapter 5 – Narbrook Park – “Garden City Experiment”	301
Chapter 6 – Narberth between World Wars (roughly 1920-1945)	360
Chapter 7 – Ethnic Makeup, Divisions, Different Social Groups	403
Chapter 8 – Narberth Lives	447
Chapter 9 – 1945-1975	482
Chapter 10 – 1975-1995	562
About the Author	567
Note from Editor	570
Acknowledgements	

This page intentionally left blank.

Preface

This cultural history of Narberth was written by Victoria Donohoe, a lifelong resident of Narberth. It was written over a forty-year period from about 1980 until her death in 2018. Victoria did not complete the book but left it in manuscript form in her house. Neighbor and friend Nancy Greene, who had helped type chapters for Victoria in the last years of her life, was able to secure Victoria's writings (and supporting documentation) when Victoria was moved into a retirement home. Victoria died before the book could be completed but Nancy has typed and organized the material as closely as possible to the way she believes Victoria would have wanted it.

This is a first unabridged version of Victoria's history. It is comprised of an introduction and ten chapters in roughly chronological order from earliest precolonial times to Narberth's establishment as a borough in 1995. Before going to press, this history will be circulated among friends in Narberth for comment. It is hoped some may be able to fill in missing material, supply names and, where needed, make corrections.

Following the last chapter are a biography of Victoria, a description of the work that went into putting this book together and acknowledgements.

Cultural History of Narberth – Unabridged

A Cultural History of Narberth

By Victoria Donohoe¹

Introduction

Narberth's roots as an independent community go surprisingly deep. Not only today is it the only independently governed town in Philadelphia's Main Line suburbs, but independence seems to have been associated with this locality from earliest times – when Swedish settlers were at last free to trade as individuals with the Indians after the overthrow of their crown colony; also when the Merion Quakers sought to establish a barony with their meetinghouse as both its religious and governmental center; again when a Liberty pole was erected here during the quasi-war with France (1798) and the area became known and imprinted on major maps as Libertyville.

Narberth is now a trendy address, though it has never been a fashionable address in a High Society sense, in the way many other Main Line addresses such as Haverford and Bryn Mawr have been for over a century. Narberth still looks like an old-fashioned home town. And thankfully, it never has been gussied up to appear otherwise. Trendiness has lent an aura of glamour to a locality that is cozy rather than spacious. A streak of independence has defined the place from earliest times.

The wonder is that Narberth's separate existence appears to be the end result of repeated attempts since the late seventeenth century by Merion Welsh Quakers to assert their independence and defensively prevent not only their own community's absorption by the city of Philadelphia, but also later to prevent the imminent takeover of their meetinghouse neighborhood by commercial interests.

Thus Narberth, that tiny enclave begun as a Quaker suburb near the city's edge in 1881, is today the only self-governed town along a twenty-five mile stretch of Philadelphia's rail-linked Main Line suburbs that straddle three counties. Narberth is studied here as a useful model of long-established suburban community development because of its survivability as a thriving independent town close to a

¹ Typed posthumously (and lightly edited) from manuscripts found among the author's possessions by neighbor and friend, Nancy A. Greene.

major American city at a time when other old inner-rim suburbs are dying.

Almost hidden around a bend two miles from the western edge of the city – Narberth was never engulfed by Philadelphia’s vast city/country consolidation of 1854 because of far-seeing action taken in 1784. This late-Victorian town was built at an ancient crossroads to shield the grounds of a very old Quaker meetinghouse from disorderly intrusion - a very real problem during America’s first great international world’s fair. Parts of the town pre-date the nineteenth century, with remnants of a pair of old villages located on Narberth’s “front road” [Montgomery Avenue] providing clues of how Narberth’s stand-alone character quietly evolved. One of these, which gave the area its first name, Libertyville, is the remains of a tiny primitive trade-route hamlet believed to be Swedish, that was a spearhead of settlement before Philadelphia existed, and vestiges of the other one still feature an ancient inn at the meetinghouse entrance.

That “front road” soon became a key transportation hub of the region with a stage coach stop at the inn. By 1832, a regional rail line from Philadelphia began passing through this locale along that same main artery to upstate Lancaster, one of America’s earliest inland cities. Within a generation, what turned out to be transcontinental train service was established along its present route (through Narberth’s midsection), giving a string of small station-stops in hamlets and villages in Philadelphia’s western suburbs its catchy name of “the Main Line,” a now-famous moniker which has endured and been understood to connote a comfortable and prosperous lifestyle.

The community we call Narberth evolved because a conservative Quaker farmer [Edward R. Price] founded a town on his ancestral farm and made plain that the acreage be extended further after his death. The locality became essentially suburban in character in 1881 when that farmer’s plot-plan for the nucleus of a town was published. Soon a few rather lavish houses were built with the farmer’s help, eventually medium-size ones, and the effort later broadened in scope as anticipated, with Narberth’s becoming a self-governed town in 1895.

One rock-solid reason for Narberth’s survival is its extremely close proximity to the city, with only slim buffer of township land separating it from the city’s edge. Consequently, with the heart of the city’s downtown district just a little farther away, Narberth borough always was and still is strongly identified with residents who commute there by train to white-collar jobs - so much so that Narberth seems to be rediscovered anew as a destination by each successive generation of house-hunting newcomers. This is most notably the case now for young professional couples who both work and have small children. And when new residents realize this community is governed independently, many view

that as a double bonus.

Still, why has this self-governed town not been swallowed up since it went independent? The obvious answer is that Narberth is of manageable size, and people like governing themselves. Also it is a fact that independent boroughs tend to stay that way. And, as Narberthians seldom have given serious thought to surrendering their borough incorporation, consolidation with the surrounding township now seems remote from the minds of both the local elected officials and the townspeople. Narberth is the hole in the donut, and likely to remain so. All the while helping to maintain Narberth's separation is its tucked-away location, making the town hard to find except by rail.

Most obviously, this "donut hole" [aspect of Narberth relates to its] physical position relative to the much larger township. But it also applies equally to Narberth's existence as a populist town surrounded by a township long regarded as affluent, sophisticated and upscale. In any event, being that hole in the donut sets Narberth apart. A healthy rivalry with neighboring civic associations and other voluntary groups gave Narberth an early competitive edge with such organizations and towns even before this community earned its populist stripes. Certainly the fact that Lower Merion Township still is an upscale place has helped Narberth survive, avoid decline, and become the very trendy place to live that it now is.

Of course Narberth's "mass-audience tilt" was foreshadowed when farmer Price tried to establish a Victorian era "Godey's Lady's Book village" here, a concept then known popularly nationwide. Later leanings of that sort were a re-casting of this tendency in forms more appropriate to a new age and new needs. And although the potential for [a down-to-earth], everyman's town had existed here from the outset, it being adjacent to that most egalitarian of institutions, a Quaker meetinghouse (not to mention a harness race track), Narberth's populist leanings did not become clear-cut until the near-takeover of the town just after the turn of the nineteenth century by an aggressive land developer who blanketed the borough with tracts of tiny houses. [While this caused] a sharp rise in population, [it also created] a rallying point for the town fathers whose [response] was to launch - under organized volunteer sponsorship [and], as an apparent diversionary tactic, a "Garden City" improvement project that featured a quite advanced type of open-space conservation and architect-designed houses before World War I.

No question but that an active civic life flourished here throughout the town's first half-century, reflecting quite a few concerns of the Progressive Era. People who dominated Narberth's civic life during that period were expeditors who made things happen. Their passion for community building as a great and difficult enterprise had extraordinary vitality, so that it is sometimes regarded with awe, in

retrospect.

True, the most memorable civic leaders over time in this community have tended to be fairly prosperous people frequently with business or professional ties in the city, although some have been heads of their own local firms. But people of more modest means, even ones barely making ends meet yet active in volunteer organizations, work-related unions or otherwise well motivated, have often provided the glue that keeps civic life together. Inquiry into the first half-century of independent rule reveals a period of civic ferment and audacious intervention, one which now appears far removed from our present more sober and at times maddeningly cautious attitudes toward both innovative exploration and long-range planning for the town's future.

Likewise, a strong sense of the past has served to anchor the town, but it took a high-profile community-wide Narberth historical pageant (1914) to make all the citizens aware of this initially. The all-volunteer Lower Merion Historical Society was founded in 1949 and still has a high percentage of volunteers with Narberth roots, including some of its officers. The Lower Merion Conservancy, involved with protecting both the natural landscape and historic architecture, came along later, as did the Narberth Historical Society. Houses of worship, numerous here, have also been an unusually strong and stabilizing influence from the very beginning up to today. And an active civic life has been a benchmark as well in a town so often said to harbor an uncommonly large number of community groups - including a huge network of sports activity for children and young people centered at the oft-described "busiest playground on the Main Line."

That populist tilt carries over to a number of prominent persons who have lived in Narberth including Albert Hay Malotte who set the Lord's prayer to music, the Shakespearian acting team of Sothern and Marlowe who had a habit of staying here during their appearances on the Philadelphia stage, and Ashley Montague the quotable anthropologist who expounded both on the air and in print the "natural superiority of the female of the species."

But it was two other nationally-known figures in particular who were drawn to the town above all by its solid populist reputation - the great art collector Dr. Albert C. Barnes of Merion and the National Football league commissioner Bert Bell who reportedly, while in office, was the best-known man in America. Both men were attracted (as was Bell's actress wife) by what they perceived as the zesty hell-on-wheels assault on pomposity that they each saw as the town's hallmark of authenticity.

Narberth is an unbuttoned society. It has its pockets of scrappy wage-earners. But what it has had even more of is the feeling of human bonds in a guileless community made up, since the late-1880s

before it became a borough, of a saucy mix of people from old established upstate towns and rural areas along with an occasional aristocrat and people who had been settled home-owners in Philadelphia's various districts, each locality with its distinctive fabric of neighborhood life that has earned Philadelphia its nickname "a city of neighborhoods." So, by the turn of the twentieth century, Narberth - with its own cast of characters: a surprisingly comfortable fit of artisans and ex-farmers, storekeepers, people in service jobs and in business and management as well as teachers and professionals - became an especially vivid approximation of the typical American small town.

Another strong thread woven into the fabric of the town and one that has regularly manifested itself without letup for more than a century is Narberth's dedication to patriotic observances of various kinds, something doubtless instilled early. Washington's Army camped here during the Revolution on one of the Price family farms, its location partly in the present Narberth borough. And remnants of the two primitive villages here also have prompted other patriotic remembrances of our past having to do with liberty, notably our vast historical pageant early in the twentieth century when such observances were plentiful during the Progressive Era nationally.

And speaking of "patriotism," to view the period after World War II in all its complexity requires mentioning the fact that Narberth was not just one of five local places Ku Klux Klan processions and cross-burnings occurred on Fourth of July eve, 1924. But it is also the place where people who were to clash with and strive to counteract that KKK movement at its height, learned their first lessons and took their first steps. The "high" purpose of their "Narberth Movement" that became a nationwide effort to educate a broad public about hate tactics of the Klan existed here side-by-side with the low purposes of the Klan, even if separately and without much awareness of neighbors' involvement in either group. In the end the people launching that protest triumphed while the numerous Klan members here in the town, like those across America, soon saw their crusade dwindle.

Hearing about those cross-burnings, one of which in a nearby town that same night resulted in the shooting of two policemen, one fatally, it may seem contradictory to suggest that a benchmark of Narberth's comfortable hometown feel is the undeniable friendliness here. Perhaps the main reason the town acquired that enviable trait - and did so quite early - is the remarkable number of family networks of grown and already married siblings who settled here between 1890 and 1925 - mostly middle-class people and some working-class folks as well. A few of these "clans" are still represented in the town.

Still another reason for the cohesive small-town feel of Narberth was that, for some sixty years starting in the second decade of the twentieth century, Narberth was regarded for miles around as a

“railroad town” due to the heavy concentration of rail employees of all kinds living here, especially white-collar Pennsylvania Railroad workers who used their free passes to commute by train to their jobs in Philadelphia. At the time, our station stop serviced about two thousand passengers each weekday.

As for who Narberth’s leaders were over time, the town-builders at the outset were a team assembled under farmer Price’s directives. Their accomplishment attracted other leaders who had something of the explorers’ spirit, and who learned a lot from Price’s town plan before realizing that it was not a path but a door. Their first really creative project, once through that door was the “Garden City” initiative immediately followed by another conspicuously positive effort, the major community playground replacing an indoor recreational facility that had outlived its usefulness. Taking over the reins of leadership in the mid-1920s to post World War II was the next generation, its impact crucial in keeping alive the Progressive Era incentives that had already done so much for the town.

After World War II, changes in Philadelphia began to have very noticeable effects on this settled, inner-ring suburb two miles from the edge of the city. In the immediate postwar period, Narberth and Lower Merion Township surrounding it became a destination for West Philadelphia residents engaged in so-called “white flight,” although other municipalities in neighboring Delaware County bore the brunt of these massive relocations. At the same time the new suburban shopping malls, increasing use of automobiles, and arrival of television entertainment (it put an end to attendance at the town team's semi-pro baseball games) began drawing people away from the resources of a town intensely proud that all its neighborhoods are reachable from the village center on foot. New civic initiatives, save for demolition projects and rebuilding (for apartments, offices), mostly entered a postwar quiet time. Only patriotic activity on certain holidays and organized sports for youths and children seemed immune from fluctuations in the public's attention during the decades immediately after World War II.

A generation passed before changing demographics caused by that influx of West Philadelphians was reflected in persons elected to town council. When such changes were acknowledged, friction was minimized as the candidates belonged to the same political party in charge since the borough was founded. Only during the century's final quarter when fresh demographic changes heralded a new generation of families choosing Narberth as the place they want to raise their young children did voter registration rolls of the two major political parties start to equalize for the first time ever. This caused mild panic for the party in power and heated things up all around. No longer content to be run by one party, Narberth had entered the last stage of one-party rule. How long until a competitive two-party system would evolve leading our self-governed town to become a true democracy? It could take another

five or ten years in order to have a two-party system, with back-and-forth control.

Meanwhile, Narberth Civic Association and almost every other community group also played a much more active role during this final quarter of the 20th century than in the post-World War II period. One very positive recent occurrence was that, by the late-1990s, both the Lower Merion Historical Society, and Lower Merion Conservancy² assumed strong advocacy roles to help protect endangered historic buildings in Narberth Borough and the surrounding township. They also took their first steps in leading our community toward the pursuit of public education about our local history, natural habitat and our built environment and urged the celebration of these cultural resources along with their protection as we moved into the twenty-first century. Narberth Historical Society, begun in 1995, took its own modest steps, meanwhile, toward realizing the same goals.

And the town's close link with sports activity has continued. Narberth's benchmark today in that regard nationally is its long-established tradition of half-court-only basketball, our friendly playground surroundings attracting a startling diversity of players of all ages and backgrounds for the hard-edge outdoor game of pickup basketball, played here without letup - or referees - day and night every day.

For a long time, Narberth seemed a terribly underrated place - a place real estate agents promoted to customers looking for "starter homes" they could expect to (and often did) move out of later, presumably to new tract-house developments in fast-growing exurban locations. That this perception lately has changed was reflected by the late-1980s in the sharply rising Narberth real estate values and also by changes in the incoming population - a number of arrivals in the smaller houses being professionals such as lawyers or physicians who teach in the city's medical schools or do medical research. And a strikingly large number of architects which is a vote of confidence for the existing solidly-built housing stock in this town. Making a difference now among people moving here to settle down is their realization that Narberth is a place with genuine community spirit - a true neighborhood in the old-fashioned sense. The town still has its core assets for it is a stable community with access to good schools and excellent transportation links. Consequently home sales often are to existing residents for once people arrive here, they tend to stay and move from house to house. There is nothing new about this, except that younger people are doing it. And when some residents do move away, they often move back.

² Editor's note: The Lower Merion Conservancy was formed in September 1995, when the Lower Merion-Narberth Watershed Association (founded in 1974) merged into the Lower Merion Preservation Trust (formed in 1991), and organizations joined forces as the new Lower Merion Conservancy. Information from Lower Merion Conservancy website.

True, a section of Narberth's upper perimeter, with its popular ethnic eateries, block of "Brick Row" houses, and a commercial strip growing along Montgomery Avenue, hides from casual observers the town's quiet residential areas: the upscale "gold coast" which has seen the inroads of various housing subdivisions, the rows of tree-lined straight streets, tucked away Narbrook Park with its grassy common and stream, and the solidly residential southside which so far has had no commercial development at all. But people have found this community anyway and mostly they have found it to their liking.

Narberth is now a very popular address. Surprisingly, monthly rents for its apartments are higher than in other nearby communities, and its houses sell fast - some districts even having an informal waiting list. Why this trendiness? By the mid-1900s in America, and as a result of television's influence, ours became an entertainment-centered society. And with this very strong shift away from serious concerns, popular culture zoomed up in importance. That celebrity-centeredness could partly explain why populist Narberth was "discovered" and proclaimed a trendy place during the past fifteen years.

Part of [my] interest in Narberth as a locale to be studied is that, although feisty and unpretentious, Narberth may be one of the most culturally diverse places throughout the region from the standpoint of the number of settlements here over a long period. Moreover, for the close observer, Narberth has, even to this day, visible remnants of nearly all the ethnic tides that have swept across the old Upper Great Trading Path of the Minquas.

Beyond telling the story of Narberth's past to those who are to live its future, a study like this portraying some of the more basic characteristics of a middle-class/working-class, independent, flag-waving town and its people located little more than a sixteen-minute commuter train ride from the heart of a major American city, can serve as a point of departure for future work by persons further afield. [This could be especially true for] those who seek to unravel the complexities of what has made certain middle-class communities viable at the inner rim of America's cities and what keeps such places that way, even in some cases a region's most densely populated and long-established towns that, like Narberth, are as much as ever a sought-after destination for house-hunters, most especially but not exclusively those with children. And this [could be true], at a time when our nation's embattled cities inevitably must start to take their first steps toward regionalism, enabling them, like city-states, to establish closer ties and a working relationship with entire networks of these surrounding small boroughs and townships.

In this connection, I mention a former Narberth youth, Steven Conn, a graduate of Lower Merion

High School, Yale and Penn and now an Ohio University history professor. One of his books³ is about what it was like for several years while living in West Philadelphia to have “a mixed neighborhood experience” that was the nearest thing he’s ever known to a “peaceable kingdom.”

Likewise, [it is hoped that] this telling of the success story of Narberth's past [reaches many] who will either live the future of the Philadelphia region or study it, [or other] places like it, throughout America. For what this story shows, after all, is that the “hole in the donut” (independent Narberth surrounded by Lower Merion Township) did not just happen by chance. Indeed, it came about through the arduous far-seeing efforts of one man, Edward R. Price, because he was trying to develop his own strategy for fighting invasive crime, indifference and what must have seemed to be chaos all around him. Price's solution was to take steps to organize a town, a Quaker town, with its first few streets laid out on an atlas map in 1881 marking the Bicentennial of the Merion Welsh colony's plan to come to America. They had been careful organizers, so he would be too. Much of the story of how Price's town of Narberth evolved, therefore, is about the organized effort that goes on here.

This study focuses particular attention on those individuals, groups and activities that have built up civility and contributed to the civic sense which has distinguished Narberth throughout its most vigorous periods. For these are the very qualities that are regarded as a missing ingredient from so much of American life today, and which can be replenished by the telling of these tales....

³ Metropolitan Philadelphia: living with the Presence of the Past, by Steven Conn. University of Penn Press, 2008.

Chapter 1 - Before the Town

Prehistory - Lenni Lenape..... 2
Indians, Swedes and Dutch- Highways, Byways and Traders 4
Narberth Trading Post..... 10
Early Jewish Traders..... 18
Arrival of the Welsh - Welsh Heritage 21
Welsh Quaker Legend..... 27
Other Nationalities – Germans..... 28
Betty Conrad 29
Washington in Narberth 30
Revolutionary Period 32
The Federal Era 41
Capture of a Pirate Ship 45
Village of Libertyville..... 49
Columbia Railroad 50
A Lawman in Libertyville..... 51
General Wayne Village..... 55
Pennsylvania Railroad and Elm Station..... 56

Prehistory - Leni Lenape

Peaceful, nomadic Lenape Indians of very ancient lineage, probably a band no bigger than 25 or 30 persons, are believed to have summered in Narberth for an extended period sometime between 1600 and the 1650s. Lenapes were a hunting and gathering people of very individualistic temperament who lived in numerous small bands instead of large groups and also grew summertime crops. Only a faint echo of their occupation of this land remains. But we know that when it came to farming, fresh water supplies and prospects of hunting small game, area Indians and colonists (Swedes, Welsh) preferred the same sites. So much so that these colonists often settled on land the local Indians had previously cleared for themselves.

Quaker meeting houses of early vintage usually occupied such sites in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, and William Penn also chose similar sites for his various tracts called “manors.” Clearings where Indian villages formerly stood were in demand for these purposes because tree-cutting was such an arduous task for new European settlers. Conveniently for Quakers, the Indians lived in their villages for only 30 to 40 years before leaving them vacant. Thus far, short of an archaeological dig to settle the matter (and there have been very few of those at probably Lenape sites in Southeastern Pennsylvania), the fact that Merion Friends’ Meeting was built at such an early date (1695) is the strongest evidence we have that the customary practice prevailed, and that an Indian village existed at Narberth - either a prehistoric one before the year 1500, or one in the historic period within about 150 years after that date.

The Lenape got their nickname “River Indians” because they liked to settle on riverbanks particularly at the mouth of streams. So, why Narberth, which is not on a river? Indians made their trails on ridges. Narberth is located upon an ancient curving ridgeway. And trails in some cases may have represented the boundaries marking off the range of a Lenape band. Trails offer a ready-made type of boundary because ridges so often contain springs which are the source of creeks flowing off both sides of the ridge in opposite directions. Indian lore is filled with references to Indian tracts that extended from such a place “to the ends of” (meaning to the feeder springs of) such-and-such a creek or “to the ends of” such-and-such a waterfall. So a Lenape band living at the mouth of Cobbs Creek, for instance, very likely might regard its territory as extending upland to a major source of that creek, namely a couple of its major feeder springs along Narberth’s ridge.

Narberth’s Lenapes might have been a Cobbs Creek band displaced when Governor Printz built

his celebrated grist mill near the mouth of Cobbs Creek in 1643. Or, they might be from either of two Schuylkill River bands – Nepopcon on the west bank on the present site of the Presidential Apartments⁴ where there was both a village and an Indian fishery at the major waterfall formerly there, and which had direct access to Narberth via an ancient trail today called Ford Road. Another known Lenape village, Nittabakonk, was located on the east bank at Miquon. And Lenape bands are known to have liked their villages to be four or five miles apart in clusters, which is about right for all three of these locations.

There is another reason the Lenape might have pulled back even earlier from the mouth of Cobbs Creek to Narberth. Despite their particularly early lineage in Southeastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey, these Algonquin-speaking Lenape had to contend by c. 1600 with both the raids and otherwise menacing presence of a warlike tribe of breakaway Iroquois Indians known as the Susquehannock. A large centralized group based in Pennsylvania’s Lancaster County and the upper reaches of the Susquehanna River, these exceptionally tall Indians with sonorous voices whom the Lenape referred to as Minquas (meaning treacherous) and who also were called Conestoga by others, had migrated from lower New York State. They were trying desperately to get a piece of the action in fur trade. Blocked both by the League of the Iroquois on the north and by Chesapeake area Indians on the south, the Susquehannock determined to come east and to drive the defenseless Lenape from their native lands on the Delaware River’s west bank. By 1630, they largely succeeded.

The Lenape, whose territory included all of the state of Delaware and reached inland up to Pennsylvania’s Lehigh River, if not beyond, and east and north into New Jersey as far as the Raritan River, pulled back from the Delaware River’s western edge. Other factors may have been involved such as a shortage of edible vegetation. It is believed the Lenape hunted and foraged inland during the winter, or at the very least they thinned out in the local landscape in the cold months of the year when green plants were in short supply. But in the summer, to protect themselves from the Susquehannock, they began choosing their local village sites along streams further and further from riverbanks.

Since it took the Lenape 30 to 40 years to “use up” the resources of a new site and move on, Narberth could have had particular appeal for them at this time. Set back from the water’s edge, but very well connected by trails, Narberth would have provided a safe haven for quite some time for our tri-state region’s fur trade started, to be sure, on the Delaware River - but far to the south of here, at Fortress

⁴ Editor’s note: 3900 City Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19131

Christina where the city of Wilmington, Delaware is today.

The Lenape are linked in other ways with the Narberth locality. They had standing orders to supply venison to the first Welsh Quaker settlers here. Indian children received instructions sitting alongside Quaker children on benches upstairs in the Merion meetinghouse. Also, a few Indian burials took place in the meetinghouse graveyard, suggesting that those Indians had lived nearby, since the early Merion Welsh Quakers, by custom, buried non-Quakers if they lived in the neighborhood. Very likely those Indians were stragglers who lived on the fringes of colonial life after their tribal groups permanently left the area in a westerly direction by 1740. The very large quantity of Indian arrowheads found early in the 20th century around Narberth's "Ancient Indian spring," source of the East Branch of Indian Creek,⁵ may date back before the "contact period with colonists to prehistoric times before 1500 A.D. But at least it testifies to the wealth of hunting activity along what was, after all, the Lenape's major hunting trail leading from the junction of the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers servicing Indians in the Philadelphia metropolitan area since ancient times.

Other local Indian signifiers are the names of the two streams that originate here, flowing through Narberth. One, a feeder of West Philadelphia's Mill Creek, was called Nanganesy by the Lenape.⁶ The other, the East Branch of Indian Creek, is identified as such on early maps, which suggests that oral tradition had closely linked this stream with Native Americans for a once perfectly obvious, but now unknown reason. Settlers may have been referring to the Lenape settlement, if it were recent enough for any European to remember. But very likely they would associate the stream more strongly with the Susquehannock Indians coming down the same trail, renamed the big Trading Path in 1643, with beaver skins, and with their sometime stopovers in Narberth around 1654 and '55 and later.

Indians, Swedes and Dutch- Highways, Byways and Traders

Trade routes were destiny in the earliest colonial times when Narberth, a Swedish/Native American trading post site, is believed to have existed at a break point on a principal trading path to the

⁵ Editor's note: As indicated later in this chapter, this ancient Indian spring, the source of the East Branch of Indian Creek which surfaces in Narbrook Park, was located immediately behind an early nineteenth-century house at 1256 Montgomery Avenue, Narberth. It was "capped" in 1980.

⁶ Editor's added note: In the author's notes it states w/re "naming of creeks" – All were given their names by Peter Lindstrom Geographic Americae, 1654-56. – a military engineer and the earliest cartographer of the Delaware Valley. He drew the first map of the Delaware Bay and River, 1654-55. He traveled up the west bank of the Delaware River to the Falls at Trenton and down the east bank, charting many of the creeks along the way. He gave all of these creeks their Indian and/or Swedish names and noted some of their features. From: Before Penn: Swedish Colonists in the Land of the Lenape. Phila: American Swedish Historical Museum, 1988, p. 35.

nearby unloading zone for European supply ships in the mid-seventeenth century. Decades later new colonists came to settle Narberth's land granted to them by Pennsylvania's founding father William Penn. These first-generation Welsh Quakers built their meeting house as the prominent centerpiece of their community, known as Merion in the Welsh tract. It was to be both their religious and governmental center when they attained complete autonomy as a self-governing township in a Welsh-speaking barony⁷ - a status eventually denied them. With such status, the Welsh tract would have become part of a 45,000 or 50,000-acre Welsh-speaking barony, to be settled with six other land companies by William Penn himself.

Welsh memories are long, however. Nearly two centuries later and in an altered form, the idea of independent rule was revived, updated and scaled way down in size when the autonomous Borough of Narberth was created in 1895 on a portion of that same original Welsh settlement, on what was to have become "barony" land in Penn's colony.

Significantly the borough's corporate boundary fronts on the meetinghouse grounds along that property's full length, as if in protection of it. Such protection indeed had been the intention of the town's Quaker founder from the outset. The Quakers had never wanted this zone around their meetinghouse to be undifferentiated, as suburbs have tended to be for centuries. So, belatedly their stubborn determination to preserve local autonomy was rewarded, if in scope modestly, as benefits Quaker sensibilities.

This chapter takes a look at the period of earliest European settlement here, after which gradually the Welsh farms became some of the largest and most prosperous in Philadelphia's western suburbs, and the area found the strength to nip in the bud what otherwise might have been, under some circumstances, virtually certain eventual annexation by the city. Next it will examine a span from the Federalist era through the booming fringe economy phase as it was lived here on the city's edge, on up to the 1860 appearance of residential suburbs for commuters.

This community did not start life as an inner rim suburb of a major American city. But over time it became one. Something about the distinctive geography of the site and that attracted functions to be served here during the earliest colonial period when Europeans were having contact with Native

⁷ The Welsh Barony idea, its governance to have been conducted in the Welsh language, was for any and all seekers a dead issue by around the year 1700, no later. Wales of course has never lost its sense of independence. That little country had been unjustly robbed of it by the killing of the Welsh Prince Llywelyn by English soldiers who sent his head on a pike to London as a trophy in 1282; Wales thus became subject to the British Crown.

Americans at this location made certain indelible impressions that have left their mark on the landscape. The rivalry of Dutch and Swedish commercial interests in the region first put this locality on the map when it led the Swedish governor to reroute his major trading path from the interior through Narberth vicinity.

For the English explorer Henry Hudson's services on behalf of the Dutch had given them their foothold on the eastern seaboard of North America. So, the Dutch Republic, surrounded by European monarchies, staked its claim to the territory Hudson explored in his three-masted wooden ship that navigated the Hudson, Delaware and Connecticut rivers more than a decade before the Pilgrims landed in New England. While setting up their system of trade with the Indians for beaver skins, the New Amsterdam Dutch built their first local fort, Fort Nassau, across from the junction of the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers, on the Delaware River's east bank at Gloucester, New Jersey.

Originally, the Dutch built Fort Nassau in 1624 while they were expecting to locate the capital⁸ of their New Netherlands colony on an island, most likely Tinicum, Pennsylvania on the Delaware River, which they called the South River, mistakenly believing that locale had Florida climate and palm trees. But by 1626, they were officially centered at Manhattan Island, on account of its fine harbor.

And, of course, the strategy of trading networks such as that of the Dutch West India Company was to set up military trading posts like Fort Nassau at key locations and have traders bring beaver skins to them for the Dutch were not trappers and depended on the Indians. Initially Fort Nassau traded with the Lenni Lenape Indians until the Susquehannock very soon permanently squeezed those long-established local Indians out of that arrangement.

Certainly the Susquehannocks had been swift at seizing new opportunities. By 1626, just as Fort Nassau was up and running, a Susquehannock Indian delegation traveled to Manhattan to establish trade relations⁹ with the Dutch. That meant delivering their cargoes to Fort Nassau by way of the Schuylkill.¹⁰ For this, the Susquehannocks used Conestoga Portage, an ancient beaver trade route linking the Susquehanna and Delaware rivers. This passageway gained prominence in the 1620's as the beaver trade

⁸ Shorto, Russell, *The Island at the Center of the World*, Random House, 2005, p. 44, (original hardcover by Doubleday). Helping the Dutch reject Tinicum as their capital was the fact that, while Delaware Bay did freeze over, Manhattan's harbor seemed almost immune from that kind of seasonal setback.

⁹ Isaack de Rasiere immediately reported this outreach by the Susquehannock Indians to the West India Company in 1626. *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey and Delaware 1620-1707*, Albert C. Myers, editor, 1912, p. 24-38; reprinted 1953, Barnes & Noble, Inc. N.Y. Rasiere was secretary to the commander of the province, Peter Minuit, at the time.

¹⁰ Weslager, C.A. and A.R. Dunlap. *Dutch Explorers, Traders and Settlers in the Delaware Valley, 1609-1644*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961, p. 58-59. It refers specifically to the Susquehannocks as coming down the Schuylkill with their furs to Fort Nassau.

flourished and foreign nations were competing to participate in it.

Meanwhile, many useful contemporary accounts that Jesuits provided about Eastern Pennsylvania in the seventeenth century have been cited by archaeologists and historians, including highlighting of St. Isaac Jogues, S.J. For example, this particular Jesuit account about Susquehannocks in 1647 helps pinpoint where their main village was located in Lancaster County near the Susquehanna River (if not closer), from which those Indians traveled through Lower Merion/Narberth with beaver skins to the Swedish docking area near Tinicum.¹¹ Moreover, a secondhand account of a 1663 major attack on this same inland Susquehannock town by the Seneca Indians is given likewise.¹²

It is interesting too to discover a Dutch traveler, Jaspas Dankers, looking closely at life along our Delaware River some 40 years later or possibly even just 20 years after the Seneca attack mentioned above, and remarking:

It is said there is not an Indian fort between Canada and Maryland where there is not a Jesuit who teaches and advises the Indians, who begins to listen to them...¹³

This Dutchman hated the drafty clapboard houses the English built here, but loved the tighter, well-made square wooden block-houses of the Swedes, with their low doors. Dankers also saw Quaker villages mainly on the river's east side, Indians and scattered Dutch and Swedes on the west side, with a Swedish village at Chester. Occasionally Dankers criticized the shallow attitudes of people he met on his 1679-80 East Coast journey. After attending an English Quaker meeting service in Burlington, New Jersey on the Delaware River's east bank, he targeted a pretentious and worldly man who left a book of Virgil and a medical book on a windowsill to impress people. He also seemed only mildly interested in other Burlington Quakers he met there. Dankers himself belonged to a small Protestant sect, Labadict.

Already by the 1620s, the Dutch had been actively trading with the Susquehannocks in what's now the state of Delaware, supplied with pelts by overland routes from the Susquehannock region. And while the Dutch gradually built additional forts on the Delaware River for themselves, they kept a low-key presence nonetheless, even when angered by the eventual formation of a Swedish colony on the

¹¹ Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents & Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, Pageant Book Company, New York, 1959 XXXIII, p.1291.

¹² Jerome Lalemont in *Jesuit Relations...for 1662-63* (Thwaites 1959 XLVIII, p. 77).

¹³ Jaspas Dankers, *Journal of a Voyage to New York and a Tour of Several of the American Colonies in 1679-80*, Long Island Historical Society, Brooklyn, 1867, p. 221.

Delaware River led by one of their own former officials¹⁴ with plenty of frontier spirit, Peter Minuit.

Formerly Director-General of New Netherland for the Dutch West India Company, Minuit was the son of a Belgian father and grew up in Germany's Rhineland among people struggling after the Thirty Year's War. Realizing Sweden was eager to expand its empire, Minuit offered his services. Soon he began investing in the project with some acquaintances. But when he realized those Dutchman were mainly interested in profit, he finally went it alone.

And in fact, New Amsterdam took no immediate action against the arrival here of Minuit's two-vessel invasion fleet flying the blue and yellow Swedish flag on behalf of a nation they considered friendly. But the Swedish buildup presented a military and diplomatic challenge, as the Dutch considered the Delaware River a vital part of their North American holdings - and something to be kept away from the English.¹⁵

Swedish royal documents attest to the March 28, 1638 purchase of New Sweden's land in the new world by Peter Minuit¹⁶ from its traditional and rightful owners, "the wild inhabitants," namely the peaceful Algonquin-speaking Lenni-Lenape Indians and their temporary overlords, the Susquehannock Indians sometimes called a breakaway tribe of the Iroquois.¹⁷ Tribal chiefs representing both groups were invited aboard Minuit's flagship "Kalmar Nychel" ("Key of Kalmar") and the other vessel "Vogel Grip" ("Bird Griffin") and they made their marks upon a deed claiming land for Queen Christina, age twelve. Those ships had docked on the Delaware River at Wilmington, Delaware, where Minuit soon built Fort Christina.

Steeped in practical understanding of the many requirements of such a major undertaking as the establishment of a New Sweden colony, Minuit was also able seize the moment to launch it. Considering that he himself had been the current New Amsterdam governor's immediate predecessor, Minuit wasn't

¹⁴ The overlap of officials of various nationalities connected sometimes with one or more competing colonies is fully discussed by Russell Shorto in *The Island at the Center of the World*, as are conflicting claims to ownership based on commissioned explorations.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Shorto.

¹⁶ Peter Minuit is often said to have purchased Manhattan Island in 1626 from a group of local Indians (believed to be northerly Lenni Lenape Indians) for sixty guilders worth of goods, sometimes mentioned misleadingly as \$24. However, a provincial governor, Willem van der Hulet, may have bought Manhattan before Minuit. However, Minuit definitely did buy Staten Island.

¹⁷ Especially valuable and convincing in his book about Dutch Manhattan, Russell Shorto lambasts the Wild West era cartoon images we have of American Indians – about their being "primitive" and moreover that they were "[n]oble and [d]efenseless" The reality was quite different. In what became the Eastern United States, the many various Indian tribes were biologically, genetically, and intellectually virtually identical to the seventeenth-century European settlers who came in contact with them. And they dealt with one another "as equal participants, as allies, competitors and partners," as plenty of Shorto's evidence shows - each side with different ideas of what it meant to purchase land.

upset by the menacing arrival of a Dutch ship bearing a blistering letter criticizing his actions on the South River. Minuit simply ignored the letter from New Amsterdam's current governor, as it did not threaten an armed attack. Certainly, Peter Minuit got that Swedish colony off to a strong start before his life was cut short by a storm at sea. And he had a worthy successor in Governor Johan Printz.

Straightaway, Swedish settlers in sizable numbers had become the first European inhabitants of the Delaware River's west bank on the Philadelphia side of the river, as well as into much of its immediate Pennsylvania suburbs to the south, north and west.¹⁸ Yet this was never a really large colony, and its settlers preferred living at scattered locations rather than in close communities. Swedes were after all seemingly "happy campers" at home compared with William Penn's Quakers who were mostly fleeing persecution in England. Swedes by contrast were being coaxed and cajoled to come to the Delaware River. And to boost their numbers, some Swedes were sent here by government order, including military personnel to clear their record of small crimes, or deserters. Also people from neighboring Finland. And there's a rare account of a group of Swedish soldiers traveling along the Delaware River¹⁹ and into Maryland and Virginia after being in the service of the Dutch West India Company, then traveling to Sweden to drum up enthusiastic interest for would-be settlers in America.

One of Printz's first official acts was to move New Sweden's seat of colonial government further upstream from its original site, Fort Christina,²⁰ at the present city of Wilmington, Delaware, to Tinicum Island at Essington on the suburban Delaware County waterfront in Pennsylvania. The location is immediately southwest of Philadelphia International Airport and just outside the current city limits. "Printzhof" at Tinicum became this Commonwealth's first State House, and the place where most of New Sweden's courts sat in session (1644-53) after Printz systematized the administration of justice. This governor lost no time in establishing commercial and political relations with the Indians and with the English in Virginia.

Governor Printz soon took control of the South River rendering some Dutch forts useless, welcoming supply ships (twelve expeditions in all) and persuading the Susquehannocks to trade with them instead of with the Dutch. The Swedish colony flourished seventeen years as the Swedish Crown's

¹⁸ The Swedish domain fronted 160 miles along its major Delaware River waterway, starting at the Atlantic Ocean at Delaware Bay's Cape Henlopen, northward up Delaware River's west side. The colony included all of the present State of Delaware, slicing across and encompassing much of what is now Southeastern Pennsylvania as far north as Trenton, N.J. By contrast, the Dutch bought no land on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River, keeping to the east side only.

¹⁹ Dankers. *Ibid.*, p. 240-241, Swedish soldiers on the march.

²⁰ For some years, this fort had been garrisoned by 25 men, on call to protect both the settlers and the Indians locally.

first permanent settlement in the New World. This happened during Sweden's one epic period as a great power among European nations under Queen Christina.²¹

Inevitably the ablest of the Dutch governors of New Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant, would turn his attention to this feverish activity to the south of him. And during that late phase of both the Swedish and Dutch colonies (before the arrival of the English and Welsh), the stage was set for some "free-world" activity at what came to be known in early twentieth-century accounts as the Narberth trading post site.

Narberth Trading Post

Narberth acquired its so-called Swedish trading post as a spin-off of a lively chain of events set in motion by the arrival of a new Swedish colonial governor, Johan Printz in 1643. Formidable in every respect, the 400-pound Printz weighed in with a legal document specifying how the first permanent settlers in what is now the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were to be governed. The instruction covered such points as the governor's duties and the rights of the governed.

Sent were agents to New Amsterdam in New York to trade with the Dutch, New Amsterdam having become the free-trade hub of the Atlantic in 1640.²²

Upon Printz's arrival here, the territory of the colony had assumed a new status, being regarded as Swedish soil directly under jurisdiction of the Swedish government. Also at Tinicum, Printz created Pennsylvania's first house of worship²³ (Lutheran) in 1646.

The next year, a ten-man beaver trade delegation from the New Sweden colony set out from Tinicum in October bound for the Pittsburgh locality and bearing gifts for the warlike Black Minquas²⁴ Indian chiefs there. Led by Henrik Huygan and his head guard who knew the Indian language well,

²¹ Elevated to the throne at age 6 by the death of her father, the warrior king Gustavus Adolphus, Queen Christina (1626-1689) had a mind of her own. By nature, she was footloose and a mischief-maker, yet cared about the classics and high achievement in the arts. And while action and adventure never lost their appeal for Christina, her extravagance almost wrecked the Swedish economy. Upon joining the Roman Catholic Church, she was, at age 27, obliged to give up the throne and leave the country. She headed for warmer climate, Rome, her character continuing to manifest a combination of maddening and endearing traits some see as a far-away glimpse of a modern spirit. See Veronica Buckley's *Christina, Queen of Sweden, The Restless Life of a European Eccentric*. Fourth Estate/Harper Collins Publishers, 2004.

²² In 1640, the West India Company gave up its monopoly of trade in the region, which had kept the place from developing in any areas except piracy and smuggling, and declared New Netherland a free-trading zone. In that free market territory, New Amsterdam would be the hub through which traders' and merchants' ships would pass (pay duties, then be cleared for travel). The effect was swift. An intensely active merchant class was one result. "Everyone here is a trader" was the mantra by 1650. And the effects were strongly felt in the Swedish colony.

²³ One of its Lutheran ministers focused on learning a local Indian language here, then composed for those Indians a book about Christianity.

²⁴ The Black Minquas acquired their name from the "black badge" they wore.

namely Sergeant Gregorius Van Dyke (two Dutchman in the service of Sweden), the mission included a detail of eight Swedish soldiers and an Indian guide. Huygan had earned his stripes. For he had been aboard the Swedish ship that first landed on the Delaware River in 1638 under the command of his late brother-in-law Peter Minuit at what became the location of Fort Christina. And the timing was right for this October 1647 journey inland.

For the seventh expedition by sea to the Swedish colony had just arrived at Tinicum - namely the ship “Gullene Haj” (“Golden Shark”) amid general rejoicing of the Swedish colonists. Among its plentiful articles for the beaver trade were items such as kettles, duffels, mirrors, hardware, hose, knives, axes, trinkets and more valuable items. Local Indian chiefs soon received gifts also and the members of that trade delegation to the Pittsburgh area then quietly set out for the interior to renew New Sweden’s old friendship with the Minquas tribes and re-establish the beaver trade. Full of hope, they marched over Indian trails, then probably boated up the Schuylkill. Where they were heading, the great French and Indian war was fought a century later – a conflict Winston Churchill once referred to as the “first world war.”²⁵

Of course the Dutch had come to our region primarily as traders, but the Swedes came mainly as homesteaders. Governor Printz meant to emphasize this when he built for himself an elegant two-story manor house where he lived with his wife Maria, five daughters and one son at Tinicum – that dwelling said to be one of the finest houses between Virginia and New Amsterdam, and the largest one, with its fireplaces and glass-paned windows.²⁶ Narberth’s own Swedish saga mingles the trading and homesteader²⁷ aspects - traders tending to be what we hear about, however, when folklorists talk of Narberth and the Swedes.

Governor Printz was a master strategist at attempting to smooth the way for re-routing the Indian trading path from the interior away from Fort Christina, to his preferred new trading post site further upstream. That way it was safely out of the clutches of Dutch traders arriving by ship from New Amsterdam. He threw in some Cecil B. de Mille special effects for good measure. For, besides defensible block houses at the new site, Printz built a gristmill²⁸ in 1643 that was the first public industry

²⁵ Editor’s Note: The section that follows in Vicky Donohoe’s chapter has been relocated to a section below entitled “The French and Indian War.”

²⁶ Before Penn: Swedish Colonists in the Land of the Lenape. Philadelphia: American Swedish Historical Museum, 1988.

²⁷ Ibid. Jaspas Dankers. By 1680, that Dutch traveler visited Tinicum, while the sale of that island property was in the courts. Among buildings he saw [were] Governor Printz’s Manor House, about 4 Swedish houses, other buildings and its Lutheran church of logs, p. 178-181.

²⁸ An illustration: Swedish gristmill, 1643 - scale model at Hagley Museum.

on Philadelphia's soil, and everyone was permitted to grind grain for a toll there. Governor Printz's mill had a prime location on Cobbs Creek, where it crosses present-day Woodland Avenue, beside the new "Big Trading Path" and near its destination, where the Swedish supply ships docked.

The Indians were in awe of this mill and scores of them are said to have sat for days at a time watching its operation. Also, the Lenape hunters from nearby Moyamensing and Passyunk in present day South Philadelphia had to pass by the mill whenever they went hunting because Governor Printz's new trading path utilized their well-trafficked old hunting trail,²⁹ the only path entering into the forest in that vicinity. That trail led direct lead to Montgomery Avenue in Narberth's vicinity, where it joined the Allegheny path³⁰ going westward.

The Lenape women for many miles around brought their corn to be ground at the Swedish mill. Any Lenape Indians living near Narberth would have had an easy commute to the gristmill on foot in less than a day - making this a convenient place to live and to farm in Narberth's marshy areas (those being the conditions Indians are said to have preferred for growing crops at that time). One way or another, there is every reason to believe that Indians in the Narberth vicinity were customers of that mill.

Two things Governor Printz clearly emphasized by replacing the site at present day Wilmington with Tinicum as New Sweden's official Indian traders' destination on the Delaware River. First, he was clearly defining a new overland route (we still know it as "Conestoga Road") that completely avoided the lower Delaware River banks where the northbound Indian suppliers might too easily be spotted by the Dutch. Only when it reached Narberth did his new path swing sharply toward Tinicum, going eastward from present-day Montgomery Avenue, then heading south down Merion Road. We are familiar with Conestoga Road, but surprisingly few people associate it with the beaver trade thinking rather of Conestoga wagons.

While studying eighteenth century Lower Merion deeds, I made the surprising discovery that Conestoga Road in its approach from a westerly direction did not just "disappear" in Ardmore and Narberth. Nor did it merge with old Lancaster Road as is sometimes said by local historians. Instead a deed John Dickinson obtained when he bought back half of his grandfather Dr. Edward Jones' 1682 property that had been sold out of the family, reveals the hill-climbing east side of that farm is the

²⁹ The very ancient Lenni-Lenape "hunting trail" (from Passyunk) is believed to be North Narberth Avenue. Somehow that trail retains some of its ancient feeling for me best of all as it crosses Montgomery Avenue and continues its course into quirky Old Gulph Road. Might this also have been the path of the old buffalos?

³⁰ Wallace, Paul A. W. *Indian Paths of Pennsylvania*. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1993, "Allegheny Path, From Philadelphia to Pittsburgh and Kittanning," p.19.

Conestoga Road. (Today it is called Merion Road where it climbs out of Montgomery Avenue and crosses City Avenue at Overbrook rail station.)

Astonishingly, it is again picked up and continues on roadmaps into Southwest Philadelphia as the long, straight and narrow “Conestoga Street.” It’s located just east of South 55th Street, extending all the way to Bartram’s Garden on the Schuylkill River. And that’s near its juncture with the Delaware River where Fort Nassau formerly stood - built when the Dutch thought they might establish their colony there instead of New York.

For a while the maintenance crew at the old Dutch fort had been enduring minor but deliberate provocations from Governor Printz. Added to that, the Indians hauling beaver skins would be expected to cross the Delaware River to reach the fort, and thus they increasingly tended to avoid it. Dutch fortifications on the Delaware thus gradually fell into disuse during the seventeen-year period of Swedish rule, yet didn’t cease entirely. Indeed the Dutch were able to come up the bay to their Fort Casimir near present-day Newcastle, making contact with Indians in Delaware.

Secondly, by establishing this alternate trade route, Governor Printz inadvertently called attention to Narberth’s strategic location that made it an essential staging area along “Conestoga Portage,”³¹ one of the oldest known beaver trade routes in Eastern Pennsylvania. Since the 1620s, when the Dutch at Fort Nassau began using it, it was the main canoe route between the Susquehanna and Delaware Rivers, arriving here by way of the Schuylkill. In drawing attention to it, Governor Printz seemed to be reactivating it for full use by Swedish traders, although beaver skins had become far less plentiful by then.

Conestoga Portage began at the headwaters of Conestoga Creek (its name considerably older than the Susquehannock Conestoga Indian settlements around it), then sped overland a short distance to the headwaters of French Creek. From there it navigated downstream into the Schuylkill at Phoenixville, on down to Beaver Island (just above Philadelphia’s City Avenue). Conestoga Portage traders avoided the then Falls of Schuylkill by leaving their canoe at river’s edge and hauling the beaver skins on their backs inland going west a short distance over the Allegheny Path at its Schuylkill crossing. Upon reaching Narberth’s headwaters of Cobbs Creek, it is assumed they canoed some of the way down the East Branch of Indian Creek which flows into Cobb’s Creek, thus arriving at the junction of the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers directly opposite the by-then empty Fort Nassau.

³¹ Wallace, Paul A.W. *Ibid.*, p. 138, 135.

Various portage paths from upstate involved traveling a combination of canoeing and walking. The common practice by Indians on such trips was to place one's canoe under a bush and use another canoe further on, even sometimes stopping to make one.

The initial mention in a document³² of the place we now call Narberth may be the request a Susquehanna chief made (1655) that the Swedes set up a gun-repair facility and cargo depot for Indian use at a location he chose on account of its mutual advantage to both parties. Several factors point to Narberth's being an especially suitable location for such a resource. But first, some history.

This was an unusually strategic place at a break point on Governor Printz's Big Minquas Trading Path just as it departs the Allegheny Path to go southeast to the Schuylkill River at Kingsessing Creek toward the unloading dock for supply ships on the Delaware River. (This way, gun repair would be done at a discreet distance from incoming ships.)

Also, Governor Printz had already set up two major enhancements on that favorite trading path of his - the gristmill at Woodland Avenue and the watermill located a mile-and-a-half further along that path, and closer to Narberth. So it would seem natural that the best location for the gun repair depot the Indians requested would also be on that same active trading path, but still further up it. Such a request would also show the Indians' desire to rely on the Swedes, who knew the Indians were then getting a plentiful supply of weapons from the Dutch. That request for a repair facility made sense because the Swedes had sent soldiers to the Susquehannocks in the 1640s to teach them "use of our arms and fights."³³ At the time, the Swedes on the Delaware River were growing stronger, and trying both to build up their fur trade with those Indians as well as to strengthen their military alliance with them - two things the Susquehannocks never forgot, as we shall see.

And Narberth's land wasn't just conveniently close to - but actually on - one of the oldest beaver skin delivery routes that came eastward in this region via the Schuylkill River to old Beaver Island (just above City Avenue). It avoided the Falls of Schuylkill by coming overland and crossing the Allegheny Path at Narberth, to join the ancient hunting path of the Lenape as it traveled close to the juncture of the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers.

³² Additional very early mention of Narberth's location in a document possibly might be found in an as-yet unlocated Swedish land deed, one of many still in private hands or in archives, and that date from the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Swedes especially during that period were snapping up parcels of land hereabouts.

³³ Beauchamp Plantegenet's 1648 observation reprinted in Peter Force's *Tracts and Other Papers* 1836, also in 1947 by Peter Smith in New York; and in John E. Pomfret's *Province of West New Jersey, 1609-1703*, Princeton University Press, p. 33, 37. Beauchamp Plantegenet is a pseudonym of Sir Edmund Plowden.

Certainly the Susquehannocks are known to have had a special affinity for inland locations with plentiful springs (a defining Narberth trait well-known to area plumbers). And the principal spring that is the source of the East Branch of Indian Creek in Narberth has a number of small feeder springs along its waterway leading to the river. Susquehannocks gravitated toward headwaters where major springs are found, while Lenni Lenape, by contrast, became known as “river Indians” because they liked to locate at a river’s edge where streams empty into it.

Especially farseeing, the Indian proposal of a cargo depot on the Allegheny Path in Narberth would surely have bolstered the very keen Swedish ambition to settle spacious virgin land in Upper Merion Township, which they later did. At the time, Narberth, with its rickety road to Valley Forge, represented a virtual gateway to what is now called Swedeland further up the Schuylkill River between Gulph Mills and Norristown.

Very likely the Swedes did comply, and hastily built that depot and stocked it, even if it meant buying provisions from other colonies, because Governor Printz had already won Susquehannock loyalty by then and his successor would not have hesitated. If so, that Narberth depot surely became a site “of interest” during the Dutch takeover of the Swedish colony later that year. Such a location also might readily explain why the two Dutch traders from New Amsterdam were so willing to come up from Printz’s Great Trading Path or even from Passyunk to Narberth. For the opportunity to see for themselves an existing Swedish cargo depot newly built at the Susquehannocks’ request (and possibly still stocked) would have been very compelling - far more so than their own dull assignment. And that cargo depot almost certainly was the large roadside Swedish log cabin we know existed in 1682 at 1226 Montgomery Avenue and that survived intact until modern times, about which more later.

Meanwhile, Governor Stuyvesant, increasingly concerned about beaver trade on the South River, is on record³⁴ as having angrily accused the Susquehannocks of cheating Dutch traders at Fort Nassau. All measurement of incoming textile trade goods such as plain and fancy cloths and velvets was done by the length of a man’s arm, he explained. And the Susquehannock, a tall tribe, the rich sound of their voices echoing as if in a deep cavern, were sending their braves with the longest arms to do the trading. But finally it was his outrage at the years of Swedish monopoly of the South River beaver trade under

³⁴ In the early 1980s, examining a set of official early New York Records in the “stacks” at Historical Society of Pennsylvania, I read Governor Stuyvesant’s angry accusations that the Susquehannocks were “cheating us” by sending their braves with the “longest arms” to participate in the measuring of the length of textile yard-goods arriving on the incoming Dutch ships on the South River.

Governor Printz that forced Stuyvesant's hand.

Ever a commanding presence with his direct and forceful manner, and this time more so clad in a gleaming suit of armor, a peg-leg Governor Stuyvesant arrived with armed soldiers in three vessels on the Delaware River on September 15, 1655 to take over the Swedish colony. Dutch victory was achieved without firing a shot. But the Native American response to the takeover, however, was fast and furious, the Indians' tribal intelligence network having informed them of Stuyvesant's intended move. Directed by a Susquehannock chief from this locality, those Indians mounted a major raid on New Amsterdam simultaneously, causing much bloodshed over the entire colony. The Dutch thought the timing of that raid a coincidence.

Only recently have historians understood that the bloody Indian raid occurring at the same time as Governor Stuyvesant's takeover of New Sweden was meant to show Susquehannock solidarity³⁵ with their friends, the Swedes, and to "protect" them. After all, Indians thought of themselves as a majority, and thus felt compelled to defend the Swedish colony, a minority.

Interestingly, both governors, Stuyvesant and Printz, were sons of Protestant ministers. And each thought about becoming a man of the cloth before choosing a military career. Both governors also preferred colonists who were conformists. Stuyvesant loathed having to cope with the great mix of people and nationalities of his wide-open New Amsterdam settlement. A visiting Jesuit priest³⁶ counted eighteen languages being spoken after this colony became a free-trade zone and was becoming one of the earth's fastest-growing multicultural sites. But Stuyvesant still preferred the New England model of colonists all from a single culture. Printz too liked all his colonists to be Swedes and Finns; thus other small groups trying to move into New Sweden were shooed away.

Not so William Penn as proprietor. He recognized he was not the first to colonize this area. And he had suitably generous words³⁷ for Swedish colonists' respect for authority and kind behavior to the English, their strength of body, their families with many children, and their young men virtually unsurpassed in their work ethic and sober attitude. Even so, when the British under William Penn later controlled New Sweden areas within Penn's charter, it was a different matter. Swedes who remained were compensated erratically.³⁸ One of Printz's daughters dutifully stayed in the area to try to set things

³⁵ Russell Shorto. *Ibid.*, pp. 279-283.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 107.

³⁷ From William Penn in *The Present State of His Majesty's Isles and Territories in America*, London, 1687.

³⁸ *Before Penn: Swedish Colonists in the Land of the Lenape*. Philadelphia: American Swedish Historical Museum, 1988. P. 17.

right with Swedish land deeds.

Clearly motivating both the Swedes and Dutch to continue South River trading was a threat³⁹ the Susquehanna Indians made at the time of the Dutch takeover of the Swedish colony - to wipe out the Swedish settlement and strike a blow at Dutch dominance in the area if either group ceased trading. No wonder the peaceful, and by then non-trading Lenni Lenape Indians with deep roots in our area had a name for those other Indians, their sometime overlords, calling them treacherous or “minqua.” Yet because Governor Printz had repeatedly tried to turn the Susquehannocks against the Dutch, those Indians weren’t mincing words to persuade both the Dutch and Swedes that the important thing was that trading must continue, not who the traders might be. Ah, but they were perhaps unaware of Governor Stuyvesant’s strict rules preventing certain persons from trading.

Business had boomed since New Amsterdam became America’s free-trade port in 1640. Gone was the old requirement that the Dutch West India Company must be middle man for any transaction taking place. New Amsterdam citizens were enjoying exceptional rights and freedoms in an “opportunity society.” After Swedish colonists, aware of this disparity, complained bitterly to Governor Printz in a petition (1653) about not being allowed to trade as individuals either with the Indians or with free Dutchman under a penalty of death, they got a shock. The man who led that petition drive was executed - to set an example. Governor Printz never forgot that his post at the New Sweden colony was that of a military commander.⁴⁰

While the Welsh Quakers are well remembered locally, their predecessors, the Swedes and the Dutch, tend to be overlooked. More’s the pity too, considering how practical Governor Printz was in re-routing the beaver-skin delivery route of the Indians away from its former destination at Wilmington and closer to Philadelphia. For, by doing so, he was able to link (at Narberth) his new overland Conestoga Road route with a Schuylkill waterway route some Indians had been using for decades. And best of all: they were out of Dutch clutches either way, although Printz never gave up his strict rules.

Perhaps it’s surprising therefore that historians since then have mentioned at most only the bare fact that the Swedes and the New Amsterdammers traded side-by-side with the Indians at Narberth - something that only happened after the overthrow of the Swedish colony by the Dutch. Liberty, so

³⁹ Revealed in a July 30, 1656 letter by Johan Papegoja, Governor Printz’s son-in-law, in Amandus Johnson, *Swedes on the Delaware*, 1914, p. 364-5.

⁴⁰ Anthropologist Marshall Becker mentioned to this writer his discovery that quite a few Swedes moved just outside Governor Printz’s colony rather than obey its strict rules.

elusive, had come to Pennsylvania's frontier at last. And that circumstance was anything but routine for the liberated Swedes.

This long-awaited free-lance trade opportunity available to individual Swedes is a very plausible reason the locality received its earliest known name Libertyville - and it has weight as an explanation.

Most often suggested as the so-called trading post site is the environs of Narberth Borough's "ancient Indian spring" immediately behind an early-nineteenth-century house at 1256 Montgomery Avenue and also the former ancient log cabin at 1226 Montgomery. Until the "Indian spring" was capped in 1980 for the Hansen tract housing development, the grounds surrounding that spring, a major feeder of the East Branch of Indian Creek, were thickly scattered with Indian arrowheads collected by children into the 1950s. The nearby 1226 dwelling, moreover, is the probable site the Susquehannocks suggested as suitable for a gun-repair depot that they asked the Swedes to establish and operate for their tribal use. No archaeological "dig" has ever been conducted at either location.

Early Jewish Traders

So how did Governor Stuyvesant impose his own set of harsh rules in his wide-open free-trade colony? He did it by constantly preventing Spanish/Portuguese Jewish people whose families had fled the Inquisition of 1492 from settling permanently in New Amsterdam. Also he prevented them from buying a house there, or trading with the Indians in the former Swedish colony he had just captured. These were brazen acts, especially as the granting of such "privilege" for Sephardic Jews had been approved repeatedly at the Dutch West India Company headquarters in Holland.

Clearly such obstinacy from an official here who consistently restricted people's lives and activities, even at the frontier where vim and vigor are such valuable assets, just didn't make sense.

On one occasion, however, while denying three Jews permission to trade on the Delaware River in 1655, Stuyvesant made a concession. He allowed them to send two men to dispose of trade goods already shipped there, stipulating that the two men then return to New Amsterdam. Sent were a dynamic individual, Isaac Israel, and Benjamin Cardoso⁴¹ who are known to have arrived on the South river (Delaware River) by December 29, 1655 at Fort Casimir in Delaware. At the time a treaty was being made there between the Indians and that community. All agreed to the subsidy except Israel and

⁴¹ Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society in vol. 5, 1897, p. 194 names Isaac Israel's companion on his first authorized trip to the South River as Isaac Cardoso; Publications of the A. J. H. S. gives that companion's name as Benjamin Cardoso, vol 18, , p. 28- from "The Early History of Jews in New York" by Oppenheim.

Cardoso who refused, since they were there for a different purpose. Interestingly, Isaac Israel was back at Fort Casimir in June 1656, heatedly in a dispute about some brandy, beaver skins and cheese – about what he paid to ship’s Captain Jan Flamman for transporting both him and these goods to the South River.

So either January or June of 1656 are the earliest times Isaac Israel would have traveled northward from Fort Casimir to Narberth via Passyunk (in what became South Philadelphia). One of those times or maybe both, Israel would have wanted very keenly to examine whatever potential there might be in both the building itself and the contents of that gun repair/cargo depot built by Swedes in Narberth at a Susquehanna chief’s request.

And that willingness to explore the region is the compelling reason Isaac Israel and Benjamin Cardoso are seriously claimed as the first Jews in Pennsylvania. Of course Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach of the Rosenbach Museum and Library was right in declaring: “There can no longer be any doubt that there were Jews in the Pennsylvania locality at least 25 years before the landing of William Penn.”⁴²

And now especially there is every reason to acknowledge the importance of Isaac Israel’s achievement in our region during the colonial period. This outstanding figure was both a Jew and at the same time he was, by 1663, a member of the High Council of the Incorporated Dutch West India Company’s settlement on the Delaware River. As such he was also at that time Chancellor in charge of the licensed Passyunk trading post. So besides being one of the first Jews in Pennsylvania, Isaac Israel was the first Jew to hold office in the Pennsylvania area.

Upon realization that a translator’s error from the Dutch language in an early period, mistakenly said Jews could never hold high posts, a later scholar⁴³ rightly took issue with Dr. Rosenbach’s insistence that Isaac Israel couldn’t have been a Jew because of his high station. The matter is now settled.

That classification also was awake up call for another usually very reliable source⁴⁴ that had incorrectly suggested that this Isaac Israel may have been just another person with the same name.

And persons interested in some of those old recurring Jewish colonial-period names, useful

⁴² “Jews in Pennsylvania, 1655-1703” Rosenbach. Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 5, 1897, p. 196.

⁴³ “Early History of the Jews in New York” – Oppenheim. Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 18.

⁴⁴ The History of the Jews in Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson, Edwin Wolf 2d and Maxwell Whiteman, 1957, p. 11.

references⁴⁵ are available.

The first Jewish settlers in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania c. 1730 or 1732 were Spanish Jews from Portugal who had fled the Inquisition seeking refuge in South America before coming here.⁴⁶ Such settlers probably used old Lancaster Road from Philadelphia. And near that road in Narberth is the Merion Welsh tract's 1683 western boundary, the "Merion Line," along Narbrook Park. While deeply digging in their 25 Narbrook Park garden in the 1990s, Peter and Nancy Greene Grove found an early 17th century Spanish coin. Next door at 27 Narbrook, a child Paul Wohlert, playing in about 1922 in the basement excavation of a house under construction, found an elaborate dagger. It was taken to the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology. Checking on this with the museum registrar in the 1980s, turns out no records were kept at the time of items brought in.⁴⁷

Keeping trails open and serviceable had been a constant concern of course for the Lenape who periodically set small brushfires to clear them without harming stately woodland trees. Then in 1681, our provincial government saw the need to take its own decisive action on the matter of keeping pathways open. Thus authorized by its Court of Upland⁴⁸ still in session, that provisional government in 1681, just one year before William Penn's arrival on our shores, took action under the administration of Sir Edmund Andros, governor of New York. Dispatched was a team of men, each one responsible for repairing a specific stretch of the "road" extending the full length of the colony – from Upland on the south at Chester, and as far north as what we now call Pennsbury Manor.

Peter Yocum⁴⁹ was responsible repairing the road from Governor Printz's mill to the Schuylkill Falls, an indication that he repaired the section nearest Narberth. Other roads in the immediate area such as Merion Road⁵⁰ and Bala's old Ford Road would also have been among those repaired by court order.

A close reading of that directive suggests that the road undergoing repair⁵¹ went right through the

⁴⁵ Alan M. Moskowitz brought to my attention that persons with the same names and later dates, presumably the descendants of the individuals most often mentioned as Jews from New Amsterdam likeliest to have traded with Swedes and Susquehannock Indians at Narberth, are on record. They are listed in Rabbi DeSola Pool's book *Portraits Etched in Stone* about the Spanish Portuguese New York Synagogue Cemetery which started in the early 1700s and still exists, but is not in use.

⁴⁶ Mays, George. "The Jewish Colony at Tower Hill, Schaefferstown, Lebanon County, PA." Philadelphia, 1905.

⁴⁷ Editor's note: page 11E omitted.

⁴⁸ *Record of the Court at Upland in Pennsylvania 1676-1681*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁴⁹ A Roman Catholic, he was commissioned as governor by the Duke of York on behalf of all the land granted and confirmed to him by Britain's King Charles I, specifically including all the New Netherland property from Connecticut to the Delaware, and also a portion of Maine where Andros had built a fort two years earlier.

⁵⁰ Individuals participating in this repair task presumably lived close to the stretch they were assigned to clear of the colony's full-length roadway. And the farm property of this prominent Swedish settler, Peter Yocum, on the Schuylkill River was later acquired by naturalist John Bartram. It exists today as Bartram's Garden, a National Historic Landmark.

⁵¹ This much-forgotten road was a very vital one. There is even the strong likelihood that before the Welsh period, it had been located in a more westerly direction where it remains Old Gulph Road and would have retained it all the way to Narberth's railway bridge, except that its name was changed to "Narberth Avenue" where it crossed Montgomery Avenue and entered the town.

future Narberth Borough's eastern end to nearly where Merion Friends Meetinghouse now stands, then took a sharp easterly turn toward the Schuylkill River, crossing it and following the Allegheny Path eastward and north.

This prime location along a newly repaired road would have made Merion Quakers' choice of an accessible meetinghouse site very desirable to this group of seventeen families from Merioneth in northern Wales that subscribed to their patents for land from William Penn in 1681. They were the first Welsh people to settle in America, arriving on our shores two months before William Penn himself and before other Welsh Quakers who came expecting to live on a tract they referred to as New Wales.

Arrival of the Welsh - Welsh Heritage

Welsh settlers were shocked on arrival here in 1682 – eager to take immediate possession of their American land grant purchased abroad, when they discovered Swedes living on their property. What to do? Of course they immediately contacted William Penn.

This “occupied territory” happened to be in one location only, in what is now the Borough of Narberth. At the time it was part of a huge tract, perhaps the Welsh settlers' largest one – its owner the most prominent woman among those seventeen arriving Welsh families. She was Katherine Robert Thomas of the Yale family, widow of John Thomas⁵² of Llaitheum in Merioneth, the man originally to have led the Welsh colonists here. But he had died just after being released from prison, where this ill older man had been jailed for practicing his Quaker faith.

The hospitable Dr. Edward Jones, son-in-law of William Penn's physician, Thomas Wynne, stepped into that leadership role, ably assisted by Katherine Thomas and her two grown sons.

What then was Katherine's response to the new dilemma of “squatters” on her property? She immediately generously reached out to protect the legacy of earlier Swedish settlers unknown to her - something infinitely more important than if she had coldly served notice upon them to move out at their earliest opportunity.

Instead Katherine, greatly to her credit, protected that Swedish settlement, even though it meant placing a fence around a large 24-acre triangle⁵³ of her own land with its two log cabins along

⁵² Although it's now said that fewer people did jail time for their religious beliefs in this early period before fleeing to America than is generally believed, this man was definitely one who did suffer in a 17th century British prison for his religious convictions. ?'s lengthy genealogy is on file at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵³ Editor's note: This area is referred to as the “Swedish Triangle” and is considered the “oldest” part of the town. It is approximately the area known as “Libertyville,” discussed below.

Montgomery Avenue - all of it in what became the present Borough of Narberth, and with that ancient Conestoga roadway its dividing line with the rest of her enormous property to the north of that line. Hers was a wise and refreshing expression of Welsh neighborliness and goodwill toward existing colonial heritage,⁵⁴ one that was struggling but still vital. Thus she helped it stay alive even at her own expense and that of her sons.

It is thus the everlasting pride of seventeenth century America before our nation existed that one of our most distinguished Welsh immigrants, Katherine Robert Thomas of the Yale family, made that wise but difficult decision, doing so immediately upon her arrival on our shores.

Almost as soon as the Welsh takeover, the fascinating, tantalizing, unsettled question arose of whether the Swedes in the neighborhood were going to be able to keep an active Narberth trading post a while longer. After Katherine Thomas made it possible for them to remain there, her younger son, Thomas Jones, later his son Evan, continued to keep a close watch on things there. And certainly Katherine's acceptance of the Swedes at the trading post location is the main positive consideration and accomplishment here.

Yet because the Swedes were still on that land when the Welsh came, did this automatically give them a reason to assert their right to remain, especially since numerous Swedes were living nearby? Whether the Swedish "squatters" ever did assert that right, we simply don't know.

Set back from the so-called trading post site, there still exists a two-story log cabin (plastered over) believed built in 1724 and that has Swedish characteristics. Located at 610 Shady Lane, that cabin acquired a stone addition built in 1796 by house carpenter and diarest Joseph Price for a new owner. Nearby is the base of an enormous Swedish style corner fireplace, the surviving remnant of a much older log cabin that stood until the late nineteenth century, at which time it was replaced by a new wooden structure built over its existing cellar foundation and then attached, as the cabin had been, to a stone addition of about 1800 – this property now known as 1226 Montgomery Avenue. That very early cabin may have existed when the Swedes and two Spanish/Portuguese Jews traded with the Susquehannocks there in what is now Narberth Borough and could have been the storage place for cargo and gun repair believed built in 1655 at the Indians' request.

Directly across the Montgomery Avenue trading path (or Allegheny Path) from that

⁵⁴ The nearest sizeable group of Swedish families at this time living nearby the 24 acres Mrs. Thomas set aside was...Upland Court Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

renovated and once primitive cabin site at 1226 stands a stone house at 1231 Montgomery Avenue built in 1791 for a direct descendent of Katherine Thomas's youngest son – that is, from one of Lower Merion Township's and the Borough of Narberth seventeen Merion Welsh founding families on their original land grant from William Penn. The mid-nineteenth century name of that house was "Wigwam," believe referring to the Indian trading post cabin site opposite. Together these and adjacent eighteenth and nineteenth-century buildings formed the nucleus of what soon became the village of Libertyville.

And how come these Quaker colonists, by establishing their meetinghouses as the hub of their communities, were able to make the Welsh heritage the strongly felt backbone of Philadelphia's Main Line suburbs it is today? For starters, it happened because those colonists took naturally to adapting themselves to existing major trails, preferring where possible to build meetinghouses at the crossings of important Indian trails. Often the earliest meetings (and Merion meeting is a prime likely example) occupied the site of a former Lenape village, because early settlers had such difficulty cutting down trees.

Old trails soon took on new identity as the well-traveled link between neighboring meetinghouses, for the Welsh Tract settlers were known for being exceptionally sociable with one another. They had been a people not inclined to talk about themselves in front of strangers. And the designations of their meeting-to-meeting street names often stuck, even after some became cart roads into the city or part of regional transportation networks.

The meetinghouse of the Merion Welsh Quakers for a long while puzzled historians on account of its difficult-to-identify architectural style. How come it bore no resemblance to any other Quaker meetings in this country? A couple of National Park Service historians⁵⁵ soon found the answer by taking a quick tour of early meetinghouses in Wales. As one of the earliest Quaker meetinghouses built in America, Merion's predates the typical Quaker-meeting style. Small wonder it thus simply leaped over National Register status to become a National Historic Landmark. This still-active meetinghouse was constructed of stone in 1695 at the intersection of three trails, a couple of which almost certainly were altered at the time to avoid total convergence at a single point directly in front of the meetinghouse. Two of those roadways⁵⁶ still retain part of their "meeting-to-meeting" names – in both cases their designation serving as a bow to history, since each is a shortened form of its practical old Quaker

⁵⁵ Bill Bolger [was one of them.]

⁵⁶ In Merion Meeting's immediate vicinity today is Merion Road (formerly "Merion and Darby Road") and Haverford Avenue (formerly "Haverford and Merion Avenues").

moniker.

The careful way these Welsh Tract Quakers established their meetinghouses, both as the hub of their own individual communities and as an interconnected network upon major Indian trails, contributed significantly to the fact that the Welsh heritage remains the single most strongly felt connective element it is today in defining Philadelphia's Main Line suburbs, rivaled as unifier only by the intercontinental Main Line railroad tracks built by the Pennsylvania Railroad, and still used by Amtrak and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. Initially this sense of "togetherness" that the Welsh Tract ideal fostered and stubbornly retained – if only in the minds of the Welsh families themselves – made them a bulwark against the English Quaker colonists who settled mainly in the heart of the city, while the Welsh Quakers occupied rural areas ranged around the city's outskirts. And for that reason alone, it is no wonder the Welsh never allowed themselves to be absorbed into the city, and acted against such a move in a timely and decisive way before it could happen, with one of their descendants leading that initiative.

Keep in mind that Welsh people had grown accustomed to living in the same locale for thousands of years. Both the Welsh language and poetry deeply interested them and they especially relished family friendship and companionship. All these colonists were from the north, a farming area with intense focus on pedigree and family pride. It's been said of the inhabitants of northern Wales that these people are perhaps as deeply rooted in their soil as any of the world's inhabitants. But they looked for and did find many similarities here.

Farmland, hills and valleys, pure water sources, woods, wet meadows and nearness to the Schuylkill River were at the heart of Narberth in the Merion Welsh tract. The lack of steep mountains hardly mattered because all those other traits in our Merion Welsh Tract were strong reminders of similar features these settlers cherished so much in their beloved homeland with its "friendly mountains." Seems safe to assume that one feature of their land with great appeal for Lower Merion's Welsh settlers was the Philadelphia Main Line's only example of mountainous terrain – a very unusual canyon. It has cliffs rising sharply about 100 feet on both sides and leading to the Schuylkill River opposite Manayunk. Today Rock Hill Road meanders down the full length of that Canyon, its last stone quarry (McCabe's) having closed in 1966, with condos now proposed.

Three of the most prominent of the original seventeen families settling this tract in search of religious freedom in 1682 and a fourth arrival in 1683 owned land granted to them by William Penn in what is now Narberth Borough. A fifth arrival made it a quintet of Welsh family owners here within a

decade. Those Merion Welsh pioneers, known as “Pennsylvania First Purchasers” – several of whom enjoyed personal friendly ties with William Penn - ... included the enthusiastic Hugh Roberts active in public life and described in early accounts as a minister among the Friends. Another was John Thomas⁵⁷ cultured widow Katherine Robert Thomas [...] with her adult children including Thomas Jones. And there was also, by 1691, state assemblyman Robert Owen, besides already mentioned Dr. Edward Jones. Each of those four families owned tracts at the outset larger than Edward ap Rees. And portions of the plantations of those four prominent settlers extended into Narberth to frame his land like the picture of tranquil colonial farmland most people imagine this area was. Dr. Edward Jones wrote home to say that the Merion Welsh had contracted with the Indians to leave venison on their doorstep “for six pence ye quarter,” and that the other colonists they saw most often were the Swedes. And there was also the letter written in 1683 to William Penn by Welsh Quaker Thomas Jones just after he and his distinguished family had arrived here to take up residence on their plantation. He told Governor Penn that they arrived only to find “improvements” already on their land grant. [As stated earlier, e]very indication points to those “improvements” being log cabins on the southwest corner of that plantation (at a major trail’s curbside, in the present borough), where at least two such cabins definitely Swedish, were known to have stood at that time.

And of course all sorts of boundaries had been drawn for individual Welsh plantations here at the same time as the lengthy western boundary for the Merion Welsh tract was established in 1683 (its lengthy eastern boundary counterpart being the Schuylkill River). The Merion Line, as that western boundary was known, served for several years virtually as a frontier zone between the Merion and the Haverford Welsh communities. In Narberth, no land west of the Merion Line was settled until 1691. In that year Robert Owen fleeing persecution and Edward ap Rees beginning to enlarge his farm, each acquired from the original deed-holders large tracts extending into that zone, and thus opening up north Wynnewood to agriculture.

Edward ap Rees’ original 78-acre plantation formed the borough Keystone and included his stone house⁵⁸ and stone barn, the ancient Friends Meeting itself as well as its burial ground (in which Edward ap Rees’ and his wife Mabby’s young daughter Catharine was the first settler buried), and the inn next door. Edward ap Rees (or Price) steadily increased his land holdings. Moreover, a glance at his

⁵⁷ John Thomas’ lengthy genealogical history is on file at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁸ Believed to have been S.E. corner Forrest and Windsor Avenues, built 1690; the small stone barn of the same period, at 101 Forrest Avenue.

will (proven in 1728) in Philadelphia City archives discloses that Edward ap Rees kept a couple of whiskey stills.

And that suggests Rees produced whiskey by an ancient process of limited-quantity craft distilling known to the Welsh from Scottish sources. This he could have done in his small stone barn (at 101 Forrest Avenue) or outdoors near it. Chances are he produced single-malt whiskey made from malted barley he grew. Such artisan whiskey he could market conveniently to the male clientele of the then-getting established and long-existing inn nearby. Such brew usually was stored in oaken barrels for a few years.

Certain types of individuals seemed to be especially attached to this kind of solitary activity, then as now. Artisan whiskey brewing is said to appeal to persons of somewhat rebellious nature who are nonetheless likable characters. This jibes with what we know about Rees' conduct in the colony for he wasn't a noticeable "joiner" in common activities of his neighbors. Instead he had an obvious, ongoing and hard-driving flair for acquiring real estate in the immediate area. He also held a mortgage on nearby "Harriton" (built 1704) and known as the locality's most sophisticated dwelling of its era architecturally. Rees' own stone house did not survive, but "Harriton" is now a distinguished Lower Merion Township-owned house museum. Several generations later, a direct descendent, Edward R. Price, would revisit his ancestor's real estate interests, as he saw parcels of it slip away from family ownership. Price was starting to think how some of those holdings of his great-grandfather might be brought back together - permanently.

After arrival of the Welsh, change continued at a rapid pace that first decade. Even as early as 1700, fewer Indians were seen hereabouts in the countryside, and people began using the old Indian paths as cart roads. No generation of colonials seemed so emotionally involved with the neighborhood as the Welsh. Flourishing plantation owners at the turn of the eighteenth century only two decades after they fled their homeland, these people consolidated the way of life of this locality for the first time by forcing a climate of acceptance of village life and then entering the ranks of the local citizenry themselves. The cart roads bringing farmers' produce from nearby villages to the city were firmly established at this time (on pre-existing roads), one of those routes being our borough's main street, Haverford Avenue.

Meanwhile, Narberth's primitive "front road" evolved through stages to be known as Conestoga Road, setting the stage for it to become one of America's earliest and most important highways under

the name “Lancaster Road,” before creation of the Lancaster Pike (U. S. 30).⁵⁹

Surprisingly Narberth’s Welsh property line boundaries have remained largely intact, even including (partially) the Merion Line marking the original Western edge of the 2500-acre Merion Welsh tract, discernible where it passes north and south through the borough’s west end. Described as the “Merion Line” in two separate Narberth deeds for the year 1691, those of Robert Owen and Edward ap Rees,⁶⁰ that ancient boundary runs parallel with North Wynnewood Avenue some 350 feet east of it. Today the old Merion Line can be traveled easily within the borough along a hilly two-block straight stretch, the western service drive of Narbrook Park. Entry is from Windsor Avenue. The woodsy appearance of Narberth’s west end even today is a reminder that this section of land came under Welsh cultivation later than the rest of the borough. The slender slice of borough land fronting on North Wynnewood Avenue now goes by the name of “Narberth’s gold coast,” and not because it faces the setting sun.

Welsh Quaker Legend

One of the most appealing legends ever linked with the primitive Merion Welsh settlement - and surprisingly little known - concerns Pennsylvania's leading citizen and a journey he took on horseback down Narberth's main street, Haverford Avenue. As this Quaker tale unfolds, William Penn is departing from a visit to Merion Friends Meeting, presumably with a retinue of staff or well-wishers, and setting out for Haverford Friends Meeting on Eagle Road. Naturally, he used Haverford-and-Merion Road which even today still connects the two meeting houses. (It is now disguised a bit because the street changes names several times along the way.)

Well, the governor and proprietor had only just begun his journey when he passed a poor barefoot child walking in the same direction. He stopped upon learning that her destination was the same as his. And he invited her to hop aboard his horse and ride in back of him. She did, and a legend was born.

While that is the main story as usually told, variations exist, with other meeting houses claiming a similar tale. One version describes such an encounter between the governor and a poor child walking to Haverford Meeting from Philadelphia. Another more specific account, quoting a venerable member of the Jones family of Merion a hundred years after the fact, identifies Rebecca Wood of Darby as one

⁵⁹ Editor’s note: “Lancaster Road” is now “Montgomery Avenue” – not to be confused with “Lancaster Pike.”

⁶⁰ Deed Book E2 volume 5, pages 174, 175, City Archives of Philadelphia.

barefoot child who received an impromptu shared ride on horseback with Gov. Penn en route to Haverford Meeting. Perhaps each story is accurate. For the governor liked to show deference to people of modest station in life, and the Welsh Quakers admired this trait in him. Sounds as if some commemoration should be made of William Penn's "carpool" journey westward through Narberth's main street. Maybe a civic association marker or re-enactment is called for.

Other Nationalities – Germans

The first nationality to break the solid ranks of the Merion Welsh that had been diluted only by the scattered presence of Swedes were the "Germans," who were more Holland Dutch in their origin than German. These were second and third generation Germantown and Chestnut Hill natives who came to cantankerous life in this locality by crossing the Schuylkill River in considerable numbers by the 1720s or so. Soon they began marrying the local Welsh, as Anthony Tunis, one of the more prominent early Germans on this side of the river, did when he wed Mary Williams at Merion Meeting in 1718. Upon acquiring the next-door Wayside Inn (built 1704), he renamed it the Tunis Ordinary⁶¹ and enlarged it. The property then included adjacent land on both sides of the Conestoga Road (Montgomery Avenue).

The Germantown-German population who were the earliest settlers of that nationality in this neighborhood had much less solidarity here than their Merion Welsh counterparts - except in the social sphere so they could feel free to take it or leave it and they did this, and more. It followed that the earliest people of German ancestry in Narberth (before numerous Palatinate Germans began filtering into the region in mid-century, particularly around nearby Ardmore) were as diverse in temperament as the local scene itself would soon become.

Certainly the Tunis and Streeper families were the outstanding groups with proud Germantown roots who owned property in the eventual Narberth Borough before the Revolution. And the example of the Narberth "witch" Betty Conrad⁶² is extreme and hardly typical in that she is the only woman – apart

⁶¹ Since the American Revolution[, until recently, it was] known as General Wayne Inn (and [w]as one of Lower Merion's most famously haunted buildings, supposedly haunted by the ghost of a Hessian soldier killed in 1777, his body dragged into the inn's basement). The inn closed as a restaurant in August 2002, much in need of repairs. About a year later Rabbi Shraga Sherman, leader of the Chabad of the Main Line, an Orthodox Jewish organization, assembled a partnership that purchased the property and brought this important building back to new life. The restored building reopened in autumn 2005, now serving as a restaurant and a center of Jewish life.

⁶² Joseph Price states in his Diary, Jan. 23, 1806, that he attended Betty Conrad's burial in Merion Meeting's Strangers' Yard, where non-Friends and neighbors were buried. He declared that "many or several" German people thought her a witch. Historical Society of Pennsylvania manuscript; copy at Lower Merion Historical Society.

from the distinguished Welsh settler Katherine Thomas and a slim handful of others – who stands out from our area before or after the Revolution until the late- nineteenth century. By that time, several women would have their names inscribed on local atlas maps as substantial landowners, but Mrs. Conrad anticipated them all.

Betty Conrad

In colonial times Narberth had a “witch” named Betty Conrad. The support for this statement is a declaration by Major Joseph Price in his diary datelined January 23, 1806: “...Attend the burial of Betty Conrad [in] our Strangers’ Yard [section set aside at Merion Meeting for burial of non-Friends and neighbors]...poor, old woman [-] many or several of the ignorant Dutch people thought her a which [witch].” (Historical Society of Pennsylvania manuscript).

I have discovered that Betty Conrad lived on a small farm she bought from descendants of the original Welsh owner Katherine Thomas on April 4, 1781, after renting a much larger farm from them. Betty’s surname is most likely linked with the Conrads of the primitive settlement of Germantown who became very numerous in Montgomery County in the early period. Probably she received a legacy from local innkeeper Anthony Tunis. Whether “our” Betty fit any of the ten current stereotypes of a sorceress, one who bewitched animals, haunted woods as the sylvans of Roman days were said to do or was a sneering, disheveled hag used to striding over a landscape immersed in darkness and in lurid moonlight, we do not know. What we do know from her will is that Betty wanted her son John Conrad and her three married daughters Rachel Sibley, Ann Wilsong and Elizabeth Bear (later Barr), to put their roots down deeply into the land later known as Libertyville.

With Jonathan and Owen Jones as her witnesses, Betty Conrad in 1804 affixed her mark to her will dividing her six and three-quarter acres into four equal parts and giving each of her four children a life interest in a lot fronting on what was by then called Lancaster Road. Their children, in turn, were to inherit. Thus Betty Conrad’s disposition of her property with buildings on it, and the existence by then of at least two other (log) houses, probably Swedish, nearby (both still standing, enclosed in houses at 610 Shady Lane and 1226 Montgomery) set the stage for an early nineteenth-century village. Betty’s children did hold onto their houses and lots, but her grandchildren did not.

More than one house was put up or existed on each lot owned by Betty’s children, while in their possession. Still standing are 1294 and 1296 Montgomery on John’s lot, 1268 on Rachel’s lot and 1256 on Ann’s lot. Rachel’s old wooden house at 1292 was very likely the “witch’s” home mentioned in the

1783 Lower Merion tax lists as Elizabeth Conrad's "six acres and dwelling." It was destroyed by a real estate speculator in June 1980 despite neighbors' protests. His recent subdivision of French provincial-style houses on the old Betty Conrad tract wiped out much of Libertyville's character by destroying the ancient Indian Creek spring house, an early orchard, the Connor family's barn-slaughterhouse and the Super's blacksmith shops. A nexus of activity in this farming area, the Connor and Super businesses flourished at Libertyville from the Civil War into the early twentieth century. Few old-timers have forgotten the large Super family at 1256, whose blacksmith shop outlasted the other smithy in Narberth, located since colonial times opposite General Wayne Inn.

The much-feared Betty presents the case for the viewpoint that Germantown, in her, produced a spiritual descendent of the same seventeenth-century strain of witches⁶³ who were being hunted in a geographic area of Southwestern Germany at the time her ancestors left their homeland in Northwestern Germany near Holland to found Philadelphia's Germantown section in the early 1680s. Curiously, plans made by our eighteenth-century "witch" are connected with the eventual foundation of the village of Libertyville on land she had owned, three decades after she owned it. Betty Conrad's disposition of her property⁶⁴ with buildings on it, and the existence by then of at least two other (log) houses, Swedish, nearby, would set the stage for an early nineteenth-century village. But even before such a thing happened, that small, densely settled area started to become a melting pot of various nationalities and occupations. Meanwhile the larger tracts surrounding it were all still devoted to farming, whether by their owners or tenant farmers.

Washington in Narberth

Few of us seem to realize how important the French and Indian war was in paving the way for

⁶³ William Penn attended the trial of a witch at the Court of Upland. Born in Finland, the woman was accused by her daughter of bewitching a cow. As she was found not guilty, the episode has tended to be forgotten. Stereotypes of a witch at that time included a sorceress, one who bewitched animals, haunted woods as the sylvans of Roman days were said to do, and also a sneering, disheveled hag used to striding over a landscape immersed in darkness and in lurid moonlight.

⁶⁴ Mentioned in the 1783 Lower Merion tax lists is Elizabeth Conrad's "six acres and dwelling" which she had bought in 1781 from descendants of the original Welsh owner Katherine R. Thomas and her son Thomas Jones after renting a much larger farm from them. And it's thought Betty received a legacy from local innkeeper Anthony Tunis. Her own will divided her acreage into equal parts with buildings on it for each of her four children, giving each a life interest – her son John Conrad and her married daughters Rachel Sibley, Ann Wilsong and Elizabeth Bear (later Barr), wanting them to put down roots on those lots extending from 1256 to 1296 Montgomery Avenue. Betty herself is believed to have lived at # 1292. Betty's children did hold onto their houses and lots, but her grandchildren did not.

American independence.⁶⁵ Even George Washington with volunteers from Virginia had gotten involved in that remote area of the Alleghenies on the Monongahela River as a youthful aide to a British general who died in combat there fighting a French general. Washington nearly lost his own life in the same battle in that Pittsburgh area location. It was back and forth English and French dominance with the French superiority lasting only a few years and always including American Indian tribal groups. Each of those three separate groups was fighting for control of North America.

And finally England proclaimed itself the exclusive winner, in its peak year there of 1763, the Indians having suffered great losses. Not until 1777 and 1778 would we again find George Washington active relatively close to us, this time in South Jersey and at both the Narberth location on Montgomery Avenue and also at the Battle of Barren Hill in Montgomery County.

In Morristown, New Jersey, there's a small park with detailed life-size statues called "The Alliance" portraying Alexander Hamilton with George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette as the latter pledged French support in a 1780 Morristown meeting. (The statue was erected in 2007.) The recent nationally award-winning play "Hamilton" is based on the real Alexander Hamilton who was stationed at Washington's then headquarters in Morristown and Hamilton was then "dating" a local woman, Eliza Schuyler.

In that old Lancaster Road march of Washington's army to what would be the Battle of Paoli that included crossing the Schuylkill River, the chief engineer of his Continental Army was a Frenchman, Col. Louis Lebègue Duportail.⁶⁶ He headed a group of French volunteers...

As for the obscure but important Battle of Barren Hill that occurred in May 1778, it featured a band of colonial soldiers and Oneida Indian warriors led by Gilbert du Motier Marquis de Lafayette, then 20 years of age. His victory here was that he evaded a trap set by the British Army. Some Continental scouts and 47 Oneida warriors of the Iroquois Confederacy in central New York participated, giving them a spectacular escape from three-pronged pincer movement of the British. Barren Hill was renamed Lafayette Hill in 1900 honoring the French general. The stone monument shaped like a tent suggesting the encampment was erected in 1897 on Ridge Pike at Barren Hill by the Historical Society of Montgomery County. That monument has been moved several times and is now in

⁶⁵ Fred Anderson is the author of two important books on this subject, "Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766" and his "The War That Made America, A Short History of the French and Indian War", Viking, 2006.

⁶⁶ "Battle of Paoli" by Thomas J. McGuire, Mechanicsburg, PA, Stackpole Books, 2000, chapter 3, p. 17.

front of St. Peter's Church. When the Marquis de Lafayette returned here from France to Barren Hill on June 20, 1825, he was welcomed by an enthusiastic crowd.

Revolutionary Period

Discovering how hard it can be for others to open the door for us is something we take for granted every day. Such a wake-up call caused quite a jolt coming from one of our nation's learned authorities on the American Revolution, Alan Taylor, a winner of two Pulitzer prizes. He had published a book in 2001 and another in 2016 wrapping up his startling claim that our American Revolution fought against Blacks, Indians and women.

Indeed, we acknowledge those bracing thoughts even as we turn now to the American Revolution as viewed up close locally in the Narberth vicinity. Our focus is on the Dutch, the Jews, Swedes, Germans, Indians, the French and English. And it also looks at young black women introduced early here from the South, as well as our Revolution's most famous British General who chose to make his one-and-only American home away from home among Quakers at Narberth.

Here at the western edge of a city that kicked off America's fight for freedom, the Revolutionary period seemed to be dominated or spearheaded by a number of different responses to those historic events. The bulwark of peaceful Quaker farmers did not take up arms against the British. But others did - there being two conspicuous patriots who owned real estate in what is now the borough. The one who also lived here was Abraham Streeper who served with General Washington at Valley Forge. A resident of the 610 Shady Lane log house and its farm, of German background, Streeper maintained a Picket Post or lookout-post for Washington's Valley Forge army here on ground he owned (later it became tennis courts and in 2015, houses) opposite Streeper's Tavern,⁶⁷ which was the updated old inn he ran. And he also maintained a blacksmith shop directly opposite his inn, and there General Cornwallis had his horses constantly looked after.

The other patriot with local ties was the intellectual John Dickinson. His farm - which had belonged to some of his family in the days of the primitive Welsh settlement - while Dickinson owned it, was operated by a tenant. Dickinson's farm,⁶⁸ partly in Narberth and partly in Merion, suffered greater

⁶⁷ Editor's note: Streeper's Tavern became known as the General Wayne Inn and is now Chabad of the Main Line.

⁶⁸ It was well known that other people in this region supporting the American cause also suffered strong damage to their property over an extended period. A prime example was the great architect Wilson Eyre's family business, the Eyre Brothers shipbuilding enterprise in Fishtown, Philadelphia.

losses from British incursions than any other property in Lower Merion Township during that conflict.

What is known of the place in our rural Quaker Township where the British General chose to settle, apart from his comrades then occupying the city? A local historian addressing this in 1906 emphasized that the headquarters of the British Army General and the Merion Friends Meetinghouse were landmarks still to be seen in close proximity to each other on the same north side of Montgomery Avenue. “Just across the field stands Price Homestead used by Lord Cornwallis as a headquarters during the revolution while he was in this part of the country.”⁶⁹

A really superb property known as Maplewood, it was owned and lived in by farmer Edward Price and his family in 1767 – the year its 146 acres including 74 acres of woods was taxed at £28⁷⁰ by the Township. Among some 73 taxed properties listed that year by Lower Merion Township, it was also one of the largest properties.

Edward’s son, Reese Price, Maplewood’s next owner, let Cornwallis take it over until he departed later. Eventually, Maplewood went commercial, advertising high-price (summer only) rented units – able to accommodate forty persons. Still later it became known as Brookhurst Inn, and today its old main entry road, now lined with houses, has become Brookhurst Avenue. A short straight street named Maple Avenue for a time existed where the Acme Market entrance now is, and a long narrow footpath out of Maplewood had emerged immediately to the west of the current Japanese restaurant – Gin Za at Montgomery Avenue, Northwest corner of Woodbine.

And, of course, this locality so close to downtown Philadelphia⁷¹ saw plenty of war-related activity during the Revolution. Surely none was more disruptive of local routine, however, than General George Washington’s Continental Army encampment of more than 10,000 men on the Old Lancaster Road on Sunday September 14 to Monday September 15, 1777 (on Narberth’s main front road, later re-named Montgomery Avenue).

That encampment was part of our Army’s march, begun after crossing the Schuylkill River at Manayunk to regain the offensive against Britain’s General Sir William Howe in Chester County days after the Battle of Brandywine, the war’s biggest battle up to that time.

⁶⁹ Develin, Dora Harvey. *Some Historical Spots, Lower Merion Township, Montgomery County, PA*. Privately printed, 1906, p. 6. She also compliments another Price house, directly across the street from Maplewood, at 714 Montgomery Avenue, built in 1803.

⁷⁰ Lower Merion Tax Lists for 1767. University of Pennsylvania’s Van Pelt Library, rare book department.

⁷¹ Just about to happen and exceptional among these was the British decision to seize and occupy the city of Philadelphia. This took place on September 26, 1777, remaining in effect nearly nine months, until June 1778.

Our Camp Lancaster Road, as it was called, stretched from its front end at the fourteenth milestone in the Radnor Friends Meetinghouse vicinity to Merion Friends meeting east of the eighth milestone. Its breastworks for defense were visible⁷² until the late-1920s along Meetinghouse Lane's north side just east of its oblique-angle crossing with Montgomery Avenue. Slightly tucked behind the meetinghouse, soldiers on duty at that fortification could have surprised any unwelcome strangers approaching the Army's encampment from an easterly direction along the Old Lancaster Road from the city.

Since our portion of that camp was at the tail end, it likely included, besides artillery, ammunition wagons and baggage, also dozens of four-horse wagons driven by civilians and containing commissary and quartermaster supplies such as food and camp equipment.

Many a story is told of events in this neighborhood occurring especially during that winter of 1777-78 while the British held Philadelphia from late September to the following June. Several of these tales focused on the importance of Streeper's Tavern as an intelligence-gathering site for the American cause due to its strategic location between the city and Valley Forge and because its owner, Abraham Streeper,⁷³ was General George Washington's adjutant at Valley Forge that winter. During it, Streeper returned home to check on how his family was managing the inn during his absence. While here so briefly, he was captured by the British either at the inn or in his nearby home (still standing at 610 Shady Lane) and thrown into the notorious jail behind Independence Hall.

At another time, a detail of British soldiers once set out to destroy Streeper's Tavern by setting it afire, as they had lately done to another inn at a strategic location. But they were prevented from doing so by the swift action of Anthony Wayne and his men who had been alerted to the plan. Gratitude for this deed by Anthony Wayne was later expressed by naming of a nearby one-block-long Narberth street "Wayne Avenue," as well as the long-lasting name "General Wayne Inn. It is unknown whether these two wartime incidents occurred before or after the following confrontation took place in this vicinity, causing British bloodshed. But it's likely both incidents came afterward.

The gripping story is usually told that in the gathering dusk of a bitter December 1777 Sunday evening, a detachment of Colonel James Potter's cavalryman awaited a chance to strike at the enemy.

⁷² During the 1970s and '80s, this 1777 fortification was a frequent topic among local history buffs, some of whom recalled seeing it.

⁷³ It's said Lord Cornwallis sometimes sat at a front window of Streeper's Tavern watching his own orderlies lead his horses to the stone blacksmith shop directly across the street in Narberth where, at the time, the stone mile post stood just outside the smithy's door, not across the street where it is now.

The mission of the Americans was to harass a British column returning down the Conestoga Road to the warmth and high spirits of Tory-held Philadelphia, and to confront and capture any stragglers. The terrain around here, and the way some roads met the main thoroughfare at oblique angles, provided excellent cover for the American horsemen waiting by the sides of the main road. Seizing an opportunity, the American cavalry flew down the Conestoga Road (Montgomery Avenue) in pursuit of the disappearing column. Opposite Streeper's Tavern they mortally wounded a British lieutenant and captured two of his men who begged for mercy.

Peering from the tavern, Abraham Streeper came out wrapping a long wool muffler around his head. He had the dying subaltern carried inside and placed on his cloak by the hearthside where he died. The innkeeper searched in vain for some identification in the officer's pockets. He found only some varied English coins and a miniature painting of a young patrician English woman. Next morning Streeper had his slave, Bob, dig a grave in Merion Meeting's "Strangers Yard" while Streeper and his wife placed the body in a winding sheet. The miniature passed down in the Streeper family through daughter Mary and her children. In 1900, it was owned by Mrs. Joel Cook of Merion.

Among local skirmishes, Cornwallis' biographers mention a specific one in which General Cornwallis led a "foraging expedition"⁷⁴ on December 11, 1777. Almost certainly this refers to the one described above (with the dead officer and captured foot soldiers). Since such an episode had serious consequences, it required the chief commanding officer of British forces in America, General Howe, to file a report to London, which he did. Also this clash might have involved Cornwallis' own Thirty-Third Regiment.

From Britain's National Archives in London, my English cousin sent me nine pages, 11 ½ X 6 ½ inches each, of Lower Merion activity that are copies of hand-written documents sent from Philadelphia during Revolutionary War battles fought by the British Army here in 1777 and mailed to London, arriving aboard the armed ship "Brilliant" in January 1778. Aboard that ship too was the British General Lord Cornwallis, who had applied for a leave of absence to attend to some private business.

Whenever very serious matters and lots of killings and injuries of British officers and their men occurred, General William Howe was required to write to London about it, including on one of these pages a chart of deaths and military units served. My nine pages are very dark, but here is an example of

⁷⁴ Wickwire, Franklin and Mary. Cornwallis: The American Adventure. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970, p. 104. Footnote #46 cites Howe to Germain correspondence, Dec. 13, 1777. H.M.C., Stopford Sackville mss., 11, 86-87. Message was sent by Cornwallis' commanding general, William Howe. [This Dec. 11 "foraging expedition" is mentioned.]

one passage:

Not judging it advisable to attack the Enemy,...the Army having remained in the same position during [Nov. 6], marched at one [A.M. on] the 7th, the van and the main body commanded as before to take position Edge Hill, one mile distant from the Enemy's left. A corps of one thousand men, composed of riflemen and other troops from the Enemy's Northern Army, were found by the vanguard, posted on the hill with cannon – Lord Cornwallis immediately attacked with the 8th Light Infantry, supported by [his] 33d Regiment, and defeated this body with a considerable loss of officers and men. [Mentioned was a thick woodland, one officer, three enlisted men of Light Infantry Killed, and 30 to 40 other men killed or wounded.] Those 30 to 40 may have been the American "Enemy."⁷⁵

Surprisingly, this happened to be the same December 11 expedition in which Lower Merion's richest man, the Quaker miller John Roberts of Old Gulph Road took part, chosen because he knew the area so well. Despite his claim the British forced him to be their guide on that particular foraging expedition, Roberts nonetheless at war's end was convicted of high treason because of it, hanged, and all his properties seized. This punishment by his fellow Americans happened despite Roberts' good works and his having helped many American prisoners survive the rigors of the dreaded Walnut Street jail.

During the revolution in Lower Merion, there were two "hotspots" that could easily spark unexpected tension between local patriots and British officials. One was hiring a prominent local person to guide a British foraging expedition; the other was a tendency to repeatedly raid the property of a prominent American leader, such as Dickinson.

Meanwhile, the two captured British foot soldiers from the rear of that same British raiding party mentioned above that was heading back the city did not fare well. They were bound and led, one account says, to a small stone house alongside Streeper's blacksmith shop directly across from the inn on what is now Narberth borough land. A sergeant, presumably British, is said to have thundered at the door "Open up, open up." Cautiously two wide-eyed teenage boys peered out and were asked, "where's your paw?" They replied, "Maw's looking for 'im." In that story we are left cliff hanging about the next move.

By another account, those two captured British soldiers were detained and tied up in a house immediately behind the one just described, across Haverford Avenue where it meets Montgomery.

⁷⁵ British National Archives, London. Documents that originated in Philadelphia area in 1777 and traveled overseas where the originals exist.

(That's a corner of John Dickinson's farm where there was at the time a roadside rental house in the care of his tenant farmer.) The mother of the family living in that Dickinson-owned small tenant house is said to have killed the British soldiers with a knife, after she sent her teenage sons out to search for their father.

If this story is true, these killings of prisoners might have been revenge for damages to Dickinson's farm, which is known to have had the most destruction to private property in Lower Merion Township by the British during the Revolution.

Horses and foodstuffs were the objects usually stolen in such raids, and often the British targeted properties of persons favoring the American cause, sometimes setting them afire. The house of John Dickinson's father-in-law⁷⁶ in the city was burned down by the British the same night they also torched the "Cliveden" mansion at the Battle of Germantown.

One account of the clash outside Streeper's Tavern says the redcoats at the time were returning from one of their raids of targeted local farms. Other accounts note that the remains of the two soldiers that the woman murdered were unearthed during construction of the Columbia Railroad – and where had they been buried on the corner of Dickinson's farm. Also, a large bone from one of those bodies is believed to have been kept in the attic of an old house that stood on the hilly west side of Merion Road, on that same farm at Montgomery Avenue.

Here and there today we still come across persons said to be direct descendants of soldiers in our Valley Forge Army. Scattered around, for example, are descendants of Jacob Latch⁷⁷ of Old Lancaster Road, Merion. He, at home on a furlough from Valley Forge, spent his time making shoes for his destitute Army comrades. Latch was also known as "Washington's Runner" because he carried secret dispatches for the General.

The episode of deadly December 1777 mayhem in Lower Merion may have been a rude awakening for General Cornwallis. He'd seemingly had it all. Wasn't he living here on a large farm in a congenial neighborhood still full of peace-loving Quakers? Arriving on our shores, Cornwallis had created an impression he wasn't the typical Army officer on a tour of duty. Instead he had found a way to continue each of his own deep personal ongoing interests simultaneously. He had wanted to be a

⁷⁶ Mary Norris had continued to live there after her father's death. John Dickinson, sensing danger to her large and rare book collection, removed it before the fire, which a diarist reported seeing ablaze that night, a short distance north of Market Street East.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Develin, p. 27. The name Latch has remained plentiful in the area since then. Narberth borough's Charlotte Dorothy Latch, known as Mrs. Bode, lived almost a century, and died here in March 2015.

soldier, a farmer, a faithful husband, a traveler who was always engaged and sensitive about what was going on around him. Juggling a wide range of interests was his way of wishing to experience greater freedom, which he evidently learned to do on our doorstep. Cornwallis was at the very beginning of a long and arguably brilliant career.

Simple country living of the kind he enjoyed with his young family in his native Suffolk had such enormous appeal for British General Charles Cornwallis⁷⁸ that his biographers make a special point of saying he avoided living in downtown Philadelphia⁷⁹ during that city's occupation by the British. He also thought that takeover a mistake. Where then did he live locally?

We know that during those nearly nine months of occupation, and at other times when he was in the area, Cornwallis took over and maintained as his headquarters a handsome and quite large farm, Maplewood, then belonging to Quaker farmer Reese Price of Lower Merion. It comprised a large house and barn of stone and smaller buildings all on an uphill grade and having a southerly orientation.

The Rees Price family had returned to its very own comfortable property there by 1798, the year Lower Merion's tax lists⁸⁰ referred to their two-story stone house of 20 X 40 feet, also a lean-to, a kitchen and a springhouse each of these of stone. Also taxed were Price's many panes of window glass, plus something called an Old Smokens made of logs.

The only strong reminder we have of that large property⁸¹ today is its long entry path, Brookhurst Avenue going north from Montgomery Avenue, as if following across from Narberth's Price Avenue.

More familiar to many people is the mention that General Cornwallis had his horses shod at the small stone smithy opposite the nearby inn. His eventual surrender at Yorktown in 1781 ended the

⁷⁸ Known as the most active and aggressive general the British sent to America, Cornwallis arrived here in 1775 as a major general in the British Army and an earl, to serve in General William Howe's army under Howe and General Henry Clinton. The idea was that Cornwallis eventually would have his own command in Canada. A man of moderation and common sense, Cornwallis was also a people-person and a nature-lover. He hated to be idle, something all generals had to deal with at times. Deeply in love with his wife, Cornwallis didn't share some officers' interest in keeping mistresses in America and wasn't attracted to attending theater or gambling which would have drawn him to cities. His wife's death was a turning point, and he began to move gradually away from fighting toward administration. Thus even as he ended his American adventure in defeat, Cornwallis would look forward to his imperial years ahead with full backing of the crown all the way, both in India and in Northern Ireland. During India's 2,500 years of history, Cornwallis saw to it that places like Bombay were under British control for a while.

⁷⁹ Wickwire, F. and A. Cornwallis: The American Adventure. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970, p. 101. They affirm that, although an area resident during the British occupation of Philadelphia, Cornwallis did not live in the city itself.

⁸⁰ Bulletin of the Historical Society of Montgomery County, PA. Spring 1984, vol. XXIV, No. 8, p. 182-213, Lower Merion in 1798. Especially pages 192-193 and pages 208-209, regarding its tax assessment district with its list or description of each dwelling house. Rees Price is taxed for his 134 acres on p. 209.

⁸¹ Atlas of Lower Merion, Montgomery County. Philadelphia: A.H.Mueller, 1896, plate 3. Brookhurst is shown with its acreage already drastically reduced. A short street, Maple Avenue, off Montgomery, existed then where ACME Market's driveway is today.

American Revolution and brought American independence. Cornwallis then moved on to become commander-in-chief on two other continents, India⁸² and Iceland, fulfilling his sense of obligation to king and country.

Cornwallis' departure from our shores seems very much the overarching reason why some people felt Reese Price and his wife needed a new home and shouldn't just be satisfied to reclaim their old one. Word had gotten around about this matter. Actually Reese Price did have a new stone house built in 1803 to usher in the new century. This time it stands proudly on the main road at 714 Montgomery Avenue and his kinsman Joseph Price designed and was building it. Fittingly as it neared completion, an enormous public reception with prominent guests including a son of President John Adams took place with a gala ox roast shared by all. The event seemed a lot like a true Philadelphia election-season block party for the masses.

On this occasion, the friendly crowd felt the need to celebrate as if they were celebrating Reese Price's American independence from that other house. And so this new dwelling on a busy main street designed by a Revolutionary war vet quickly became a meaningful symbol of American democracy and a page-turner marking the exit of British military power from our shores. Even so, it wasn't long before Mrs. Reese Price would return to the privacy and relative of seclusion of her older homestead. Fortunately, the symbolic newer Price house survives.⁸³

And although ineligible for membership in any carpenters' guild in Philadelphia because he lived outside the city, Joseph Price nonetheless does reflect in the exterior detailing of this federal era stone farmhouse of 1803, 714 Montgomery Avenue, Narberth, either the direct or indirect influence of specific designs published in a rulebook of Philadelphia's principal carpenters' guild. So, in this sense this house for prosperous farmer Rees Price "goes by the book" more so than much of Joseph Price's other known work. And the result is one of the finest examples of a single block detached Federal era stone farmhouse in the suburbs southwest of Philadelphia. The period of significance is the year this dwelling was built.

Meanwhile, an important unanswered question about this builder's construction activity lingers. Did Joseph Price in fact build the outstanding 3½-story, three-bay Shippen-Wistar House, 238 South 4th

⁸² General Cornwallis brought Bombay under British control at the time in India, but it was several years before electricity reached Bombay.

⁸³ Editor's note: In 1999, this house (714 Montgomery Avenue) was determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register; however, it was not listed because of the objection of its then owner, Lankenau Hospital. It currently houses the "Hamper Shop," Lankenau's thrift store.

Street at the SW. Corner of Locust Street in Philadelphia, with its corner-house plan and efficient use of interior space?

After consulting Price's Diary,⁸⁴ the answer is a confident yes. For it clearly states that important city house was built for William Shippen, Jr., the renowned physician and medical educator from Lower Merion who headed the medical department of the Continental Army 1777-81. Dr. Shippen was both a close friend of Joseph Price and one of Price's most prominent clients. And while the construction date of this Philadelphia house is usually given as 1765 without mentioning a builder, Price's Diary specifies Price's supervision of construction work on a Dr. Shippen house – declaring it completed at the end of 1788. And the latter date far better agrees with Shippen's then current activity. For after receiving his medical degree at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, he began teaching anatomy at our nation's first medical school⁸⁵ (at Penn) in Philadelphia until the Revolutionary War began. After his Army service, he returned to Penn Medical School for thirty more years, this time teaching surgery and midwifery in addition to anatomy.

It was during this 1780s period of his return to teaching at Penn that he got something he surely needed – a new house in the city. When he retired after a total of forty years teaching, it took three people to replace Penn Medicine's strong first teacher.

Then too, this Joseph Price-designed house for Dr. Shippen is also a rare if not unique instance wherein Price was supervising Philadelphia carpenters who undoubtedly were members of one of the carpenters' guilds in the city. After paying the bills these subcontracting carpenters submitted to him, Price received his own final payment of £25/7/6 from his customer, which suggests that this construction project Price undertook for Dr. Shippen was a substantial one, not a mere addition. The chief relevance of the early Shippen commission to Price's work in general is that it shows Joseph Price brought sophisticated awareness of good architecture and fine carpentry to all of his subsequent projects. (An earlier segment of Price's Diary may have existed, that could have thrown more light on the Shippen commission, but if so, it is now lost.)

Joseph Price moreover was no stranger to the type of architect represented by the Shippen-Wistar House, as his kinsman David Price's old four-bay stone homestead "Green Hill" (built 1695) in Lower

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Clyde Barker, J.D., a surgeon from the faculty, served as Penn Medicine's historian-in-chief during its 250th Anniversary celebration in 2015 as our nation's first medical school. Dr. Barker has much to say on the dust-up between that medical school's earliest trailblazers, William Shippen, Jr. and John Morgan. See Pennsylvania Gazette's "The Link" July/August 2015, p. 26-33 by Dave Zeitlis.

Merion, although only 2½ stories high, had a similar soaring webbed pair of chimneys at one gable end. Also on his frequent trip trips to the county seat of Norristown, Price could see several pairs of webbed end-chimneys near the court house, and others in Bridgeport nearby, assuming they were built by then.

Also, Joseph Price possessed a deep devotion to certain clients he regarded as superior people. Dr. Shippen was one of these. After that dedicated physician died in c. 1798, the mantle of Joseph's admiration fell upon the shoulders of his first cousin Reese Price, and next upon the financier of Lower Merion Academy's construction, the high-minded and much-revered Jacob Jones. Shippen and Jones were of an earlier generation, and Reese Price nearer Joseph's own age.

The Federal Era

By the beginning of the Federal period, travel was becoming very congested on the Lancaster Road (Montgomery Avenue). There was almost continual traffic. Stagecoaches, picturesque brightly blue-painted Conestoga wagons and farmers' lumbering herds of animals being driven to market in Philadelphia were plentiful. Some suggestion of this traffic on a slack day can be seen in a well-known engraving of Merion Meeting area c. 1800. Still, in sharp contrast with this frenzied roadway activity was the largely intact country atmosphere of the local farms, many of them large ones, and most of them flourishing. So it is interesting to realize what prominent politicians in that era felt they must do to get out the vote. The earliest form of political clambake hereabouts was Federalist Party ox-roasts at election time. This tradition may have taken its cue from a practice some pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia eating establishments had of holding such roasts at infrequent intervals simply as non-political public entertainment. In any event, one or more Federal era candidates used this means locally to make political hay, in a district known to be staunchly Federalist throughout the existence of that political party of true-blue old-guard residents.

These candidates, whoever they were, were likely to have been comfortably well off because this was an expensive type of meal for large numbers of people. Besides knowing the location - in Narberth, opposite Streeper's Tavern outdoors on land the inn owned⁸⁶ - all we have at present is speculation on who, between the years 1796 and 1816, the sponsoring political candidates were.

[One such candidate], because he easily could have afforded to pay for this type of repast, [might

⁸⁶ The inn at the time owned the open land where two ancient roads were drawing together at a Picket Post site. Such open land so close to the inn made it very useful for ox-roast gatherings. Eventually, this openness gave way to a tennis-court club until taken over in 2015 by housing construction.

have been] John Adams, victorious in his 1796 presidential race by a narrow margin, with Thomas Jefferson on the ticket as his vice-presidential running mate. Or the presidential and vice-presidential candidates John Adams and C. C. Pinckney in their losing battle against Thomas Jefferson and his running mate Burr in 1800, which was the first political party overturn in United States history, an event sometimes referred to as the “Revolution of 1800.” Or, it might have been in connection with Pinckney’s losing race against Thomas Jefferson by a landslide in 1804. And so on through 1816, which marked the last time the Federalist Party put up a presidential candidate in the general election.

Independence had been an early watchword in Lower Merion, the municipality surrounding present-day Narberth. And like many other fringe communities near big cities, the Township relished that status. Tight government control in any form had no appeal for Merion Welsh Quakers ever since they long ago were disappointed as a community over the turn-down of their requests for separate status as a Welsh-speaking barony despite their best efforts and active petitioning.

Certainly, absorbing a would-be “separatist” district like that into the city never held much promise. And Lower Merion made absolutely certain to avoid the City of Philadelphia’s expected sweeping annexation of the many Philadelphia County districts by jumping the gun and seceding from that county seventy years before annexation would have given it permanent city status in 1854, as it did to a district such as the unincorporated village of Chestnut Hill across the Schuylkill River. Thus Lower Merion was hooked up as undisputed keystone and richest district in the newly created and mostly rural county of Montgomery. It was a resounding victory for the Quaker ideal of political authority being vested at the county level. That decisive move was made in 1784, and a prominent local landowner had a firm hand in assuring it.

Clearly acting in the township’s best interests at the time of Montgomery County’s creation by the state was no less than John Dickinson, head of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania (equivalent to governor.). A statesman, historian and author, Dickinson knew that prosperous townships like Lower Merion stood a better chance of avoiding eventual annexation than weaker ones.

There was also definitely a personal side to his decisive action to avert Lower Merion’s annexation by the city in the way he did. For Dickinson was intensely proud that surgeon Edward Jones of Bala in Merioneth, his great-grandfather on his mother’s side,⁸⁷ who had in 1681 purchased acreage directly from William Penn and thus was among “the first purchasers of Pennsylvania” only months

⁸⁷ John Dickinson’s mother was a Cadwallader.

after Penn had received his Charter from King Charles II for the land destined to be Pennsylvania. That Dickinson ancestor also led the seventeen immigrant families – the first Welsh colonists to settle in America – who arrived here in 1682 and built the Merion meetinghouse.

So proud was John Dickinson of those particular family ties that he managed to purchase back half of that forebearer’s Merion/Narberth plantation on the open market after it had been sold out of the family. When he took possession of his ancestral land, Merion was a one - windmill village, and that windmill⁸⁸ was on Dickinson’s newly acquired property. Dickinson still owned its 100 acres when he signed the legislature’s document creating Montgomery County. Also John Dickinson’s anonymously published “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania” (1768) that were so very celebrated and influential in the American colonies’ push toward independence from Britain, clearly had in mind that family plantation Dickinson loved in Merion/Narberth. For his ownership of half of it enabled him to characterize himself as “a Farmer in Pennsylvania,” which he otherwise was not.

Only after marrying Mary Norris in 1770 did the couple begin acquiring large acreage in Adams and Cumberland Counties that became the eventual Dickinson College campus.⁸⁹ Even when Charles Willson Peale painted a certain John Dickinson oil portrait while engaged in his famous series of likenesses of American leaders, Dickinson saw to it that the image’s visible landscape background portrayed the west bank of the Schuylkill River – precisely in the direction of that farm.

Yet Dickinson wasn’t too much in love with his old windmill in Merion to know which way the wind [was] blowing. This was so even though the “personal” side of things at the county level extended to his having the satisfaction that the village freshly founded so as to be designated the county seat took the name Norris (later Norristown) after his book-collecting wife Mary’s family. That name was an obvious choice. For Dickinson’s wife Mary was the daughter of Isaac Norris of “Fair Hill” in Philadelphia. He was a direct descendent of the first Isaac Norris on our shores, who had acquired vast acreage⁹⁰ in what became Montgomery County. Like Lower Merion, those lands had been part of

⁸⁸ This windmill, an expensive item, appears on the inventory of Joseph Tunis’ estate. Two generations of the Tunis family (owners of the inn adjoining Merion Friends Meeting) owned this farm. And as they stayed briefly in Holland after leaving their native Germany en route to America, they apparently developed a reliance on windmills – using this one most likely to pump water for their cows.

⁸⁹ See Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories and Reclamations, by Fear-Segal, Jacqueline and Rose, Susan D. (University of Nebraska Press), 2016. It examines how native American children were stripped of their languages, religions and cultures at a Pennsylvania school seeking to turn them into “white people.”

⁹⁰ Those holdings, called “Norriton” by Isaac Norris, Sr. included all of the present Borough of Norristown, all of the townships of East and West Norriton and part of Worcester township. Acquired while choosing a Norristown site for a mill before 1711, Isaac Norris, Sr. bought that land from a Swede, much of it remaining in the Norris family for generations.

Philadelphia County, and they too would have been destined for eventual incorporation into the city, had the legislature with Dickinson's full support, not taken action.

When Montgomery County was established by act of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and approved by the Supreme Executive Council, presided over by its president John Dickinson, its formation at the time was seen as a considerable convenience to the public in the administration of justice. One indisputable way in which the need to focus on belonging to a new county in 1784 prepared Lower Merion people to accept eventual residential suburbia with its longer travel time was that, from their neighborhood, the new county seat was actually much farther away than the previous courts of law so accessible in downtown Philadelphia. The Lower Merion diarist Joseph Price noted the change, requiring him often to make long journeys to Norristown on horseback. The new county did of course receive a Welsh name.

And never mind how determined Lower Merion was at this time to stay independent of Philadelphia. This locality was equally focused on capitalizing on every advantage of living on the city's edge – a combination of features that was a true benchmark of a community intent on staying suburban. The other suburban trait it possessed at this early date was that the residential character of the place was emphasized over and above commerce and industry – its mill district being well hidden from the main roads back along a meandering creek. And both the larger-than-average size of its farms compared with a nearby locale such as rural Radnor Township, and the number of its farms giving a good impression as to their upkeep and prosperity, would have made it easier to imagine Lower Merion's future in a new, mostly rural county than cified.⁹¹

So, in just over a half-century of transition into full-fledged suburbia that started here at the close of the eighteenth century, this locality did have occasional problems about identity and sticking together, but generally it was a place with a well-defined character due to the presence of the Friends Meetinghouse, the next-door inn, and farms of prominent Quakers lining busy crossroads. As mentioned, by the eighteenth century the area already had its own mill district several miles away which saw many industries, come and go over the next hundred years.

But the external forces capable of bringing regional transportation routes across this area and upgrading and expanding these throughway systems could be very disruptive of newly forming communities as well as older ones. This uncertainty often worried people and left them wondering, what

⁹¹ [Vicky's note: work on this]

next? The latest incursion, the Lancaster Turnpike, was kind to this locality, by avoiding it. ⁹²

Capture of a Pirate Ship

With President John Adams at the helm and Philadelphia still the nation's capital, a celebrated international incident took place off our shores during the Quasi-War with France that caused sparks to fly here in the heart of our old Libertyville neighborhood. It was early 1798, the year that controversy dogged the founding of the U.S. Navy in Philadelphia. Our young nation was on the brink of war with France our former ally, over French privateers menacing our shipping off every major American seaport. The two major American political parties, the Federalists led by Adams and Thomas Jefferson's Republicans were at loggerheads over the issue.

Jefferson argued we should remain neutral and not risk break-up of our nation since there was no national consensus favoring war, Adams having just been elected by a narrow electoral margin. Jefferson insisted the Federalists were just trying to invent a crisis to maneuver us into an alliance with Britain. Founding a Navy would only complicate things, deepen our debt, and draw us for certain into war, claimed the Republicans. Barbary piracy on the high seas from Africa had existed many years. Was this new threat now actually something worse than that?

They also criticized a peace delegation Adams sent to France – until it was realized that the French leader Talleyrand was using the stalemate to demand of those envoys extortion and bribery as a condition of a peace settlement. Otherwise the entrenched privateer network was destined to continue, as it was a lucrative source of revenue for the post-Revolutionary French government.

⁹² Editor's note: In another version of this introductory chapter, the author stated the following: "In the colonial era two small villages stood on Narberth's turf along a primitive twisting highway (Narberth's front street) leading westward out of Philadelphia while these local lands were still part of Philadelphia County. One of those settlements was a Quaker meetinghouse hub, the other an agricultural service area anchored by its cluster of log cabins. This meetinghouse district had started as a seat of both religious and civil authority for the area during the Welsh settlement, its school building too a local first, with the inn offering food and rest to travelers and worshipers alike. For that main road was a vital link with Lancaster, one of America's earliest inland cities. And the inn, its property originally spanning both sides of the road, was a stage-coach stop along the route. This artery quickly became overcrowded with local and long-distance passenger and freight traffic. So the Lancaster turnpike was opened a mile from here in 1794. This somewhat straightened path between the two cities bypassed this immediate area. However, the development of our two local settlements soon speeded up anew when the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad began rail service in 1832 between Philadelphia and the Lancaster vicinity, following closely in this neighborhood the route of the Old Lancaster Road. It made unofficial stops here at the inn and at Libertyville, as the service area by then was called. Yet the character of the locality remained agricultural, with some city folk seeking sojourns here in the summer months as they had first learned to do in the 1790s. Relocation of the rail line southward to its present right of way and its takeover by the Pennsylvania Railroad did not immediately result in construction of a local rail station. But when this finally did occur and Elm Station was built here in 1870, this set the scene for the foundation of a town along what became known as the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad." Lancaster Turnpike became Lancaster Avenue (Route 30)

Response on our shores was swift. Outrage accompanying it led to a huge outpouring of public support for President Adams' aim of starting a powerful navy and going to war. The Republicans, by contrast, fell silent and were harassed as possibly subversive. By springtime, frenzy and patriotism were widespread on the home front.

In mid-summer 1798, a stirring event occurred that had repercussions here in Narberth. The occurrence took place just as plans got underway for our federal government to build six frigates, a type of heavy yet fast-moving and well-armed warship, that launched the U.S. Navy.

Then amid these feverish preparations came the news of the sensational capture of the French pirate vessel "La Croyable" by the Philadelphia sea captain Stephen Decatur, father of the eventual Commodore Stephen Decatur, Jr., who would soon captain one of those new frigates.

The arrival of Decatur's captured prize under guard at Philadelphia, excited universal satisfaction in our city. And bells tolled to celebrate this first successful effort to wipe away the deep disgrace to our nation and to its name being caused by actions of the French republic. Congress at the time was deliberating whether to declare all our treaties with France null and void because of that nation's continuing flagrant violation of them. A bill before the House to encourage capture of French armed vessels by allowing a bounty for their apprehension was under discussion but would lose by a forty-one to forty vote. Also the Alien and Sedition Act being debated in Congress was sought as an especially effective way to prevent our country from being drawn into the jaws of France, as Holland and Switzerland already had.

The capture of "La Croyable" near Delaware Bay by Decatur's medium-size twenty-gun U.S. Navy frigate "Delaware" on the evening of July 7, 1798 was immediately recognized as an event of national importance. "Croyable" was the first armed French vessel captured by the U.S. Navy in the quasi-war with France going on at the time. With American naval capacity at a very low ebb since the Revolution and six heavy-duty frigates authorized by Congress but not yet in action, the capture signaled a great moral victory and a godsend for the shipping industry. For at the time our young nation was virtually held captive along our East Coast due to the constant ship hijackings by French privateers operating with full French government approval, their crews of sailors trained as soldiers.

Manned by a veteran pirate commander and a crew of seventy, the new fourteen-gun schooner "La Croyable" after marauding Delaware Bay for only two days, had already captured two prizes (an English brig, and also the Liverpool-bound American ship "Liberty" just out of Philadelphia). Once captured, that Gallic pirate vessel was refitted and taken into the U.S. Navy, renamed "Retaliation" and

placed under command of Lieutenant William Bainbridge, its mission: to cruise in search of other privateers. All of “La Croyable’s” contents were quickly auctioned in Philadelphia.

Locally at the time of the capture, Quaker simplicity had gone into temporary eclipse as Philadelphians aped French customs to an exaggerated extent. Public sentiment was strongly in favor of France here, even though local newspapers were constantly full of reports of French sea piracy outside all the American ports. Newspaper guest editorials sometimes chastised Philadelphians for their Francophile leanings.

Adding friction to an already tense situation, numerous French ships were in port here in early July that year. And some of them were embroiled in controversy while being forcibly detained under quarantine at Fort Mifflin with large numbers of French loyalist passengers and some of their black servants. These vessels included the armed ship “Melpomene,” “Daurada” and “Josephus.”

At the time too, scores of French “West Indian planters who had fled Haiti due to Toussaint L'Ouverture's bloody insurrection were a familiar sight strolling along Market Street. And who was mainly in charge? President Adams' Federalist Party was battling to save its supremacy and overcome serious tension with Jefferson's Republican Party, already growing strong and favoring the French. Jefferson's Republicans were not about to forget that our Revolutionary War with Britain had just ended due to the combined American-French siege of Yorktown, Virginia, at which General Cornwallis surrendered in 1781. Meanwhile, authorities in Philadelphia could not risk any sudden attempt of a popular nature to throw open the jail doors and set these French pirates from the “Croyable” free.

So, President Adams had the satisfaction of sending the captured crew of “La Croyable” inland to prison in Lancaster. The prisoners were convoyed there by the First City Troop of Cavalry and infantrymen of McPherson's Blues on the afternoon of July twenty-seventh, after a delay to increase the guard force when several French, captives resisted their transfer.

This capture at sea was one of the last great moments of victory for Adams as our president. This time he got to use his elite units of voluntary military battalions to serve our Nation's best interests. Not by any measure, just narrow interests only of the Federalist Party, as Jefferson's Republican Party had been claiming⁹³ constantly as it played catch-up and was starting its own copy-cat volunteer battalions to compete with the Federalist friendly First and Second City Troop and McPherson's Blues.

⁹³ For insight into East Coast post-Revolutionary political culture and its competing groups, see “Political Conflict and Public Contest: Rituals of National Celebration in Philadelphia, 1788-1815, by Albrecht Koschnik. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography*. Vol. CXVIII, No. 3, July 1994, p. 209-248.

To be expected, Major Joseph Price faithfully recorded in his diary of July thirty-first, 1798: “About twelve or thirteen light horse and perhaps twenty foot in a stage coach returning to town. Been g(u)arding some french [sic] up to Lancaster...they were taken off our coasts.” So how come a Liberty Pole was raised at Libertyville over the “Croyable” incident? Caused by ship owners celebrating no doubt.

Richard Tunis is the obvious person to have erected that Liberty Pole in front of the house at 1226 Montgomery Avenue⁹⁴ that he had just bought at a sheriff sale and moved his brother into. The capture of the “Croyable” would have filled Tunis with exuberance for he had a wharf on the Delaware River just below Market and owned all manner of ships, sloops, brigs and schooners, and had sea captains in his employ with regular routes such as bringing tobacco from Virginia. If anyone in the Tunis family set up that celebratory Liberty Pole in their yard close to the road, it would have remained there a while. That would have been in sharp contrast to Revolutionary times when such patriotic devices were torn down by the British as fast as the Americans planted them. And then too, the reminder that the “Croyable” had just captured a local ship named “Liberty” when itself was caught, would easily have suggested Liberty Pole to Tunis.

According to a misleading early twentieth-century Narberth source, a Liberty Pole was set up by “French soldiers”⁹⁵ at the old trading post site – surely a vague and misleading account. For such a marker then erected for “patriotic” reasons by Frenchmen might have been seen as a punishable act of defiance.

A better-known Liberty Pole incident in nearby Gladwyne the following year was more provocative in nature than celebratory. Its raising of a Liberty Cap on a hickory pole⁹⁶ prompted Congress then in session in Philadelphia, the nation's capital, to send out a detachment of troops to arrest

⁹⁴ It is interesting to speculate what a device to celebrate, symbolically, the freeing of American coastal waters from French pirates might have looked like. Probably placed upon a tree or a pole it may have carried the captured pirate ship's name. Or it may have been an Americanized version of a Liberty Tree such as French sympathizers had solemnly consecrated “to liberty” during the 1760s. Richard Tunis would have been painfully aware that the French pirates in his day had many friends and accomplices ashore here who were supplying intelligence overseas about the best vessels to plunder that were due to arrive or depart from our port city. And his banner may have dealt with that.

⁹⁵ When asked about a Liberty Pole erected by “French soldiers,” Edwin Wolf 2d, the Library Company of Philadelphia's noteworthy historian, not surprisingly gave the assertion no credence.

⁹⁶ Llewellyn's controversial Liberty Pole may somewhat have resembled an old-time Democratic device, a seventy-five-foot hickory pole erected by digging a post hole and trench, and then forcing the pole to stand straight by means of a pair of wagon wheels attached to an axle. Placed on top was a red cap. A large sign stated “Down with all tyrants. No gag laws. Liberty or Death!” After their acquittal, patriot farmer Llewellyn along with George Britton, Samuel Young and Archibald Minges became neighborhood heroes.

the perpetrators on a charge of “seditious conspiracy,” chiefly Captain Morris Llewellyn of Gladwyne. In early autumn of 1799, the Federal Circuit Court records show, Llewellyn and others met in Gladwyne to protest the Sedition Act passed in 1798 to curb criticism. Llewellyn was brought to trial but not convicted.

Village of Libertyville

The events of the Revolution and its aftermath gave the locality Revolutionary credentials it soon employed, when the Columbia and Philadelphia Railroad came through, by creating the village of Libertyville. The name preserved the rhetoric of patriotism.⁹⁷ And it was the first name applied to any section of Narberth. The village received that name while our country was trying to consolidate its diverse elements in order to establish a national character, and while patriotism was considered the most important sentiment a citizen might have. Then in its heroic phase, the American ideal of liberty clearly stood for personal and moral accountability. That is in sharp contrast to our own day when, although it demands respect, that ideal has been turned upside down, and liberty now so often means license.

The choice of name for this village also reflected the very early beginnings of the railroad age, with its need for legible signs to be read by a large influx of people traveling westward. Their immediate destination, Columbia, was also the gateway further west and to Yorktown in Virginia and the Southwest. Libertyville meant such a sign and symbol, an eloquent reminder of Philadelphia’s heritage as the most hallowed ground of American liberty.⁹⁸

The name called to mind too that this neighborhood in particular pioneered the advancement of freedom long before the war of independence by providing Swedes with some of their earliest opportunities to trade freely as individuals with the Indians (rather than as agents of the Swedish crown colony, as already mentioned). Surely few people more so than Richard Tunis would have understood better how keenly the Swedes had seized their first free-trade opportunity there on Montgomery Avenue. For Tunis, as mentioned above, had just bought the then still-standing Swedish log cabin at 1226 Montgomery – the one believed built for storage supposedly at the Indians’ request. He of all people,

⁹⁷ Persons hoping to get a sense of what the early village of Libertyville was like, or its patriotic “Liberty Pole” erected there on Montgomery Avenue while Philadelphia was still our nation’s capital, need only to board a #44 SEPTA bus eastbound on that street before it reaches Essex Avenue. A 40-minute ride takes you to Fifth and Market Streets and the Liberty Bell.

⁹⁸ Our neighborhood also enabled Welsh Friends to find safe haven from religious persecution so they felt at liberty to establish here one of the earliest houses of worship in America (built 1695), still standing just over the borough line in Lower Merion Township.

ship owner that he was, would have celebrated there by erecting a Liberty Pole as the French captives passed en route to prison. And before long the Libertyville moniker here did become a very congenial one for a hamlet the Columbia Railroad passed through. For the striding female figure of Columbia was liberty's traditional symbol throughout the nineteenth century.

If in our day the human race can successfully strive for dignity and freedom, Narberth by remembering and affirming its earlier identity as Libertyville,⁹⁹ has a message that needs to be told to the world.

Columbia Railroad

The state legislature in 1828 authorized construction of the Columbia Railroad. It was completed in 1834, and not a moment too soon. Already, in 1790 alone, some ten thousand Conestoga wagons, brightly painted and hitched to teams of four, six and even ten horses, had been required to haul merchandise between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh by way of the Old Lancaster Road (Montgomery Avenue). Traffic on this Narberth artery was unparalleled in American history prior to the introduction of steam power. And after the new Lancaster Turnpike, America's first macadamized road, was constructed several years later, that number kept climbing's deadly.

By the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, New York had been vigorously preempting Philadelphia's claim to being the nation's largest city. The Columbia Railroad turned out to be too little too late. But it stirred things up considerably among farmers in this vicinity and all along its main route. And it turned out to be one of the crucial factors, besides the slightly later Pennsylvania Railroad, that opened up suburban development in what became known as Philadelphia's Main Line.

The double-track of the new rail line was officially launched by the departure of two trains "Lancaster" and "Columbia" Baldwin locomotives at Columbia on October 7, 1834 carrying Governor George Wolf, state officials and dignitaries. These V.I.P.s departed on their sixty-mile journey from Columbia at 8 a.m. and arrived at 6 a.m. in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁰ When the State continued the line to Pittsburgh, the route's full length was 394 miles. In Narberth the Columbia rail route hugged the south side of Montgomery Avenue except where it made a wide arc around Edward R. Price's house (714

⁹⁹ That said, our Libertyville in the early years seems to have been a less important stop than Athenville (Ardmore), the first "official" station stop on the Columbia Line from Philadelphia.

¹⁰⁰ Poulson's Advertiser, Philadelphia, 3 July 1834 issue contains an eye-witness account of the first few trips by a steam railroad train operating between Philadelphia and Columbia.

Montgomery Avenue). Also just west of here in Wynnewood, a similar arc occurred around the Robert Owen house - in both instances, after what must have been strenuous efforts to protect the privacy of those properties.

One eye-witness account comes from the son of a tenant-farming couple who lived on the grounds of Edward R. Price's 714 Montgomery Avenue property while he lived there. The Columbia Railroad ran directly through the orchard behind Price's house. Their young son, Adolphus Edler,¹⁰¹ would stand in the orchard by the tracks with a basket or pan of apples and hand them to passengers aboard the moving train. The youth easily could run fast enough to keep pace with the train and distribute apples to passengers. At the time, the engines all were named for certain prominent persons. So an inquiry about a train's arrival at Libertyville was personalized as "How soon will 'Bill Jones' be due?"

Libertyville flourished and formed one of the cells (like nearby Merionville, Athensville, Merion Square, Humphreysville and Academyville) from which Lower Merion Township grew and expanded. That hamlet's location on the route of the first railroad to Lancaster County and Pittsburgh was the key to its existence. This held true until the rail route was moved much farther south of Montgomery Avenue to its present location in 1851. And all the while, Philadelphia had become one of the world's foremost industrial centers – the colossus in it being Baldwin Locomotive Works.¹⁰² Its very first engine had traveled the Columbia route and was an instant success. Decades later a huge skilled workforce was producing Baldwin steam engines, each one made to order, many sent round the world, always with a "Philadelphia U.S.A." plate on them.

A Lawman in Libertyville

Law and order would become such a priority here, spurring people to go so far as to create a town to achieve it, that this prompts curiosity about what protective measures, if any, this neighborhood had relied upon earlier, in quieter times. While there was certainly no provision here for police protection, the area did have in place the ancient British legal system¹⁰³ whereby a Justice of the Peace (appointed in colonial times, elected since the Revolution) had nearly all criminal cases brought before

¹⁰¹ An old man's story. *Our Town*, 22 June 1916, p.1.

¹⁰² Brown, John K. *The Baldwin Locomotive Works 1831-1915*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

¹⁰³ Manual, a Pennsylvania law almanac, 1868. See section VII of Constitution of Pennsylvania, on justices of the peace, p. 50. B.G. Alderfer, *Montgomery County Story*, 1951, p. 101.

him, except ones involving the death penalty, and these went to the county court. Only persons of some prominence in the community served in this post, and they were not required to be learned in the law.

Armstrong E. McKeever, Justice of the Peace at Libertyville from 1846 to 1870,¹⁰⁴ is a good example of the type, as he took office during the formative period of American law, that is, prior to 1850. McKeever was a man of means, a stockholder in various railroad and canal projects, owned a substantial library,¹⁰⁵ and had married the girl next door from a high-profile family. Descendant of a colonial Scotch-Irish sea captain and a fur trader's daughter, McKeever, a second-generation local resident, was a natural choice as squire.

Moreover, McKeever left his mark on his Libertyville house at 1226 Montgomery Avenue in some surprising ways. Yes, he created a jail cell in the basement all right. But he also was close kin of a well-known Philadelphia prizefighter Charley McKeever, portrayed in the ring in a couple of major paintings by the great master Thomas Eakins.

And coincidentally Squire McKeever's Libertyville house in the early-1930s had been transformed into a serious art dealer's establishment, The Grassburger Gallery, that featured the only solo exhibit in his lifetime for the Eakins protégé, painter Charles Bregler. The event¹⁰⁶ was attended by Thomas Eakins' widow Susan Eakins who lent a painting by her husband for display on that occasion – not, however, of Charley McKeever.

McKeever's house of stone and wood, still privately owned at 1226 Montgomery Avenue (its log portion replaced late in the nineteenth century), had a basement jail cell¹⁰⁷ lock-up that lately serves as a private wine cellar. Most likely built originally as a root cellar, this small room may be the oldest surviving jail cell in the county. According to nineteenth-century penal practices, the darkness of a holding cell was meant to instill fear and cause remorse in the prisoner.¹⁰⁸ This cell also could have served as a convenient hiding place on the Underground Railroad, as next-door buildings no longer

¹⁰⁴ For his three successive commissions as Justice of the Peace, see records at Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, report from RG26 file.

¹⁰⁵ Will #4150, 1870, Montgomery County Court House; inventory #2301, 1871.

¹⁰⁶ Told to me by Seymour Adelman (1907-1985), a Philadelphia collector of art and books whom Susan Eakins once painted. Adelman brought her to the Bregler exhibit in his father's lavish touring car. Adleman was profiled in the *New Yorker* magazine in 1979.

¹⁰⁷ Even as late as the early-1980s, it still had some of the bars in place at one window, though bars from the other window had been removed, and a rusting iron cell-door was still attached as late as the early-1940s.

¹⁰⁸ Correspondence with the Pennsylvania Prison Society.

standing at 1236 Montgomery Avenue reportedly had harbored escaping slaves.¹⁰⁹ If so, might not an elected peace officer such as McKeever, himself a Quaker, in such circumstances face a particularly troubling dilemma in deciding whether to give refuge to fugitive slaves himself, or to condone his next-door neighbor's doing so?¹¹⁰

By 1851, Libertyville boasted more than a dozen buildings clustered at what is now Montgomery Avenue. Besides the Justice of the Peace, these included a store, a wheelwright shop and smithy and the log-and-stone house (still standing at 610 Shady Lane) that had been serving as an informal station stop for the Columbia Railroad. Here it is said passengers often waited inside during inclement weather for the train's arrival.

But the community character of the place declined after the Columbia track bed was abandoned. True, Libertyville remained the only village in the immediate vicinity for a decade after the Elm station stop on the Pennsylvania Railroad was established. And the old Libertyville neighborhood within a couple of blocks of 1226 Montgomery Avenue where this hamlet's name was first used even kept its place-name as a locality inscribed on pages of the Federal Census record of 1900, some five years after the area had been incorporated into the Borough of Narberth. Certainly Libertyville continued to be occupied and to flourish, but it was no longer the hub of activity it had been earlier. A similar thing happened to the village of Merion Square (Gladwyne) - largest town in Lower Merion until it was bypassed by the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line.

Still Libertyville was no passive receiver of events and environmental signs and signals of history. This village in its image and substance was a hustling, bustling place as long as the Columbia line lasted. And it continued to be a lively place afterward because of the busy Old Lancaster Road (Montgomery Avenue) traffic.

As we have seen, the stream of people and events at Libertyville proper was colorful. The "witch" Betty Conrad lived and died there, and brought guidebook notoriety to a sketchy locale. Another home-owner was a daughter of Lower Merion's richest man, miller John Roberts, the only citizen

¹⁰⁹ Information suggesting this, given to history features writer Gerry Snow Mason by relatives of that property owner Howard Williamson, Main Line Times; Charles Blockson, in a telephone interview with the author, stated that in this area, the Underground Railroad stops tended to be located along the Schuylkill River in the Gladwyne vicinity rather than inland. Nonetheless, traditionally mentioned as a nearby-hiding place has been Abel Thomas' barn that stood east of the present Merion rail station.

¹¹⁰ Certainly McKeever could have felt keenly pressured about this, inasmuch as his late wife's uncle, Merion's Richard Tunis, had been a merchant-fleet owner with ties to the Virginia tobacco planter class. And a widely reported serious flare-up of rioting and mayhem had occurred against African-Americans and abolitionists in 1844 in New York City – a confrontation investigated by some and spurred by merchants who also had ties to that Southern planter class.

hereabouts who had been convicted and executed for high treason as a loyalist and had all his property confiscated by the State at the end of the Revolution. Geane Roberts Tunis had a rare opportunity several years after her father's death to recover some of his rightful property in the form of unpaid debts owed him. Thus in a sheriff sale, she and her husband Richard Tunis obtained a Libertyville house (1226 Montgomery Avenue)¹¹¹ in which their close kin and Tunis descendant subsequently lived for nearly a century. It was there that Richard Tunis as owner, or his brother Anthony, then living in the house,¹¹² presumably raised a patriotic Liberty Pole. Then, during the Civil War just after a major connecting road (North Wynnewood Avenue) was cut through, a building (probably serving as a recruitment station) adjoining the Libertyville general store displayed on its interior walls various Civil War enlistment posters,¹¹³ that were still in place when Eleanor and John Lucas bought the building and converted it into their home. Libertyville was the name of this locality when Abraham Lincoln passed along our present railroad route a couple of times. Not long after that, however, people's nostrils and the sounds of animals being herded told travelers when they were in the immediate vicinity of the old hamlet of Libertyville. For here upon Crow Hill - and staffed by English-born butchers¹¹⁴ who later moved up the ladder to having their own stalls at Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market,¹¹⁵ and who were followed by Irish-born butchers here¹¹⁶ - flourished the old Libertyville slaughterhouse that kept our otherwise vanishing agricultural past alive by its booming, odiferous presence until the new century was born.

The film actress Mary Pickford is believed to have made a moving picture at the old Libertyville blacksmith shop in about 1910 or 1911 while she was working for the Lubin Studios. Through the third quarter of the 20th century, the cluster of agricultural-era buildings that comprised the heart of the Libertyville neighborhood such as the huge old slaughterhouse, the "witch's" former house, and the springhouse of what was known as the "ancient Indian spring," remained intact to a remarkable extent. And thus the Libertyville building complex especially while it housed Barclay's Nurseries, a garden

¹¹¹ Sheriff Docket B, p.70, #50 Term, 1798, Montgomery County. John Roberts vs. Isaac Watkins, Admin. Cum testa of James Russel; sold to Richard Tunis.

¹¹² Joseph Price's Diary manuscript, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, describes the 1798 Tunis move into this house: "B[enjamin] had my oxen and horses moving A[nthony] Tunis to James Russel's place" (transcript of ms., p. 347). These are Richard's brothers.

¹¹³ Interviews with Eleanor (Mrs. John M.) Lucas, 18 June 1983 and late June, at the time this family was still living at 533 N. Wynnewood Avenue.

¹¹⁴ Federal Census of Libertyville, 1870 and 1880 shows William Pavitt, butcher.

¹¹⁵ Boyd's Philadelphia City Directory (Philadelphia, 1899), Pavitt & Brother (William H. and Joseph W.), meat, 807 Terminal Market, p. 562.

¹¹⁶ Federal Census of Libertyville, 1880 shows D. Connor, butcher; shows W.L. Connor in 1900 Census.

accessories store plus an interesting antique shop, all with their attractive and artistic displays and pleasant ambience) became the focus of many a Sunday afternoon family stroll in the 1930s and 1940s when the economy was tight and people were looking for an enjoyable recreation close to home.

Especially noteworthy on such leisurely walks, I recall a favorite stopping place for me and my parents was The Little House Shop specializing in outdoor/indoor Arts & Crafts items and antiques. Founded by Mr. Biddle and his business partner Viola Fidler in 1934, this quaint former house at 1252 Montgomery Avenue in Narberth had belonged to and was lived in by Betty Conrad, a well-connected, property-owning eighteenth-century widow some newly arriving German immigrants mistook for a “witch.” Gradually the shop moved westward on the Main Line to its present location in Wayne, now offering stationers and a wide variety of specialty items. Today it has a well-earned reputation for purveying what’s considered “perfect Main Line carriage trade taste.” Not only did it retain its original name for its 80th anniversary celebration in 2014, but also claims the image of Betty Conrad’s house as the store’s logo. And why not? It goes so far as to see that functioning mailbox shaped like Betty’s house and recognize it as an Arts & Crafts period-piece Narberth item with potential as a logo.

Also within living memory of some of our older residents have been visits to the blacksmith shop¹¹⁷ while it was still in operation (by members of the Super family) who also had owned the ancient Indian Spring’s springhouse. The Supers liked to tell the story of the flourishing apple tree on their property that had grown from the seed of an apple core discarded by a passenger on the Columbia Railroad traveling across their land.

General Wayne Village

General Wayne was another, but smaller, nineteenth century “village” centered on Narberth’s front road, Montgomery Avenue. This hamlet, too, came into existence with the arrival of Philadelphia’s Columbia Railroad which had an informal stopping place opposite General Wayne Inn where the privately-run tennis courts followed. The name of the “General Wayne, Pennsylvania” locality remained in use a long time and appears on many maps of the period. It became the address of all houses and farms within a two-block radius and it was the address of Merion Friends Meeting as well, which was a turnabout, considering that the entire Merion Welsh tract had been built up with that

¹¹⁷ Dr. William O’Brien, a psychiatrist living in Gladwyne recalled in an August 2013 telephone conversation with the author, having accompanied in early childhood another, older Narberth boy, James Duffy (ordained a priest in 1937), to watch the blacksmith shop in action, opposite General Wayne Inn.

meetinghouse as its true focal point. As late as 1904, it was still the Academy of Mercy's descriptive address. From 1806 to 1867, elections took place at the inn.

Pennsylvania Railroad and Elm Station

Most of this general locality had continued to be a farming area, and successive generations of the Price family remained on the land. Not until the building of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the resulting push toward suburban development did the landscape of Narberth undergo major change.

Descendants of various branches of the Price family owned the assembled Price colonial landholdings until 1838. At that time the southern half of the original (1682) Edward ap Rees or Price tract was sold for \$5,650 to farmer William Thomas of Blockley Township, a nearby area later consolidated as part of West Philadelphia. This devout Baptist who had emigrated from Southern Wales in 1818, made a sixty-two-acre purchase. Not all of it in the present borough, Thomas' tract was bounded on the north by the then Haverford-and-Merion Road and the homestead he acquired with it was at the Montgomery Avenue end.

When the West Philadelphia Railroad Company was planned along the route that became the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line now operated by SEPTA and Amtrak, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania paid William Thomas for 2.747 acres in 1851 as a right of way for the tracks.¹¹⁸ This was to be a better route than the old Columbia Railroad's inclined plane in the present West Fairmount Park. What many still refer to as the Pennsylvania Railroad main line takes a wide-arc turn just before reaching Narberth, a necessity to avoid a lengthy, sharp rise in the ground extending from Merion into Wynnewood.¹¹⁹ So the small locomotives they had at that early date could make the grade to Ardmore, the tracks followed the stream beds.¹²⁰ Thus once again the entry into Elm was a twisting and scanning perspective, another reminder that Narberth developed as a passage or gateway to somewhere else.

To William Thomas is given the distinction of having set in motion a process that would result in the building of a railroad station on his property. According to mid-nineteenth century thinking, building a railroad station was the necessary catalyst to creation of a town. Doubtless Thomas shared that

¹¹⁸ According to mid-nineteenth century thinking, building a railroad station was the necessary catalyst to creation of a town. Doubtless Thomas shared that outlook. However, there is no evidence that Thomas later sold off lots of two acres or more to encourage building of that town, as many accounts have stated. That distinction belongs to Edward R. Price, the "last of the Prices," and to him alone.

¹¹⁹ Correspondence with Hugh R. Gibb, historian, National Railway Historical Society, 19 November 1979.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Gibb, H.R.

outlook. However, there is no evidence that Thomas later sold off lots of two acres or more to encourage building of that town, as many accounts have stated. That distinction belongs to Edward R. Price, the “last of the Prices,” and to him alone.

Brewing in the background was the soon to be revealed emergence meanwhile of America's great transcontinental railroads that originated in Pennsylvania. Perhaps the most poignant indication for us that this event had already taken place were the times Abraham Lincoln came clanking through Narberth by train on long journeys. He passed at least twice through here, perhaps four or more times. In those days (and as late as the 1920s), Americans living near major rail lines always knew when “significant” trains were expected to pass through - be it our chief executive or the Ringling Brothers Circus. At stations and grade crossings, folks in the days before radio and television would come out to wait and watch. It was a great pastime and a game for kids as well. Sometimes a distinguished person or celebrity might favor a sizeable crowd of spectators with a wave from the train window or rear observation platform. This made the tiresome wait worthwhile.¹²¹

At age 81, Thomas and his wife Sarah sold $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre to the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1869 for one dollar “Provided the lot be used solely and entirely” to build a railroad station. The kicker was that if at any time the land ceased to be used for that purpose it would revert to the Thomases or their heirs. Tradition states that the donation was made with the understanding that the station should always bear the name “Elm” for Thomas’s old home in Wales or, according to another account, because the many elm trees on his plantation were a constant reminder of his Welsh birthplace. William Thomas supposedly came from southern Wales. There exists a southerly Welsh village called Elm Grove at St. Florence near Tenby that in all probability was the birthplace or homestead of Thomas so often referred to in popular accounts. Its location is about eight miles south of the larger town of Narberth, Wales.

Attributing the choice of the Elm Station name to an 81-year old local farmer suggests they were buttering him up to seek additional cooperation from him. This they soon did by aiming to lease a tract of his land near Elm Station to serve an international fair in the offing nearby, as strategies were being developed to prepare for it.

So it’s far more likely the Elm Station name originated as a high-level committee decision of the Pennsylvania Railroad, relating to long-range plans that had little to do with Thomas. Fair promoters

121 Telephone interview with Mrs. Richard H. Pough, 5 June 1985, who recalled making frequent railroad-track visits as a child with such companions as the young Weymouth boys, her neighbors from North Wynnewood Avenue on the borough side, where both families lived below Sabine Avenue.

would have been partial to an easy-to-remember name with a ring of history and Americana to it. The name Elm did have those attributes and might also be expected to pacify the Quaker City about the potential for neighborhood disruption caused by construction of huge fairground.¹²²

For William Penn's "Treaty Elm," the famous tree in Kensington beneath which the founder of our commonwealth signed the treaty with the Indians was greatly revered by Quakers (who often in the nineteenth century tried to grow sprouts from that Kensington tree, one of these surviving still at nearby Haverford College). So the naming of "Elm Avenue" as one of the fairground's main thoroughfares, containing the rail station hookup with our Elm Station, clearly was a cornerstone of Centennial Exposition planning from the start.

Such considerations may have been a key factor in winning acceptance of Elm as a rail station name among both community leaders and rail officials. For doubtless the neighborhood of Libertyville, which had lately acquired a large and very active slaughterhouse which would stay in operation for decades, had a name far more closely associated with the locality's agricultural past than with the area's perceived fast-evolving future as a suburb. This was confirmed by the fact that in the minds of many farmers throughout the region, the notion of Libertyville and slaughterhouse were very firmly yoked by 1870. Thus for planners of the Main Line rail-stop sequence, the Libertyville Station name, useful as it had been during the 1860s for a station stop at a grade crossing with a small existing building acquired,¹²³ was discarded as obsolete in 1870. For in that year new station names, Elm and Wynnewood,¹²⁴ were applied to the two adjoining stations newly built by the railroad, which left the old one, deposed, to stand east of Wynnewood Station as a mere relic.¹²⁵

While that relic had been in use, the Main Line track from the city consisted of three tracks that narrowed to two as the route passed over the grade-crossing at Haverford-and-Merion Road where the Libertyville stop was located.¹²⁶ Traveling slowly, trains signaled their approach to crossroads like that by sounding a very loud whistle. At that time, neither Narberth's Wynnewood Avenue underpass nor the Wynnewood Station underpass at Penn Road yet existed. The Wynnewood Avenue underpass was built on former Thomas turf in what is now the borough in 1879. The previous year, East Wynnewood Road

¹²² The fairgrounds' Elm Street is now Parkside Avenue.

¹²³ Ann P. Jackson to PA R.R. Co., Montgomery County Deed Book 124, pp. 37-38, 25 May 1861.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Deed Book 173, p. 354, 20 October 1869, shows Wynnewood Station's location chosen considerably to the west of Libertyville stop.

¹²⁵ Atlas maps show that this stone building remained on site for many years.

¹²⁶ The narrowing of the tracks and "station" visible in an old photo

had been established by court order, and North Wynnewood Avenue had existed since 1865. Just this side of the Pennsylvania Railroad's Overbrook Station shortly before the American Centennial observance, fields were separated from the railroad right-of-way by a four-foot white wooden fence. And these fields stretched all the way to Elm Station, a split-level Stick Style building of stone that had that faux-Swiss chalet look. Larger than Wynnewood Station, it was similar in feeling, and by the same architect.¹²⁷

Railroading had caught on quickly here. For starters by the 1830s, a rail route was operating from Philadelphia through this neighborhood to the inland city of Lancaster - that distinction heralded as a gateway to the South and Southwest. Then at mid-century, another rail line dug in and grew, aspiring to become a transcontinental route. At that time, the communities that make up Philadelphia's Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad were born. Among them, Narberth.

¹²⁷ Editor's note: The author had intended to name the architect.

Chapter 2-Abrasive Changes in the 1870s-The Founding of the Town

Introduction	61
Centennial	62
Libertyville Slaughterhouses	63
Elm	65
Belmont Driving Club.....	67
Places to Stay	71
The Encampment (Granger’s Hotel).....	73
Frozen Foot Murder Case - 1877	76
Launching of the Town	79
Godey’s Lady’s Book Village	82
John Jacob Ridgeway	94
Narberth Park	99
Narberth Grove	107
Belmar	108
The South Side (or “Southside”).....	111
Narberth Park Association (Narberth Association) (Narberth’s first Civic Association).....	115
Elm Crime (Public Nuisances) - 1889-1893.....	119
Creation of Montgomery Pike	120
Becoming a Borough	122
Summary	128

Introduction

This chapter explains how an independently run town was nudged into existence when America's first great international world's fair attracted nearly ten million visitors to the western edge of Philadelphia in 1876. The town materialized because a lone hereditary landowning Quaker farmer saw town-building as a neighborhood stabilizer, after powerful outside interests laid plans for extensive local development (large temporary building, a harness race track) linked with a major civic celebration in Philadelphia. It was to be our nation's great celebration of itself at the dawn of our rise to industrial power and world leadership.

For that farmer, such a town was like the pearl resulting from years of dealing with that grain of American Centennial Exposition irritation. Gradually the nucleus of the town on Price's farm expanded, as was intended from the start. And it progressed to the point of independent rule in 1895, becoming, as it has remained, the only incorporated town in Philadelphia's internationally known Main Line suburbs.

Several kinds of planning went into this venture, starting with the launch of a "Godey's Lady's Book village" and ending with close networking that pulled together various tracts of land under development that mostly had belonged earlier to branches of the colonial family of the Welsh-American Quaker farmer, Edward R. Price.

The post-Civil War era saw rapid transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society. This meant that some powerful interests wanted to see certain agricultural tendencies swept away without delay and were prepared to take action. Thus, long before an obvious agrarian symbol like the vast animal stockyard at 30th and Market Streets became the preferred site for what is now Philadelphia's major rail facility, 30th Street Station, the Pennsylvania Railroad was selectively erasing agrarian traces along its Main Line route east of Paoli. With that major company thinking suburbs and long-distance travel, the first thing it wanted to make disappear locally were all the grade crossings. But it would have to wait. The catalyst for such change in this immediate locality was plans for a great international fair.

Still fresh in people's memories were Abe Lincoln's journeys through this area – a locality where his mother had Merion Welsh family roots. There was that frosty morning just after daybreak on February 22, 1861 when President-elect Lincoln lumbered through Libertyville eastbound en route to his March 4 inauguration in Washington. Traveling from Illinois by way of Philadelphia,¹²⁸ he was preceded by a pilot train. Minutes earlier his inaugural train had passed slowly along present-day Old

128 The Main Line railroad track between Ardmore and Philadelphia was located the same then as now; west of Ardmore, then not yet straightened.

Railroad Avenue and under the Haverford College footbridge, still in use today. Atop its slender span and lining the slopes of the railroad cut below stood crowds of college students. To acknowledge them, Lincoln stepped to the rear platform, bowed and waved, wearing his well-known top hat and shawl. Again, to give his Gettysburg Address, Lincoln is said to have traveled this way by rail.

But the final time Lincoln made an official trip through this area was very solemn. The date: April 22, 1865. The Libertyville grade-crossing station stop may have been draped in mourning like other stations all along the route of Lincoln's funeral train.¹²⁹ Even the Haverford footbridge had been draped in disregard of Quaker custom. People gathered at most of the Main Line station stops and crossings that wet Saturday afternoon to pay their respects. Men stood bareheaded holding their hats over their hearts. Women often seemed rapt in prayer. Libertyville spectators may have been farmers, mill workers, freed black slaves or Quaker gentry. They peered intently as the black-draped catafalque train wended its way westward past Libertyville preceded by a pilot locomotive to test the rails.

Centennial

Before preparations for the fair began, years of lobbying on its behalf by an Indiana college professor¹³⁰ took place, starting in 1864, but interrupted by the war. Next came his petitioning of prominent Philadelphians and their contacts in turn with the city's political leaders. As a result, Philadelphia's Select Council voted unanimously on 20 January 1870¹³¹ to back such an observance in the city. The Franklin Institute and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts voiced their approval. And the United States Congress on 3 March 1871¹³² officially authorized a celebration of "the one hundredth anniversary of American independence and products of the soil and mine in the city of Philadelphia and State of Pennsylvania in the year 1876."

This Centennial was our nation's first great international exposition. Held to dramatize our advancement since the Declaration of Independence, it let it be known that healing had taken place after the Civil War. And significantly it went further, for its strong message about American inventiveness of

¹²⁹ The dead president was being sent home to the Illinois prairies clad in the same black broadcloth suit he brought for his inauguration. In a second coffin, much smaller and in another car, were little "Willie" Lincoln's remains, hurriedly disinterred from a Washington grave so he could lie by his father's side. The raindrops mixed with tears on the faces of silent men and women mourners assembled in knots to watch the train pass. The two engines gave off plumes of black (wood) smoke that as old southsiders will tell you, through the steam-engine era, had a predictable way of quickly tumbling to the ground southward here whenever there were low-lying clouds. Doubtless many a little child carried away vivid lifelong memories of the funeral train stared at with sadness by so many that spring day.

¹³⁰ *All the World's A Fair*, Robert W. Rydell

¹³¹ Fairmont Park Commission Archives, City of Philadelphia.

¹³² *Ibid.*

all kinds was heard around the world. Also, our Centennial clearly set the pace for subsequent efforts to keep tracking American achievements.

Visitors to the Philadelphia Centennial encountered glassblowers from this city's noted Gillender firm demonstrating their wares and giving samples away. A compelling exhibit meant quite obviously to awe its viewers was the Baldwin Locomotive display about trains of the future. At the fair's entrance was another commanding presence – the mock-up of the torch-holding hand of sculptor Frederic Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty, then under construction in New York harbor. And all sorts of inventions were displayed, as this fair drove home its message about progress as a way of life. Probably the richest and most nuanced period for world's fairs in America was the late-nineteenth century, after which the impact of such expositions was blunted somewhat by lessening attendance of the American public due to the many competing distractions of modern life.

Suburbanization swung into high gear spurred by those preparations for Philadelphia's great 1876 Centennial celebration of American independence. Rail officials had clearly taken the lead in setting the stage for future new suburban communities along the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line. They lavished careful thought on this, while locating small station-stops near the country mansions of their own rail barons and top executives along that westerly route. In tandem with such community-building foresight came the sometimes short-circuiting or downplaying of old established agricultural traditions still intact in this particular area. This is quite evident in the naming of small rail stations it was building between Overbrook (within Philadelphia's city limits) and Paoli (14 miles west) [as touched on in the previous chapter].

Libertyville Slaughterhouses

A prime example of the initiative the Pennsylvania Railroad took in this matter was its suppression at a grade crossing of the existing Libertyville stop¹³³ listed on its timetables. That name was just too closely identified as the destination of a new road that led almost directly from that rail stop to the storied Libertyville Slaughterhouse, one of the last of the near western suburbs' classic slaughterhouses, in operation by 1860 and lasting nearly forty years. Butchers active there most likely started sending their meat to market by train as soon as the access road (now called North Wynnewood Avenue) was built in 1865, so the agricultural-sounding name Libertyville soon attached itself firmly to

133 Marked by an already existing building servicing a grade-crossing of the Haverford-and-Merion Road just west of North Wynnewood Avenue; neither East Wynnewood Road nor Narberth's high rail embankment yet existed at this time.

that rail stop.

English butchers operated that slaughterhouse, then Irish. They were tough, hard-drinking men able to wield a knife on the kill floor and carry a carcass on their back. Farmers for miles around used this facility, their flock of sheep, cattle and pigs filling the roads leading to it. At the time, that slaughterhouse on two-and-a-half acres was growing to accommodate an expanding trade, several of its successful butchers moving eventually to regular posts at Reading Terminal Market in Center City.

So the railroad acted swiftly to erase Libertyville as a viable stop. For nearly equidistant from that old location on a straight stretch of track it built two stations of stone a mile apart in 1870 – Wynnewood Station to the west and the split-level Elm Station (Narberth) to the east, its grade crossing later replaced by Narberth Avenue bridge.¹³⁴ Improved access to rail transport of goods had spurred the growth of the Libertyville slaughterhouse. But construction of a steep embankment for four sets of Main Line train tracks soon canceled the Libertyville stop – in exchange for a street-level underpass (1879). East Wynnewood Road, newly created at this time,¹³⁵ was brought up from City Avenue at Sixty-third Street to meet North Wynnewood Avenue there at the underpass, and it continued westward along the old Haverford-and-Merion Road under its new (East Wynnewood Road) name. That farmers' slaughterhouse railstop never stood a chance of finding a welcome mat in Main Line suburbia. But it would be tolerated several more years until after the Centennial. And lest any new residents forget Libertyville's gritty history, subdivisions of local land here would soon begin to include the inevitable deed restrictions against establishing a slaughterhouse on private property.

Those new station names had a far more suburban ring to them than the old one, and it was becoming clear that the railroad intended to eliminate all grade crossings along its Main Line route. Wynnewood, named for a stately local residence of a veteran Civil War Union Army officer, was quintessentially suburban, easily seen from the train, and became a village name. By contrast, Elm was undoubtedly brought into existence to establish a small-station link with the Centennial grounds, and thus function as a transfer center for thousands of visitors going to and from a proposed race track and hotel accommodations to be built on forty acres facing Elm rail station.

¹³⁴ Elm Station, a split-level Stick Style building of stone had a faux-Swiss chalet look. Larger than Wynnewood Station, it was similar in feeling and by the same architects – John A. and Joseph M. Wilson, both working for the Pennsylvania Railroad, before they soon founded the Wilson Brothers & Co. architecture and engineering firm. They also did much work at the Centennial.

¹³⁵ East Wynnewood Road had been established by court order in 1878, and North Wynnewood Avenue had existed since 1865.

Elm

With an international fair in the offing, choice of the Elm Station name became a high-level committee decision of the Pennsylvania Railroad's long-range plan. Besides being a name easy to remember, it might have been expected to pacify Quakers worried about neighborhood disruption due to construction of huge fair-grounds so close to William Penn's "Treaty Elm," the famed tree in Kensington beneath which the founder of our commonwealth signed the treaty with the Indians. Greatly revered by Quakers, they often in the nineteenth century tried to grow sprouts from that Kensington tree, one of these being at Haverford College. Also "Elm Avenue," one of the fairground's main thoroughfares, featured the rail station hookup with our Elm Station.

Who better to approve such plans and station name changes than banker N. Parker Shortridge? A director¹³⁶ of the Pennsylvania Railroad and local resident, Shortridge was moreover a leading figure in a national network¹³⁷ of prominent businessmen who used their business and financial connections to gather personal subscriptions to underwrite the Centennial.

An early member of the United States Centennial Commission, established in March 1872, Shortridge served on its Board of Finance as a director. In that capacity, he was described as "among the first to take an active part in securing subscriptions to the stock of the Centennial Board of Finance."¹³⁸ So he is seen as viewing his company's fortunes and those of the Centennial as "inextricably intertwined."¹³⁹ One indication of this is that, of the 22,776 ballots cast for the Centennial Board of Finance, 11,400 came from the Pennsylvania Railroad. Another is that his company championed the Centennial every step of the way, launching cross-country rail packages,¹⁴⁰ reduced charges on exhibit-related freight, and commuter traffic serving the exhibition grounds.¹⁴¹

Presumably Shortridge was the decisive voice banishing the old Libertyville name in favor of

¹³⁶ The Pennsylvania Railroad: Its Origin, Construction, Condition and Connections. 1875

¹³⁷ Correspondence of Christopher R. Dougherty, Archives Specialist, Fairmount Park Commission, City of Philadelphia, 13 August 2008 with the writer.

¹³⁸ William Bender Wilson. History of the Pennsylvania Railroad. 1899.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* Dougherty letter, August '08

¹⁴⁰ In another reminder of the impact the transcontinental trains were quickly making, surviving menus describe food already being served on Pullman cars passing through Libertyville in 1867. That year the first "cuisine departments" were added to George Pullman's other achievements, three years prior to the hiring of the first black Pullman porter. At the time, long-distance passengers were dining on such fare as lobsters, sardines and broiled ham or bacon for forty cents. And they could also order sirloin steak, chicken, cold cuts and even woodcock, pheasant or prairie chicken, snipe, quail, golden plover or blue-winged teal. For local residents, however, in the 1860s only six local trains ran daily each way and none on Sundays. Persons missing the six o'clock evening train from Center City could catch the "Emigrant" train at midnight. That train transported arriving foreigners, letting them off at each stop for which they were booked.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* Dougherty letter, August '08.

fresh alternatives. For no sooner did he settle permanently in a historic former Joseph Price property, Clover Hill, adjoining what soon became Wynnewood Station, than all those changes began to occur around him.

So Libertyville was the flashpoint locally where this friction between old agrarian and new suburban ways was most striking. This late-surviving remnant of agricultural heartland very likely also gave Centennial planners the idea of locating, as they did, the huge Farmers' Grange Hotel here immediately south of Elm Station.

Members of the National Grange and the Pennsylvania State Grange, following endorsements of the project by their respective organizations, subscribed generously to the stock of the Patrons' Centennial Encampment Association,¹⁴² organized to build the hotel. Although its accommodations were open to the public, the hotel mainly served successfully as headquarters for Grange members from all parts of the country attending the fair. This enabled them to stay longer by avoiding more costly hotel accommodations in the city. To sell stock to construct this facility, farmers were advertising it as the biggest¹⁴³ hotel in the United States. Also, farmers in the 1870s when the Grange movement was gaining its greatest strength would have respected the site chosen for their Elm Station encampment – for it was within the boundary of one of the state's earliest and most venerable granges – Merion #112¹⁴⁴ that, by World War I, went dormant.¹⁴⁵

Edward R. Price could not have imagined the changes that by 1870 [had begun] to transform his quiet rural neighborhood. Outside forces were indeed closing in, land speculators in particular, as Philadelphia prepared to host the nation's first great international world's fair in nearby West Fairmont Park. In those innocent days, suburbs near the city as yet had no police, although millions of visitors were expected.

Change had been occurring slowly, most of it confined to old-timers noticing, as farmer Price did, changing ownership of farms, particularly ones that several branches of the Price family had owned for centuries in the immediate area.

One such new buyer, who continued to farm that piece of Edward ap Rees' original land grant profitably, nevertheless turned its imposing eighteenth-century Price stone farmhouse into a boarding house. Another, more westerly section of that same ap Rees property formed part of the grounds of a

¹⁴² Fred Brenckman. History of the PA State Grange. Harrisburg, 1949, p. 52.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Historical Excerpts of PA Granges: 125th Anniversary Edition, State College, 1998. ed. by Diamond & Evans. p. 202.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

forty-acre soon-to-be-built late Victorian baronial castle-style mansion, Maybrook, still standing.

Most startling by far, however, were the plans for a big stretch of former Price farmland that had reached around the far side of the Merion Meetinghouse grounds in a warm, protective embrace. A syndicate was forming to acquire its nearly a hundred acres for a harness race course to attract Centennial visitors. Farmer Price felt helpless and heartsick over this, for the race track project in particular seemed certain to strip away all the protection that his family's acquisition of so much land close to the much-venerated Quaker meeting and its ancient burial ground had built up. How else to maintain a necessary buffer zone?

Belmont Driving Club

Certainly an astute drawing card for the Centennial year, the construction and opening of the famed Belmont Driving Club on seventy-two acres immediately northeast of Elm had a bigger impact¹⁴⁶ on the neighborhood than anything else since the railroad was built. And the effects were long lasting. With a sharply increased number of persons then living in cities, spectator sports had begun emerging as a major American pastime. This track offered the excitement of a contest and thrill of vicarious participation. City dwellers were drawn to it no less than the usual attendees at county fairs.

This sporting track opened in May 1876 with its first big race, a grandstand seating four thousand, and prizes that first season projected as totaling more than a quarter-million dollars. The facility provided many local jobs and boosted the local economy in countless ways. Belmont Park had an on-site bar-restaurant with adjoining dining room to be staffed as well as stables. And maintenance was needed for other buildings housing the timekeepers' and judges' stands. Likewise, there were the ticket-takers, concessionaires, and nearby places of lodging. And some of the horses and sulky¹⁴⁷ drivers were also from this town during Belmont's forty-six-year existence.¹⁴⁸

The din of the horseracing was constantly felt at Elm during the warm-weather months. And, since the driving club had an Elm Station address, trains from Philadelphia were met at Elm Station by four-horse omnibuses that shuttled back and forth from the track crowded with passengers. Some rode atop the vehicle and others would cling to its sides. Persons who walked to Belmont Park from the

¹⁴⁶ Bulletin of the Historical Society of Montgomery County, v. 1, October 1936, p. 12-17. M.R. Yerkes, showing Samuel M. Garrigues' "Map of Roads Approaching Belmont Driving Park Race Course," September 1874, and showing Elm Station and Elm Avenue.

¹⁴⁷ Editor's Note: The definition of "sulky": a light, two-wheeled horse-drawn vehicle for one person, used chiefly in harness racing.

¹⁴⁸ Main Line Times, Dec. 15, 1955, p. 19.

station encountered grifters along Haverford Avenue who set up their tripes for three-card monte and the old shell game.

The commotion must have driven pious Quaker Edward R. Price almost crazy. The Centennial year alone deluged this Elm Station neighborhood in one brief stretch with more visitors than it ever had before or since. Price would gaze down from his farmhouse across the fork in the road at his beloved Merion Friends Meeting and there, loud sounds of martial music seemed to be coming from that hallowed spot all summer long, as the harness racetrack's grandstand crowds roared their approval of this horse or that. From just behind the ancient meeting house, he realized the sounds were coming. But the snappy patriotic tunes were being played (mostly by musicians from the 19th Regimental Band) loudly enough to awaken the dead in the peaceful graveyard at the meeting house, the same graveyard where one of his ancestors, a child, was the first to be buried two centuries earlier. Certainly, the racetrack disturbed Price. The only specific benefaction in his will for the meeting house was money he left to construct a stone wall (around the burial ground). This clearly suggests that the little cemetery was being overrun with heavy foot-traffic of sportsmen taking a shortcut to the racetrack from the train station. Still, there were those ready to remind Price that even William Penn's son, Governor Richard Penn, brought race horses of noble pedigree over from England, being the principal founder of the Jockey Club in Philadelphia in 1766.

The American-born sport of harness racing, our country's first national pastime, was already an icon for Currier & Ives prints when the rustic one-mile oval Belmont Driving Park opened just north of Elm Station. This sport, with its aura of uniqueness and such other intangibles as its dramatic human-interest aspects, had at first struck the public's fancy and charmed it at county fairs across the country. And it remained very much a part of the popular culture during Belmont's rise to national prominence as the frequent scene of the Grand Circuit, the Kentucky Derby of harness racing, and throughout that track's existence before the sport became "industrialized" in the 1940s, later taking its first steps toward becoming big business.

Of course, light-harness racing never enjoyed the prestige of thoroughbred racing with its rich patrons and breeders such as the Whitneys, Vanderbilts or Mellons who had wide public acceptance because they were perceived as sportsmen and, moreover, had been nurtured on home turf. As part of the racing scene, this elite was publicized widely along with racing's more typical "guys and dolls" in an era when there was a delicate balance between sports and business. At the time, horse racing still had retained much of its allure – something with which the average racing fan could identify. That was

before big business, tax shelters and foreign investment became dominant in this sport and the news media gradually consigned racing to the rank of a secondary sport.

Harness racing, a more grassroots affair, was a great success both as a moneymaker and a crowd-pleaser. It appealed to the hardy breed of racing fan. Indeed, its heartland was the grandstand. In its halcyon days just after the turn of the century while this sport was booming at Elm (Narberth) and at tracks across the country, harness racing symbolized an ideal combination of Americana and entrepreneurship. Another strong drawing card was that it was unnecessary for a would-be horse owner to be listed in the Social Register to own one of the horses in this business. The newly moderately rich dominated the harness-racing scene at Elm as elsewhere. And on certain special occasions at Elm they were able to draw upon support from elite members of the thoroughbred horse fraternity, most notably Philadelphia banker Edward T. Stotesbury who headed several national and international horse show associations and was prominent in overseas Olympic racing activities. Stotesbury, at some of the more stellar events such as the Grand Circuit, maintained a box at Belmont Driving Park for himself and his friends.

Belmont's track consisted of a half-mile oval within a one-mile oval. Some of the sulky drivers complained among themselves that this track was "slow and cuppy." One horse that never got the message was Star Pointer, which set a record there for being the first steed in this country to run a mile in two minutes. July and August were the big racing months at Belmont. Although not officially sanctioned, the Horse Dealers' Sweepstakes took place there every June. Another often held meet was Belmont's "walk and pace" featuring horses starting off with a brisk walk for the first hundred yards, followed by a one-mile race. Guesswork, owned by R. F. White of Lexington, Kentucky established the record for that event at Narberth in 1920.

In 1877, the mortgagee of Belmont Driving Park, William L. McDowell, had foreclosed on its mortgage, not in order to close the park, but to reorganize the Belmont Driving Association which operated the racing facility, and to get rid of certain floating debts which had become troublesome because, although they were for small amounts, the creditors were clamoring to be paid. McDowell's move was also aimed at assuring good prospects all around, now that the Centennial year celebrations had ended.¹⁴⁹ Stoveplate manufacturer McDowell and his business partner, Mr. Leibrandt, were starting a building fund for a club house at the track, and by April had already gathered thirty subscriptions.

¹⁴⁹ Philadelphia Inquirer, April 27, 1877, p.2.

More than two generations of supporters kept the track going, one replacing the other. Wagering was never officially permitted at this track, which was a great disappointment to its organizers. Here the spectators watched the horses instead of the betting slips, but of course illegal betting went on. There were no state lotteries, no casinos in Atlantic City (Gloucester, New Jersey, a wide-open town, was the nearest thing to Las Vegas hereabouts), and few other distractions from this sport that so easily monopolized the attention of the turn-of-the-century public.

Harness racing at Elm was Americana personified. And yet it divided the people in the surrounding neighborhoods in unprecedented ways. Perhaps the most striking example of this was Luther Parsons, a church-going Protestant Sunday School superintendent whose high-quality wheelwright and blacksmith shop in Merionville employing fourteen people, repaired and supplied new parts for the track's sulkies when needed. Parsons, one of three smiths in the vicinity (the other two being in the borough), owned some of the region's fastest horses, but never entered a horse for Belmont's stakes. Oh yes, he often arrived there with his champion steed Alabaster for match races and time trials. But Parsons kept his horses out of formal races altogether. Nor would he permit any of them to run if he saw even the possibility of a slight wager on the outcome. Yet when old man Parsons sped his horses along dirt highways, those steeds were invariably admired and envied. One time a member of the local sporting fraternity tried to strike a deal for Parsons' trotter, hoping to race it at Belmont. He was baffled by Parsons' total lack of interest until someone pointed out the popular blacksmith's opposition to racetrack activity on religious grounds. But in the end, local harness racing brought people together because new alliances were formed out of necessity for survival's sake.

By the turn of the century the band music at the track had taken on a Spanish-American War flavor, some of the musicians having served in Philadelphia's 19th Regiment Band in that war so they were playing "Goodbye Dolly Gray," "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," and "The Girl I Left Behind Me" with particular relish.

After the election of Democratic governor Gifford Pinchot, it was assumed legalized betting would be a certainty. Pinchot, however, was a bluenose and never did approve of gambling. This and the revenue loss resulting from prohibition were major factors that led to the demise of the track. Its prospects, too, had begun to fade with the arrival of the automobile age.

The last horseracing events at Belmont took place August 18, 1922. And motor cycle races were held several times later. After the racetrack was sold at public auction in 1921 for \$115,000 – a sale subject to the ratification of the shareholders – they prudently voted against it. Two years later, that

same property was sold for \$300,000 for housing development operations. Thus, the locality received its current name: Merion Park.

It remained for another local boy to make good, however, in the harness racing fraternity. And when he did, he held the reins for the tri-state area as that American sport entered into a new era and a changed climate of audience expectations by mid-century. A Wynnewood youth at the time the Narberth harness track closed a few blocks from his home, George Tyler Weymouth (1904-1990) acquired his interest in horse-racing by marrying a du Pont – Eugene E. du Pont’s daughter Deo in 1930. The young couple lived here on North Wynnewood Avenue in the borough while their tribe of sons¹⁵⁰ was very young, before settling in Delaware. An investment banker, George T. eventually owned two race tracks in West Virginia and in the 1950s became president of Brandywine Raceway’s harness track in Wilmington, Delaware, a post his brother Clarence A. “Bud” Weymouth, Jr. also held in that decade. In 1954, Narberth’s former resident George T. Weymouth became one of the four original directors of a new organization, the Harness Racing Tracks of America, Inc. (the other three directors being from Detroit, Baltimore and Long Island). Comprising seventeen associations at the time, this group [was] a counterpart of the Thoroughbred Racing Association of America.

To bring these discussions up to date, recent times have seen a sharp national decline in the sport of horse racing since the late 1970s, a period of reduced revenues not yet ended and accompanied by rising competition from casino gambling and expansion of state lotteries in the region. Not quite the climate for a full appreciation for the glory days of harness racing at Elm.

Places to Stay

Classified advertisements in Philadelphia newspapers made it clear that city dwellers, even ones of modest means, increasingly looked to nearby rural locations, easily reached by the new local rail lines, as healthful havens from summer heat. Elm was described as “a favorite locality for summer boarders, and superior accommodations for about a hundred exist in the vicinity of the station,” in a

¹⁵⁰ Also an enthusiastic horseman (he [drove] four-in-hand coaches pulled by his own horses on ceremonial occasions and at other times for the fun of it) [was] Weymouth’s son, George A. (“Frolic”) Weymouth of Chadds Ford. That son [was] founder and ... board chairman of the nonprofit Brandywine Conservancy, parent organization of both the Brandywine River Museum and the Environmental Management Center, in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania near the Delaware State line – a post he ... held since that facility opened as the Tri-County conservancy in 1967 to preserve the historic and artistic heritage of the region. The Weymouth’s “Narberth period” reference [the author] discussed with Frolic W. at the 18 March 1994 opening of Brandywine River Museum’s Joseph C. Coll exhibition (to which [she had] just given an original piece of Coll’s art). Editor’s note: Frolic Weymouth is deceased.

publication of the Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1875. The brochure described four such boarding houses near Elm Station.

Closest to it and least expensive was “Elm Mansion,” Mrs. Caroline E. Wilson proprietress. This of course was the large whitewashed 1770 colonial Price house that stood surrounded by good lawns and shade trees approximately where the Narberth Post Office now is on the southwest corner of Windsor and North Narberth Avenues. At the time, this stately house belonged to land investor Mrs. Maria Furey who resided on a small farm where the Sisters of Mercy’s McAuley Convent for retired Sisters now is at 517 Montgomery Avenue in Merion. “Elm Mansion” was apparently the preferred vacation spot of an important musical figure, Septimus Winner¹⁵¹ and family.

Meanwhile, high-priced “Maplewood” with Mrs. Lehman in charge stood on the far side of Montgomery Avenue, set back from it and facing it near the present-day Brookhurst Avenue. This was also a former Price mansion, the place where the British General Charles Cornwallis (later known as the first Marquis Cornwallis) was billeted. In its palmy days as “Maplewood,” this house accommodated forty persons, summer only. Later it was called “Brookhurst Inn.”

The same railroad brochure listed two other boarding-house locations in this immediate area. One was “Larchdale Place” on Meetinghouse Lane, W. A. Boyle proprietor. Facing the racetrack entrance, it advertised a bath with hot and cold water. This building survives on the Sisters of Mercy property. And of course, the other was James Baird’s year-round General Wayne Hotel accommodating thirty-five persons at a time on Montgomery Avenue. The Pennsylvania Railroad had begun promoting the Main Line as a place for city workers to live and as a resort for summer vacationers shortly before 1870.

Around this time the Old Gulph Road (subsequently named Narberth Avenue where it passes through the borough) had a grade crossing over the tracks at Elm where Narberth’s railroad bridge is today. That grade crossing necessitated construction of the first of two signal towers that eventually stood side-by-side at Elm Station until the older one was removed. The purpose of the second tower was to regulate use of a coal yard cutoff to the north, and it also serviced the slightly later freight-station cutoff south of the mainline tracks.

¹⁵¹ A teacher of violin and other instruments with a music publishing business and music store in the city, Winner wrote: “Listen to the Mocking Bird,” “Where Has My Little Dog Gone,” “Ten Little Indians,” and “Whispering Hope” between 1855 and 1868 and his brother Joe Winner wrote “Little Brown Jug.” This information courtesy of great-grandson, C. E. (Gene) Claghorn, music researcher and author of biographical dictionaries of music (16 May 1985 letter to author). Wm C. Claghorn in 1912 had 125 Chestnut Ave. house built there for his young family; they lived there to 1946.

The Encampment (Granger's Hotel)

Throughout the 1870s, Elm remained a hibernating dream of a suburban community, doing little to change its agricultural bias. And yet the presence of a new rail station here meant the place was poised and ready to deliver results. The most sensational event to mar its tranquility was the notorious “Frozen Foot” murder case involving a mysterious stranger found slain in the snow in the embankment at Elm Station in early 1877.

Even more compelling as a sudden spectacular visual drama was Elm's Grangers' Hotel fire in autumn 1876. Earlier that year caravans of farmers from points west began arriving for Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition, which attracted a quarter of this country's population.¹⁵² Being poor, the farmers were housed not at local hotels such as Whitehall, General Wayne Inn or Maplewood Inn, nor courtesy of the widely used Philadelphia Boarding House Agency Ltd. which provided rather expensive coupons for Centennial visitors. Instead they made straight for the specially built Grangers' Hotel or husbandry encampment¹⁵³ that opened May 10, 1876, situated on the south side of the railroad tracks facing Elm Station. The complex stretched east and west from the present Narberth Avenue to Essex, and southward nearly to Woodside, where reportedly some remnants of its foundation still exist in backyards of Woodside Avenue's north side. To encourage their members' investment in its construction, the farmers advertised their hotel as the largest in the United States.

Grangers nationwide provided these accommodations for themselves by acting through their chapter in Pennsylvania which, at one of its state conventions, put all the arrangements in the hands of a Mr. R. H. Thomas, Secretary of the Grangers' Order in our state. By “affiliating with” the Pennsylvania Railroad, Thomas was able both to obtain the use of forty acres at Elm Station, and to negotiate very low fares (fifteen cents) for individual Grangers to travel by train back and forth the four-and-a-half miles to the Centennial depot. It is unknown whether that Grange official was related to old farmer William Thomas (probably a Granger's Order member) who owned that land and only a few years earlier had made a small adjacent piece of it available to build the Elm rail station. The encampment site was described as being on high ground, occupying the “first considerable hill from Philadelphia” and featuring many fine springs, rows of trees, and other attractions for the gratification of summer visitors.

¹⁵² Frank Leslie's Historical Register of the U.S. Centennial Exposition, 1876. Edited by Frank H. Norton. New York, F. Leslie's Publication House, 1877, p. 317.

¹⁵³ Accommodations of this husbandry camp are discussed in an article, Philadelphia Press, May 5, 1876, p.6, col.1, telling it would house people \$7.50 per day, with roundtrips daily train fare of 15 cents.

Next came building contracts the Grangers entered into for a hostelry to accommodate 2,400 people at a time (or with one family per room, 5,000). This facility also included a billiard room, bowling alleys, a newspaper-reading room, and a lecture room that served literary purposes on weekdays and provided church services on Sundays.

Descriptions of this building complex differ. By one account, presumably authoritative, its construction was “peculiar,” consisting of long, shed-like wooden buildings, each containing 92 rooms, with 46 of them on each side of a broad corridor. The rooms measured twelve by eight feet, had sloping roofs, and they could be rented for \$1.50 per day, the same low price as a farmer expected to pay for a meal there. Cold lunches, already packed, were also available to the farmers at low cost on the premises. By another account, the Elm Station encampment consisted of whitewashed frame construction fronting 500 feet along the railroad by some 450 feet deep, this building having a main section two stories high and the rest of it one story. Erected by the National Grangers’ Association, a stock company, so its members in the western part of the state, Midwest and beyond could attend the exposition, this hotel reportedly had 1300 rooms. Each was furnished with a spring bed and mattress, chairs, washstand, mirror and carpet. There was also a dining room 50 x 400 feet plus kitchen and laundry. Farm families large and small arrived at Elm’s encampment with their own blankets and hampers of food, mainly hams and preserves, and each family occupied one room and cooked on communal stoves. The organization and operation of this hostelry was rated as an “entire success,” as it was crowded throughout the exposition period.

More than 100,000 guests were accommodated at this Grangers’ Hotel during its brief existence. These guests traveled the Paoli Local excursion trains to the Centennial where they saw President Ulysses S. Grant, the Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro, Machinery Hall, the State buildings and many other exhibits including 35 acres devoted to livestock displays from U.S., Europe and Canada, all the railroads offering free return transport of animals.

One contemporary account, quick to provide impressions of opening day at the Centennial, declared:

Not the least interesting sight among the throng: the rural visitor, who was present, of every type, and in an astonishing number. The variety ranged from the better class and more intelligent of the agricultural class of the Middle and New England States,... to the long, lank, green and gawky Hoosier from the wilds of the Wabash, and the untamed borderer from the wilderness of the Far West. The Granger was present, with hay-seed in his hair, and the sacred

soil he disdained to remove still upon his boots, and, despite his faith in the power of the ‘Grange,’ somewhat appalled by the confusing spectacle before him.¹⁵⁴

Among the many out-of-town visitors who commuted from Elm Station to the Centennial fairgrounds by rail was the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Then 69 years of age, Longfellow apparently found the Main Line countryside far more interesting than the exposition. And he was one of the first nature-lovers to sing the praises of the Main Line suburbs.

The 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, the first great world’s fair on U.S. soil, served in the proven fashion of other international expositions during the nineteenth century, as a way of publicizing industrial products of its day. Also typical was that this fair offered a very useful overview of the current thinking about architecture and about large-scale planning of the period.

That Centennial’s uniqueness was that it provided the early world-class staging ground for interest in handcrafts sparked by the then new international Aesthetics Movement, the first broadly popular decorative arts movement to take root in this country. Ripple effects were clearly felt in related fields, so this exposition is often mentioned as a turning point in America with regard to an increased interest in art, handcrafts, interior design and art education. In this city, for example, the event was the catalyst for the founding of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the school now called University of the Arts – and institutions elsewhere such as Rhode Island School of Design.

The exposition at an end, the Grangers’ Hotel board of directors was about to hold a meeting in a few days to take action on several offers to buy that building. Most of the insurance policies covering the hotel had just expired when a fierce fire broke out at six o’clock on the evening of November 17 in an eastern corridor of the hotel. Only about twenty guests and thirty employees had remained. They narrowly escaped but lost most of their possessions. A board of eleven directors controlled the place and Mr. A. F. Jones, manager, suffered personal losses in the fire of one thousand dollars. With a stiff breeze from the east fanning the flames even faster to a ruddy hue, the enormous building was consumed in less than one hour.

Yet excitement reached a fever pitch in Philadelphia over that major November 17 fire. Thousands gaped at “a baleful glare in the sky, illuminating the low-hanging clouds as if the entire northwestern suburbs were in flames.” City folk took for granted that the fire must be close to the Schuylkill. Therefore, many thought the entire Centennial exhibition buildings were engulfed or

¹⁵⁴ Philadelphia Press, May 11, 1876, p.3, col.5, long unsigned article giving its general impressions of day one.

certainly the hotels immediately adjacent. So, all roads to the Centennial grounds became overrun with crowds of people hurrying to see the catastrophe for themselves. Arriving at the fairgrounds in West Fairmount Park, they soon realized the conflagration was beyond George's Hill, for the tall observatory crowning that eminence stood out like a huge skeleton against the fiery glow. What next?

Undaunted, large crowds boarded the Pennsylvania Railroad trains, arriving at the scene of the fire at Elm aboard the seven and eight-thirty trains, attracted there by curiosity. Out here in the country, the response was similar. Agog over what they saw in the distant night sky, Gladwyne's Richard J. Hamilton and his father simply hitched up their horse and buggy and followed the glare to its source. All that was left of the hotel was a heap of ashes —and management's deep, lingering suspicions about arson.

Some said Grangers' Hotel by late autumn several weeks after the Centennial closing had become a haven for hoboes, men who hopped off freight trains slowly making the grade at Elm – a practice regarded as a nagging problem throughout the nation's rail lines at the time.

Another account, by Merion farmer Henry Sullivan, claimed moreover that people visiting the Grangers' Encampment locality on Sundays were not the most reputable citizens. Even with the Centennial ended, safety and security still loomed as big issues in the neighborhood – all the more so because arson was suspected in that Grangers' Camp fire.

Frozen Foot Murder Case - 1877

Narberth was also the scene of what is considered one of the most baffling murders¹⁵⁵ in the history of Southeastern Pennsylvania during the late-nineteenth century.¹⁵⁶ So mystifying were its circumstances that the incident riveted widespread public attention on what was known in the 1870s as “the Elm Station murder,” “the murder near the Elm Station encampment,” “Elm Station mystery” or “The Mystery of the Centennial Year.”¹⁵⁷ With his usual flair for the dramatic, columnist “Uncle Ben” Kramer, sticking to the main facts of the case without elaboration, aptly called it the “Frozen-Foot

¹⁵⁵ The writer spent months of research on this murder case, including primary sources and the extensive coverage of the trial by a dozen Philadelphia newspapers.

¹⁵⁶ J. Bennets Nolan (ed.) Southeastern Pennsylvania: a History of the Counties of Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Philadelphia and Schuylkill (Philadelphia: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1943), vol. 2, pp. 764-769.

¹⁵⁷ Expressions used by various Philadelphia metropolitan daily newspapers to describe the crime. About the press' widespread use of the monikers “Elm Station Mystery” and “Mystery of the Centennial Year” after discovery of the body, see the Phila. Inquirer, 21 Sept 1877. The eventual trial lasted September 10-25, 1877; trial records on deposit at Montgomery County Historical Society, Norristown.

Murder” in retelling this grisly tale a century later.¹⁵⁸ This was the one crime that seemed to rob this neighborhood of its innocence, and turn it upside down.

When this premeditated killing occurred, Montgomery County had no detective staff and Lower Merion had only one constable and no police. Obviously the criminal lured his unsuspecting victim to Elm just outside the city limits because this was a police-free zone. Philadelphia’s great international fair, the Centennial Exhibition, was just winding down in its final month at the time. Concerned local citizens eventually saw justice prevail after they initiated an investigation and posted a reward. The episode left many people shaking their heads over the question of how to acquire a manageable system of law and order in the suburbs.¹⁵⁹

The Elm Station mystery was probably Philadelphia’s most notorious crime involving people (in this case, both victim and murderer) from the rising tide of middle-class German immigrants on our shores. They had been fleeing Prussian rule instead of staying home and struggling to restore the weakened power, civil awareness and sense of freedom of their own constituency in the face of continuing dominance by the well-preserved conservative and feudal Prussian military system. That entrenched system at the time had the backing of the German countryside’s landed proprietors. So large numbers of Germans, especially younger people, felt stifled. Jobs were scarce, and there seemed no end in sight. Of course, some disgruntled Germans stayed on home turf and tried to negotiate a pact of survival for themselves, like the convicted murderer’s sister who married a high-ranking Prussian officer, or so her imprisoned brother claimed while in Norristown lock-up.

In any event, the heinous Elm Station crime came to light by merest chance because trainmen patrolling their watch discovered three Irish-American lads from the city’s Logan Square district stealing a ride on a westbound freight train and threw them off at Elm Station. There the youths, idly taking their second dash up an embankment west of the station where the gully runs through, discovered the half-buried corpse on that cold February day. An Ardmore justice of the peace, Josiah S. Pearce, who also served as deputy coroner and undertaker was called to the scene by a rail station telegraph operator. And although the burden of solving this crime fell on his shoulders, Squire Pearce soon received what proved to be invaluable help from a group of leading citizens and taxpayers residing along

¹⁵⁸ Main Line Chronicle, 8 October 1970, souvenir supplement for 75th anniversary of Borough of Narberth, “Frozen-Foot Murder: Narberth crime was celebrated case,” pp. 36-38.

¹⁵⁹ Even the district attorney, in his closing statement on the final day of the trial, declared: “Crime has become rampant in Montgomery County. Murders are being committed all around us, and it is time that the law should be vindicated,” trial record, 14th day; also quoted in Philadelphia Inquirer, 26 September 1877.

the rail line in this vicinity. Led by the aforementioned Pennsylvania Railroad board member, Centennial Exposition official and bank president, N. Parker Shortridge who lived nearby, these neighbors included several of that railroad's directors, two of its vice-presidents and other prominent officials connected with it – in all, some fifty persons who subscribed \$1,600 to see justice done.¹⁶⁰ That railroad men living in the surrounding community led the hunt for Elm Station's "Centennial Year murderer" surely was appropriate, in view of the deep involvement the Pennsylvania Railroad already had in setting up a major transportation hub at Elm to access the Centennial grounds, as part of their national effort to bring visitors to the fair.

Unquestionably, what served notice that this was not just "another homicide," and from the start put the Philadelphia metropolitan area newspapers on the scent of this murder case like a bloodhound, was not so much finding the body. Instead, it was the fact that a blue-ribbon task force was offering over a thousand-dollar reward for the murderer's arrest and conviction. Hearing about that offer also rattled David Abrams' cage. A West Philadelphia resident, Abrams, fresh from his job as sergeant in the Centennial Police Guards at the exposition, applied to be an investigator although he had no experience as a policeman or detective. Without promise of a salary, he was permitted to make inquiries. On the job, he turned in a performance worthy of Sherlock Holmes. And the teamwork of Squire Pearce and Abrams mainly solved this case.

Meanwhile, the district attorney was assisted in the prosecution by a man retained by the special committee of citizens residing in Lower Merion Township that had banded together to help solve the crime. On the ninth day of the often-dramatic trial, the jury of farmers and mechanics who, dissatisfied with the trial's eight-hour day, had been clamoring to add night sessions lasting to ten-thirty in order to speed things up got their request. The jury at this point also got transported to the murder scene¹⁶¹ some fifteen miles from the courthouse. This trial was covered extensively in long and detailed accounts in all of the then numerous Philadelphia metropolitan daily newspapers, and nationally and internationally in all German language newspapers, which is how the Berlin family of the murder victim became alerted to the reason for their son's disappearance. Easily half the crowded courtroom consisted of women.

After the trial, with its parade of fifty witnesses for the prosecution, the jury found the suspect

¹⁶⁰ An effort recognized in statements made at 13th day of trial, and reported in Philadelphia Inquirer, 21 and 25 September 1877, also Philadelphia Public Ledger, 25 Sept. 1877, and in Nolan's Southeastern Pennsylvania, pp. 764-769.

¹⁶¹ On 23 September 1877 accompanied by officers, this Sunday trip having been authorized on trial's 12th day, "provided they do not stop anywhere [else]," trial record.

guilty¹⁶² of murder in the first degree. The convict hanged himself with a bed sheet five months later,¹⁶³ after which his defense lawyer disclosed that the murderer had been using an alias to hide the fact that he was the black sheep of a family very prominent in German business and social circles.¹⁶⁴ Wahlen's real name the lawyer did not reveal. Brought out in the trial testimony was the alarming fact that a second still unsolved murder¹⁶⁵ had occurred around the same time as this crime in Mrs. Furey's boarding house (a former Price mansion) near the Elm train station.¹⁶⁶ Circumstantial evidence pointed to Wahlen as the possible murderer in that case as well. Wahlen not only was very familiar with the neighborhood, but he also had met the sensational trial's young German murder victim at a North Front Street eating place frequented by German immigrants¹⁶⁷ – and located very near the restaurant Mrs. Furey owned on that same street.

Launching of the Town

Edward R. Price had dismissed early suggestions that he should found a town to stabilize the neighborhood. Yet he apparently was listening carefully because a few years later he launched an official plan to build a town on his own farm. By then, he had seen plenty to convince him to take definite action as soon as possible.

The crisis point where this friction became most unbearable for farmer Price was reached in 1876, if not earlier, when three things occurred on the former Price land surrounding him. First came launching of the racetrack and all that that meant. Then came the shocker: simultaneously two separate murders occurred – one without much public attention in the former stately Price residence that had been turned into a boarding house. The other was characterized by a Philadelphia metropolitan newspaper as “the murder of the Centennial year” during its sensational murder trial in 1877. Those major crimes committed on site must have been awfully persuasive for Price, because he soon took a decisive step. Meanwhile, all through the late 1870s, he could see the gradual strengthening of the rail line as it passed

¹⁶² 14th and last day of trial.

¹⁶³ For an editorial on the convict's death, see Philadelphia Inquirer, 25 February 1878, p.4.

¹⁶⁴ Philadelphia Public Ledger, 25 February 1878, p.1.

¹⁶⁵ References to this other, almost simultaneous murder in that vicinity were most sharply focused in the testimony of the trial's 14th day, but did not alter the verdict against the defendant in the case. Trial record; also Philadelphia Public Ledger, 26 September 1877 and Philadelphia Inquirer, same date.

¹⁶⁶ Editor's note: as stated earlier approximately where the Narberth Post Office stands today.

¹⁶⁷ Welcoming foreign immigrants to our shores, Philadelphia's Catholic bishop, St. John Neumann, closely watched the rapid build-up of German immigration here in the 1850s. It led to Wahren, a lapsed Catholic who squandered a chance to shake free from negativity – choosing instead a life of crime in America.

through here, with its rail station not much used yet, except by racetrack fans for whom the track continued active into the 1920s.

Even with the trial ended and the convicted murderer dead, things did not return to normal. After all, the racetrack was fast becoming a permanent fixture in the neighborhood. Stability was needed. So the “last of the Prices” to own ancestral lands (nearly a hundred acres) here, the aging Edward R. Price, living in the house built for his grandfather Rees Price in 1803 at 714 Montgomery Avenue, was about to embark on the most ambitious scheme of his life.

Initially opposed to selling off any of his own acreage for development, Price had come around to the idea by the time the scion of a whisky fortune Henry C. Gibson started building a baronial castle, Maybrook, in Wynnewood partly on former Price land. Thus, Price’s own willingness to get personally involved in starting his own village finally outstripped his fear about the disappearance of the last vestige of Price farmland still surviving so close to his beloved Merion Meeting on a prime piece of land his family made available for it.

There is implicit in Price’s action a response to history.¹⁶⁸ There is also a meditation on the spiritual role of the inheritor of hallowed land which is perhaps unequaled in the action of any other small Pennsylvania Welsh landowner. The vision Edward R. Price brings to this task of town-builder is not of someone simply registering his intense moral indignation over what is happening around him, indignation over the race track on former Price land, or the sensational Elm Station murder trial, or the less sensational murder of the same period that must have outraged him because it happened in his great-uncle’s beloved former home, converted into a boarding house by its owner Mrs. Furey.¹⁶⁹ And of course there was the constant commotion caused by the nearby slaughter house, if it bothered him. The significant distinction here is that, in Price’s view, he [was] not exempt from the excesses or even the

¹⁶⁸ Editor’s note: One of the author’s earlier drafts of this chapter contained the following: “Well aware that Philadelphia established a police force in 1845 (partly due to the city’s “Know Nothing” riots of the 1840s) and before the city’s 1854 consolidation, Price sought a consolidation of his own, by re-writing the early Edward ap Rees properties.”[page 24 original]

¹⁶⁹ Editor’s note: One of the author’s earlier drafts of this chapter contained information about the property owned by Mrs. Furey, as follows: “The upper half of the original (1682) Price tract remained in family hands until a Philadelphia restaurant owner, widow Maria Furey, bought it in 1871. Carden Warner’s brief (1905) borough history gives a good account of that plantation prior to 1871. Mrs. Furey continued to farm the land profitably. She turned the large Price house (1770) near present-day Windsor and Narberth Avenues into a boarding home. Eventually Maria Furey distributed to her daughters Martha (Mrs. Marmaduke S. Moore) and Mary (Mrs. Joseph Mullineaux, Jr.) a few acres where they built adjoining houses at 417 and 413 Haverford Avenue.

tragedy around him. How do we know?

By the care with which Price went about setting up the foundation of his town, we can see his own willingness to get personally involved in bringing about what seemed to him the necessary changes. So, Price possessed moral intelligence. And he was not sealed off from problems, ideas or emotions that reached beyond the dialogue that various entrepreneurs around him were conducting with themselves, particularly about how money was to be made from exploiting nearby land.

Edward R. Price was a farmer caught betwixt and between - between the entrepreneurs and certain alienated immigrants on a suburban crime spree. But there was a larger dimension to it. He saw the traditional rural society and the upheaval and social change being caused by the Industrial Age on a collision course in his neighborhood, and he determined to do something about it.

That dichotomy between old agrarian ways and new industrial might was a global problem, at least as important to Victorians as the stark concept then being advanced by reformers about the miseries of the industrial poor in the dark mills and factories versus the rich – the “victims” vs. the “victors.” So, when Price started a town on his farm, he was actually tackling one of the great problems of his day – and doing it his way, by assembling a cadre of people, the key participants being volunteers. Farmer Price apparently was quite persuasive in touting the need for stability and civility.

Even in the 1870s, Edward Price had a largeness of vision that other land-owning members of his family lacked ever since his cousin Major Joseph Price, by his whole-hearted community involvement, gave modern experience in Lower Merion Township almost an epic dimension at the turn of the nineteenth century.

It was not until 1881, however, that this largeness of vision was given a form equal to its expressive ambition. Edward Price’s approach to the radical innovations of modern suburban development was cautious, skeptical and deeply critical. (We are told by Carden Warner in 1905 that Price initially resisted developing his property.)¹⁷⁰ In the end, Price was, I suppose, the most conservative of town-builders – the most concerned to keep alive a sense of continuity with spiritual and cultural foundations laid by the pioneering settlers who built the meeting house on Price land. He remained firm in his devotion to this heritage. And then he found a means of achieving results through community building that bequeathed to us the Borough of Narberth as we now know it.

Yet the pressure we sense was felt by the aging Price, as the mantle of commitment to the ideals

¹⁷⁰ Carden F. Warner, Narberth’s Historical Prelude, 1616-1895. Bryn Mawr, Bryn Mawr Record, 1905

of the venerable Welsh settlement weighed upon his stooped shoulders, cannot be explained entirely in simple terms. Edward Price did not just decide to tackle something that would be all right or appropriate for someone in his position to do. His commitment went beyond that. From his mature years onward – and gaining momentum after the re-routing of the railroad tracks in the 1850s and especially after 1870 when suburbanization first began to take hold, Price set himself a limited agenda that he could launch. And then it would be completed by others. As he saw it, he had one job to do: to provide a decent interval of normalcy between the rural plantation way of life his forebears had known here and the coming generation of town-dwellers who would settle on his land. He did that well, very well. Then he was retired with thanks at his death, by his close supporters. Yet our town’s founding father is today an all but forgotten figure. True, we have both a Price Avenue and a marker that Lower Merion Historical Society placed upon it at 714 Montgomery Avenue, the house where Edward R. Price was born, lived all his life and died. (And that house even has quite a history apart from him.)¹⁷¹

We can only guess what Price may have thought of the classic Englishman’s dream of living in a country village – something lordly property owners tried to realize with varying degrees of success. Model villages of that sort were the creation of the landowning classes, so they tended to be “closed” communities with picturesque-style buildings like private estates. Price achieved picturesqueness initially too when he let the architects in, not just local builders, to create his own more open type of town.

Godey’s Lady’s Book Village

For under the impetus of a growing moneyed class and the increasing demand for summer-houses on Philadelphia’s Main Line, Edward R. Price reached out to attract that prosperous class by commissioning a plan (1881) for a “Godey’s Lady’s Book¹⁷² village” on his farm at Elm. His action

¹⁷¹ Editor’s note: In 1999, 714 Montgomery Avenue, known as the Rees Price House, was determined by the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer to be eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

¹⁷² Published in Philadelphia by Louis A Godey, Godey’s Lady’s Book was the largest and most important periodical aimed at American women in the nineteenth century. It maintained a high literary tone and included fashion plates in color. And from 1846 to 1892 it published about four hundred-fifty house designs, original ones which, for historians, makes it a valuable source book of popular architectural taste. Among the half-dozen or so architects linked with this mass-circulation magazine at various periods, Isaac Harding Hobbs was its chief architectural contributor – active at three separate phases (during his second phase with Godey, he did the Elm project). His fame did not extend beyond the pages of the magazine, but he is believed responsible for transforming many an American suburb. Few examples of his towns or villages are documented, however. While it is true that a concept such as “Lady’s Book houses” reduces architecture to the status of a fashionable costume, this meant nonetheless that the design of houses did thereby become for the first time a matter of concern to many middle-class women who earlier had left such occupations to rich people. Hobbs’ designs for the magazine were feisty, sometime significant and often eccentric in

took place pointedly during the two hundredth anniversary year that deeds were drawn up under King Charles II of England for the founding of the Merion Welsh Colony in Pennsylvania. Price thus launched his village with the sale of four large adjoining lots to carefully selected customers – five acres to well-known community-builder Samuel Richards, two lots (six and three acres) to architect Isaac Harding Hobbs, Jr., principal designer of homes for Godey's Lady's Book, and ten acres to Hobbs' builder. At the time, any location across America with clusters of dwellings built from Hobbs' popular pattern-book house designs – and there were hundreds of such clusters – was referred to as a "Godey's Lady's Book village." Of course these houses at Elm were designed-to-order – for Price, for Richards – rather than from published patterns, with the possible exception of the one built on speculation by a Roxborough pattern merchant facing the Richards house.

Of course, the intention here at Elm was to obtain Hobbs-designed houses for Price's new town, and several were built. But beyond that, a nod to Hobbs' then still current position as a contributor to America's then leading magazine for women is suggested by the layout of Lower Merion's freshly drawn 1881 atlas map of the Elm Station locality.¹⁷³ Clearly shown is the nucleus of Price's town upon his farm, with its acreage and parcels belonging not to the actual new owners Samuel Richards and Isaac Hobbs as their deeds state, but to their wives,¹⁷⁴ Elizabeth Ellison Richards and Mary Magdalene Hobbs. Such "personalization" seems to have been a courtesy extended by the seller, lifelong bachelor Edward R. Price, for only male names appear on the actual deeds. Putting women "on the map" this way did them honor and made certain the pair would permanently be linked with the founding of the town of

the complimentary sense of the term. Hobbs' chief architectural contribution is stated in George L. Hersey, "Godey's Choice" article, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. XVIII, No. 3, October 1959, pages 104-111.

¹⁷³ Editor's note: Found among the author's writings was the following – "Croquet in the 1860s was for W. Homer what sculling was for Thomas Eakins: a pastime that functioned coincidentally as a metaphor for much larger concerns. Croquet in the 1860s was not simply the hot new game that had reached this country from Ireland via England. It was the first and only outdoor game in which women competed on equal terms with men. Play was expected to begin at 4 p.m. and stop at 7."

¹⁷⁴ Both from native-born American Protestant backgrounds, these women are otherwise a study in contrasts. Evidently a traditional woman, Elizabeth came of a rich Quaker family, her father a major player in the drama of the rise of textile manufacturing to the heights in Philadelphia in the nineteenth century, a time when challenges to the flexible production of Philadelphia's family-owned firms was being successfully met. On the other hand, Mary Magdalene, a spunky and outspoken woman, appears to have come from far more modest circumstances, and she took in boarders at various lean periods of her husband's career as an architect in order to make ends meet. She lost a son in the Civil War. Her husband had been a draftsman for the distinguished architect John M. Gries before opening his own office. And it is believed Hobbs did seashore cottages for Richards' land development company. Also noteworthy, Hobbs had designed by this time two riverfront houses for Harrisburg's then most prominent family, the McCormicks who, like the Chicago Tribune McCormick publishers and Cyrus McCormick, inventor of the McCormick reaper, were descendants of a McCormick family from Northern Ireland that settled in Dauphin County, PA in 1734. Mary Magdalene possibly therefore may have been a poor relation of the McCormicks, and felt herself entitled to share the limelight with the textile baron's daughter. Her feistiness suggests as much.

Elm by future generations of residents. It was a boost too for the largest and most important periodical aimed at American women in the nineteenth century and a boost too for Hobbs who had long enjoyed by then a reputation as “Godey’s favorite architect,” responsible for transforming many an American suburb.

Despite superficial differences in style, the homes built in 1881-1884 on these lots, some adjacent houses and three other big architect-designed ones at nearby Libertyville, all built by 1890, shared certain fundamental elements which reflect the energy of the period. These elements were on the one hand a desire to break away from the agricultural traditions of the neighborhood, and on the other, imbalance and surprise.

As cornerstone of his new settlement at Elm, Price chose as its first resident a leading representative of the closest thing this country had to a landed aristocracy. He invited fellow Quaker Samuel Richards,¹⁷⁵ a scion of a family for many years among the largest landowners in the eastern United States, their holdings of more than a quarter of a million acres having included New Jersey’s Wharton tract. The ancestral home of both these men was in Merioneth, northern Wales. One of Richards’ great-grandfathers was the first American naturalist John Bartram. Richards’ father founded two glassworks and owned Joseph Bonaparte’s mansion “Point Breeze” in Bordentown, New Jersey, the famous former home of Napoleon’s brother, Joseph Bonaparte. That elegant house, the nearest thing to a Royal Establishment in U.S. History, stood at the Delaware River opposite and just above “Andalusia,” the Biddle family seat in America. Yet Sam Richards was welcomed here more as a catalyst than an ornament. For it was said of him as a layer of rails and a town-builder that Sam looked like a bank president and worked like a horse.¹⁷⁶

Did Samuel Richards convince Edward R. Price to start a town here? Did he help Price overcome his earlier objections, saying that he would gladly come and live here himself? That is probably close to the truth. Richards had a reputation as a persuasive orator, super-salesman and a thinker in advance of his time. A Philadelphia merchant with sand in his shoes, Richards had promoted the first rail travel to the Jersey coast,¹⁷⁷ was the true founder of Atlantic City and began promoting its shore real estate when the beachfront between Long Branch to the north and Cape May to the south was

¹⁷⁵ Arthur D. Pierce. Family Empire in Jersey Iron: The Richards Enterprise in the Pine Barrens, 1964.

¹⁷⁶ Carmelita de Salma Jones. “Batsto and the Bloonaries Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XLVII, No. 1, 1923, pages 185-195, about the career of this prominent businessman who owned Atsion furnace (“his greatest pride”) on 75,000 acres in N.J. and was a man “of keen intelligence and lively public spirit” as well as an inventor and developer.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. Fifty-four miles of the railroad leading to Atlantic City built under his personal supervision in 90 days, were later absorbed by the Reading Railroad. (Sam Richards, 1818-1895)

a barren waste. He was a man to be listened to about community building. Always interested in a place with a future, Richards in 1881 became the mainspring of Elm village.

Fifteen years earlier Richards had founded with his brother the full-size town of Atco, New Jersey, seizing what he saw as an opportunity provided by presence of a new railroad junction. Streets he named in alphabetical order, except the main avenue, which he named after the town. Atco's street-naming sequence was the prototype for Narberth's.

Besides having several inventions to his credit (including a railroad snow plow), the tremendously hard-driving and energetic Samuel Richards was described as sometimes pitching in alongside workers laying tracks for his "railroad to nowhere," which serviced Atlantic City with astonishing success.¹⁷⁸ Richards' Ventnor, Margate Land Company also got involved in the physical development of several beachfront communities that materialized after he launched the idea of a string of southern New Jersey seashore resorts, and named one of them Atlantic City.

As the excitement of his own ventures was beginning to subside, and with Atco even publishing its own newspaper by then as its latest success story, Richards went house hunting. He was looking for a place to live near Philadelphia with his wife Elizabeth Moore Ellison, his second son and business partner, low-keyed S. Bartram Richards and that son's recent bride Mary Dorrance Evans, known as "Polly."¹⁷⁹ Isabel Bishop, the distinguished New York painter, was Samuel Richards' grandniece. At the time the Dorrances had strong New Jersey ties, most notably their ownership of the Camden-based food-processing firm Campbell Soup Company, now a publicly held, multi-national corporation. The Dorrance family had been wanting to strengthen its ties with Philadelphia because it had marriageable daughters.¹⁸⁰ Polly's arrival here seems to have led that Dorrance migration.

Another plus-factor the Richards had, in Price's eyes, was their flawless Quaker credentials, especially those of Sam Richards' wife Elizabeth. Her father, John B. Ellison, a nationally prominent cloth merchant and proprietor of some of those Satanic mills the Victorian reformers loved to hate, was a staunch Friend. Her aunt and namesake, Elizabeth Ellison, was a widely known preacher in the Society of Friends. Presence of the Richardses provided Price with the best possible "sales pitch" for his village. That project at Elm was the golden dream of three men in their golden years – farmer Price, the

¹⁷⁸ See Arthur D. Pierce's Family Empire in Jersey Iron: The Richards Enterprises in the Pine Barrens. 1964

¹⁷⁹ John Thompson Dorrance Jr., while board chairman of both Campbell Soup Company and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, spoke fondly of his "Aunt Polly" in questions put to him by this writer through Ralph Collier, then Campbell Museum president.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Asked about the family's move to Pennsylvania, Dorrance explained it thus.

populist architect Isaac Harding Hobbs, Jr. and Samuel Richards. Of these, the Richardses personally retained some of their land the longest, nearly forty years.

Once he decided to found a town, Price had begun looking for an edge in attracting residents for it. His approach was, initially, [to get] into the mortgage business.¹⁸¹ He was taking a leaf, I suppose, from his Price colonial ancestor who had held a mortgage on the Lower Merion property “Harriton,” now a museum.¹⁸² Most likely Price took the matter up with a bank as his partner by setting up some sort of account – one to be used to cover construction of several large houses, and thus overcome a financial barrier that people in the market for homes, then as now, so often have found hard to overcome. Such a program enabled Price to offer mortgages for the full cost of constructing each of three large houses, though indications are that he was prepared to back several more, which did not materialize. Meanwhile, the money for the down payment seems to have been guaranteed by Price and folded into the mortgage. Price continued to draw interest on the money, which was returned to him after a few years. One prospective land-buyer dropped out of the program just at the outset. But there was no default, except for one tract of land Price sold to Hobbs’ builder. For the other participants, the down payment was the hurdle, and after that they could afford the mortgage. So, Price had a modest mortgage-assistance program to guide development from scratch in his town, and thus protect the area ten or twenty years down the line. It was also part of being a good neighbor. Edward R. Price’s program was only operative between 1881 and 1883. By then Elm’s “first family,” after renting an Ardmore house, was already settled in its new home on five acres. And architect Hobbs completed paying his builder for constructing two large houses on the land Hobbs owned by transferring the deed for those houses to the builder, who in turn was paid in cash by selling them to Edward R. Price. Price had the houses on his hands for two years until T. Broom Belfield entered the picture and bought them both. But more about that later.

The site selected for the planned town of Elm was excellent. It crowned the center of Edward R. Price’s nearly hundred-acre farm and the layout of its earliest avenues, including one called Elm Street, can be seen on the atlas map of 1881, the year its first distribution of deeds was recorded. Picturesqueness and variety distinguished this hamlet of Hobbs-designed houses. Narberth’s largest mansion, razed for Montgomery Court apartments, and another Hobbs dwelling (now called

¹⁸¹ Reminds me [the author] of the innovative program started in 1995 by Lycoming College in upstate Williamsport, whereby to help keep its neighborhood safe and viable, it launched a mortgage assistance program for the general public – as a preventive measure aimed at protecting the area twenty years into the future.

¹⁸² Editor’s note: Harriton House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

Vauclain/Barrie House parsonage) stood together on a high broad shoulder of land on Hobbs' own nine acres that sliced across a bluff to Indian Creek. These two houses, the larger one with a wrap-around porch, fronted on different streets. Vauclain/Barrie House, like its former "mate," is rugged and reflects Hobbs' sense of power over massive structures and over its sometimes mildly extravagant ornamentation such as its Renaissance iron archway entrance to the front porch. This Queen Anne Revival-style dwelling also tips its hat to American Renaissance later in the century.

Detailing on the larger "mate" to this house was similar but not identical, as for example the relief pattern of the brickwork on the tall chimneys, the larger north bay of the Belfield house. And that most American of features – the encircling verandah of the Belfield house - was greatly played up far more so than in the Vauclain house, the idea being to form a spatial transition from indoors to outdoors.

But Hobbs had made his greatest contribution to American house design with the boldness and eccentricity of his interior floor plans. Here at Elm we find him moving beyond this toward the Queen Anne wide-open "living hall" idea, in which he tried to make the first floor seem like a single immense room, something he had only hinted at earlier with lots of doors and cross-vistas, but which he seems to have carried further here than in perhaps any other surviving Hobbs house although partitioning (c. 1930) of first floor spaces obscures the openness.

This house, long enhanced by the cheerfulness and grace of an enormous white birch that shaded the entrance, faces Price Avenue. But its balcony and picturesque largest window overlook the length of that lot to acknowledge what must have been a wonderfully romantic view westward along the steep slope to the stream.

The same year he finished this and the adjoining residences, Hobbs published a book, The Mechanism of the Universe, Lippincott, 1833, intended to prove the existence of God and things spiritual by scientific investigation. Such inspirational books for the general reader were plentiful in his day. So Hobbs once again was showing his readiness fully to engage in popular culture trends. He also had several patented inventions.

Vauclain/Barrie House now is the last leaf in the first round of Narberth town planning personally presided over by Edward R. Price. Since it was built speculatively, it provides unique testimony about what kind of newcomers were sought for this community in 1881. In putting up new buildings, Victorians sought satisfaction, not from beauty, but from attaining what would befit the station in life of prospective buyers. Thus, it might have gratified Price and Hobbs to know that two men of achievement, both medal-winners at the Paris International Exposition of 1900, lived in this

house in succession – Samuel Vauclain cited for locomotive design and George Barrie for publishing deluxe editions of the classics. That occasion marked the first time American achievement was singled out and celebrated in a European setting.

Samuel Vauclain, legendary head of the Baldwin Locomotive Works, was Narberth's first industrial giant. He lived here during the dazzling days of that huge firm's expansion while his Baldwin Company dominated the locomotive world and was fast becoming one of America's largest employers, producing built-to-order steam engines marked "Philadelphia U.S.A." In many ways Vauclain was far ahead of his time, promoting national and local prosperity as well as an improved market for American goods. Samuel Vauclain was the guest-resident of this surviving house from 1885 to 1901, courtesy of its owner, brass manufacturer T. Broom Belfield, a close friend and admirer who lived in the adjoining Hobbs Mansion, and whose nearby industry brassworks near Baldwin's plant produced all manner of locomotive fittings for that colossus including bells and whistles. While Belfield owned these properties, what became the Vauclain/Barrie House was exclusively for Vauclain use. Though residing in a townhouse on Philadelphia's Green Street, Samuel Vauclain was a strong believer in country living and fresh air for his young family. According to his autobiography Steaming Up (1930), Vauclain also believed in going along with recommendations from friends he knew always had his best interests at heart. With that outlook, he readily would have accepted use of the Narberth house when Belfield enthusiastically offered. Belfield may have had the idea in mind when he was making his decision to buy the two big adjoining Elm houses instead of one. On Thanksgiving Day 1901, the Vauclains left their Narberth house for "Broadlawn," a mansion built for them in Rosemont on a site now occupied by an apartment complex initially called Broadlawn, and since renamed Home Properties of Bryn Mawr.

Scottish-born George Barrie added a whiff of exclusive connoisseurship to the Narberth legend when he took up residence in the former Vauclain house in 1910. Barrie had already pledged himself to the comfortable values of the proud possessors of books and objects, such as J. Pierpont Morgan, a Barrie customer. Barrie called his house "Puir-Hilch," and Barrie Road, later built on a piece of his land, is named after him. His wife, Renee Barrie, planted the stunning carpet of periwinkle-blue chionodoxa bulbs naturalized in the front lawn and still a joy to see in April (as are the February-blooming crocus sieberi that lawyer Fletcher W. Stites planted by the thousands in his front lawn at 413 Haverford Avenue).

Largest private home ever built here, Hobbs's Belfield summer residence at the southwest corner of Narberth and Price Avenues, was renovated (when about two years old and still empty) by architect

James A. Windrim soon after Belfield bought it in 1885. A member of the University of Pennsylvania Museum board of managers, T. Broom Belfield was a stern disciplinarian who had nine sons and three daughters. Somewhat in advance of the bicycle craze in this country, Belfield insisted his sons bicycle daily on their high-wheeler bikes to their Belfield brass foundry jobs at Broad and Spring Garden Streets. High wheelers, with their high front wheel and small rear one, were expensive and difficult to ride. So, seeing the Belfield squadron of bike riders on the road must have been a startling sight. Alexander C. Shand, chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad next owned this house and called it “Douglas Garden,” its garden still remembered as an asset to the neighborhood. Only the garden or at least some if it remains, encircled by the borough’s largest apartment block, 110-unit Montgomery Court, built in 1939.

The Belfields before the turn of the century began the Christmas custom of lighting the towering hemlock on their grounds, Mrs. Percy Belfield told me. This tradition has been continued every year by Montgomery Court Apartments management, and features 800 lights topped by a venerable three-foot star visible from the railroad station. Carolers from the Methodist church usually gather beneath the tree.¹⁸³ Believed planted by Mr. Belfield is another surviving tree, an umbrella ginkgo (*Ginkgo Biloba*) named one of the top three of this species in a five-county area by Dr. John C. Swartley who included it in his “social register” of “extraordinary trees” published by Morris Arboretum in 1970.

South of the Belfield residence, architect Isaac H. Hobbs took full advantage of Elm’s rolling terrain by placing his Victorian Gothic-style Richards house of ashy-pink stone at the summit of a long gentle southerly slope exactly where the ground levels off. The house faced Old Gulph Road (named Narberth Avenue where it passes through the borough). Its pinkish stone gateposts can still be seen at #224.

There is a revealing contrast here between these different types of dwellings by Hobbs. The closely related, eclectic Belfield and Vauclain house designs show trace-elements of a brand-new architectural style which its practitioners soon called American Renaissance and that would reach its apex at the turn-of-the-century (note the Vauclain/Barrie house’s several Italianate classical details such as a type of Palladian window and the way the “look” of these two houses caters to the cultural ambitions of people who would buy them).

But the Richards house, constructed at the same time, sprang from quite another and more rural-

¹⁸³ Editor’s note: The Methodist church no longer functions as such but it is possible that carolers still gather beneath the tree.

friendly tradition. Veteran land developer Sam Richards' vision of a house for himself in a new suburb remained true to the mid-nineteenth century liking for emphatic and pictorial qualities of Gothic Revival, which included stone with a bit of color to it rather than dull gray and gables edged with lacy ornamental verge boards. And Victorians could be counted on to obsess over the relative merits of two kinds of architecture – any styles hinting at classical antiquity versus the Gothic, with the former tilted toward egalitarianism and the latter looking back toward old-time extensive quasi-aristocratic land ownership. So Richards' preference for Gothic seems right on the mark.

It is interesting to speculate which Hobbs house of these built on his farm under his supervision Edward R. Price preferred. Most likely it was Richards' late phase Gothic Revival one, because Price might have seen in that new resident, like himself a descendant of early Welsh settlers from Merioneth believed of ancient aristocratic Cymric lineage, an alter-ego, for, although dissimilar in many ways, the two men were close contemporaries. And the Gothic Revival style had its heyday in rural settings during the vigor of their early middle age.

Careful thought went into the house built speculatively directly opposite Richards in support of the Price plan. The client, a satellite of the Godey fashion empire, was a Germantown fashion industry pattern merchant of women's dress patterns and presumably Hobbs house-patterns as well, who may have been a friend of Hobbs. That merchant sold the attractive wood-and-shingle house (1883) to widow Mary Ann Anderson Williamson who lived there with her son William von Albade Williamson, clerk of the U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals, and his wife Maria Elizabeth McKean. Doubtless hand-picked as congenial neighbors for the Richardses, Mrs. Williamson's roots were in colonial New Amsterdam, while her late husband's family, the Williamsons, had a title to land granted them at Passyunk township in 1667 by a British governor in New York.

Two Williamson relatives had a finger in development at Elm – Mary Williamson's brother-in-law and her husband's first cousin. The brother-in-law, Percival Roberts, Sr., founder of Pencoyd Iron Works, looked after Mary's welfare at Elm to the extent he put his signature first among six names on a petition (1887) to widen her street, Old Gulph Road (Narberth Avenue). The cousin was George Brooke Roberts, then Pennsylvania Railroad president, who in 1892 accommodated the wishes of area residents by naming our rail station Narberth. Roberts did not originate that name, though he is often credited with doing so.

Norman Jefferies, owner after 1911 of the Williamson house at 219 North Narberth Avenue (since razed for St. Margaret's parking lot), installed there a replica of Independence Hall's staircase.

His wife, the former English actress Gwendolyn Jane Pines, created an English garden showplace on the grounds. In the theatrical business and a motion picture pioneer, Norman Jefferies (uncle of athlete Jack Jefferies) originated the famous 1909 hoax whereby the “Jersey Devil,” a legendary lizard-skinned, fork-tailed creature whose home town is Leeds Point, a Pine Barrens hamlet in Galloway township, New Jersey was “captured” and put on display in a dime museum at Ninth and Market. Mr. and Mrs. Jefferies were ardent supporters of the Narberth cherry blossom tradition and a close friend of Narberth adventure writer Daniel P. Mannix, 4th. About 1927, Mrs. Jefferies opened a flower shop, later a dress shop run a long while by her granddaughter at the same address on the main street.

In 1886, the stove and cupola manufacturer William L. McDowell (president of Leibrandt and McDowell) took the surprising step of recasting the Libertyville neighborhood in a more contemporary mold. This he did by causing a “mansion”¹⁸⁴ to be built there on a small lot he bought (in the present borough) at a sheriff’s sale.¹⁸⁵ As McDowell was a contemporary of Edward R. Price, and lived almost directly across Montgomery Avenue from him on the grounds of a historic Price house, I believe this project was a dramatic salute by this industrialist to the early success of Price’s village-building efforts. It likewise can be seen as a salute to Elm’s several prestigious new residents, especially Samuel Richards. On the grounds of the “witch’s” daughter Elizabeth, this large stone house became “Bel-Bryn,” the residence of the Joseph D. Ellis family of Fairmount. Still standing at 1236 Montgomery Avenue, it now houses the Evviva Restaurant.¹⁸⁶ Ellis’s partner in real estate, his brother J. Pemberton Ellis of Powelton Village, soon built an imposing stone house at Montgomery and Wynnewood Avenues (often chosen by brides for their wedding receptions when in its final years it served at a parish house for the adjacent All Saints Episcopal Church), before being replaced by Wyndmont Apartment.

Narberth’s most prominent family of Swedish colonial ancestry were the Justices. At Libertyville on part of the site of Jacob R. Hagy’s former farm, silverware manufacturer F. Millwood

¹⁸⁴ Probably by architects Hazelhurst & Huckel

¹⁸⁵ The actual circumstances of McDowell’s project are intriguing. He set up legal “covenants and agreements” to obtain the imposing house he wanted, to assure that he be paid ample ground rent, and to re-claim ownership if anyone defaulted. His deed conveyed the lot formerly owned by the “witch’s” daughter Elizabeth (with small buildings on it) to Isaac B. Culin of Philadelphia, a dry goods store cleric probably of Swedish ancestry. Culin thereby agreed to construct within one year “a good and substantial three-story stone house of sufficient value fully to secure the said yearly rent described” (which ground rent could be extinguished only by paying ten thousand dollars to McDowell). Culin the same day conveyed this property, and its ground rent obligation, to the Joseph D. Ellis family of Fairmount, reserving to himself the task of seeing that the mansion got built.

¹⁸⁶ There is strange poetic justice in mandating a Swede to build a stone mansion only a few feet from a couple of log cabins that may be Swedish and are still in existence though transformed in their appearance. When the house next door at 1226 was modernized in 1887, its cabin was demolished. Whether McDowell was aware of this, we do not know.

Justice built a large house (Minerva Parker Nichols architect) at 1104 Montgomery Avenue¹⁸⁷ on land he acquired in 1889 and 1890. Son of a prosperous hardware importer, “Mill” Justice (who eventually served on Narberth’s first borough council) and his brother Alfred were born at Powelton Village of a Quaker family related to colonial silversmith Philip Syng. Their merchant grandfather George M. Justice had helped spearhead a movement toward higher public education in this country, was a founder of Central High School, started a public astronomical observatory, and was an American Philosophical Society member. When a street was cut through Justice’s property, it was called Stepney Place after “Mill’s” father-in-law, attorney Albert Stepney Letchworth whose law office was then stylishly located near Independence Hall. Letchworth lived at Justices’ in an apartment planned for him there when that Victorian house was on the drawing board.

Alfred R. Justice, “Mill’s” brother, also lived in Narberth, eventually in the Richards house, and his letter¹⁸⁸ to his fiancée Jessie Lewisin on July 26, 1891, provides a vivid glimpse of early life in the depths of the countryside here:

The walk [with “Mill” and a cousin] served to stimulate our appetites and we enjoyed a dinner of vegetables from our own garden and some very good ice cream from the little store near by (not quite equal to Blank’s). Our garden is doing very well this season much better than last, and we luxuriate in all kinds of garden truck except corn, and we would have had that had it not been for our cow, who broke loose one night and ignoring everything else except the strawberries completely destroyed our “Dreer’s early.” On Saturday afternoon I invited Will Ferris to come out and play tennis with us. He and Mill stood Mr. Forsythe and myself and we were very evenly matched. The day was so cool and pleasant that we thoroughly enjoyed it. In the evening we had music and chess.

The easy good manners of all concerned remind us that the village did not need Galsworthy. Elm had a Forsythe Saga of its own, in its early unhurrying days.

¹⁸⁷ This late Victorian manse is today the principal showpiece in the region for Philadelphia’s leading woman architect of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Minerva Parker Nichols. Chicago-born granddaughter of architect Seth A. Doane, Nichols undertook about six house-design jobs at Elm just after the architect for whom she had been working, Edwin W. Thorne, and whom she succeeded in his Philadelphia office in 1888, became embroiled in a lawsuit with his Elm client, E. Napoleon Manning (racetrack promoter William L. McDowell’s son-in-law). Minerva’s local residences comprise the largest cluster of her houses anywhere, although a vacation cottage that this Victorian career woman designed at Bellefonte in Central Pennsylvania is better known, having been the inspiration for a Gothic novel. “Mill” Justice was the client for Minerva’s finest house at Elm, he and his brother Alfred R. having been born in Philadelphia’s Powelton Village section of a Quaker family that had produced colonial silversmith Philip Syng.

¹⁸⁸ Collection of Mr. Jean Justice Collins

Edward Forsythe, mentioned in the letter was an investment broker and manager of Des Moines Land and Trust Company dealing in “choice Western mortgages and school bonds” (1888 advertisement). He came of a Chadds Ford family that claims many educators in its family tree, starting in 1799 with the legendary first male teacher at Westtown School, John Forsythe. Edward Forsythe was an Orthodox Friend and his wife Hannah Yerkes a Hicksite, which made for lively discussions in the spacious home Edward, while still a bachelor, had built at Elm in 1889-90 on Price Avenue facing the Vauclain/Barrie House. Forsythe, who placed a large windmill on his grounds, gave serious consideration to establishing a branch of Westtown School there – something that would have pleased Elizabeth Richards whose father was a prominent alumnus of that renowned Quaker boarding school. Designed by architect Charles W. Bolton, the Forsythe house still stands, embedded now in a housing subdivision. Everything about that house’s character, and about Edward Forsythe’s background, suggests that this Haverford College graduate built the long-time Forsythe family residence at Elm through the influence of Samuel and S. Bartram Richards. Both Forsythe and the father/son Richards partners had their land development offices in the Drexel Building, Philadelphia.

To broaden the appeal of his town-building idea beyond the Quaker community, Price – undoubtedly through Richards - had assiduously courted a leader who, somewhat experienced in Philadelphia ward politics, was a reform-minded politician independent of the city machine. This was John Jacob Ridgway who often gave talks on the stump for Progressive candidates running for office and later was appointed U.S. Surveyor of Customs of the Port of Philadelphia in President Harrison’s administration. Ridgway knew real estate from his experience as Philadelphia Sheriff, 1884-7, a post to which the governor had appointed him to fill out an unexpired term. Ridgway went into action on Elm’s behalf immediately after Edward R. Price’s death, as if on cue. And he brought with him as allies a couple of lawyers with sheriff’s department experience. These were the Simpsons father and son, whose selfless dedication as community-builders would be put to the test here for years to come. [More on this later.]

The hyper-active flurry of the Godey-inspired plan that had welcomed birthright Quakers and industrialists alike did not last long. Farmer Price’s death in April 1887 signaled the end of 205 years of Price presence in the neighborhood. And it set the stage for a different approach to development with the immediate sale to Ridgway of land that had belonged to other descendants of the Price family until recent decades. By early 1888, despite continuance until 1919 of lot sales by Price Estate trustees, such vitality and initiative as there had been in the Price large-house village episode was extinguished. And

Price's original intention of selling his land in lots of not less than two acres was soon set aside. The contrived irregularity of the placement of Hobbs mansions quickly gave way, under the guiding hand of Sam Richards' younger colleague and hand-picked organizer John J. Ridgway, to a tight grid plan with small building lots that partially surrounded and eventually encroached on the "Godey's Lady's Book village." So, Price's goal of founding a full-fledged town was carried toward completion after that farmer's death by an experienced community builder (Sam Richards) and a politician active nationally in the Progressive movement (John J. Ridgway). And despite the drastic changes this involved, it is still comforting to realize that Narberth is a town that Edward R. Price willed into existence. Remarkably Ridgway soon chose a woman developer for his Real Estate Investment Company of Philadelphia project. He and Richards were Price's "miracles," as it remains a mystery precisely how he happened to join forces with them. Richards seems to have settled into living at Elm as part of a "pact" with a fellow Quaker, Price. Presiding on site thus seemed to be Richards' assigned role here as an experienced town-builder. What was more urgently needed with each passing year at Elm was someone, preferably another understanding Quaker, willing to step in and be a developer - above all, someone who would buy that lynchpin former Price tract that was about to come on the market and subdivide it into a plan of lots. Then find someone willing to be a full-service developer able to construct houses and other buildings there. All these things Ridgway did. So, even though he played chiefly a transitional role in this project, Ridgway was actually the single most important individual in the achievement of Price's town-building goal.

John Jacob Ridgeway¹⁸⁹

Who was Ridgway and how did he accomplish this, inasmuch as he, unlike Richards, had no experience as a developer? The short answer is that Ridgway was a prominent politician, a blueblood, and a Quaker with ties to the advance guard of the nascent Civic Reform Movement in Philadelphia. This lawyer and public figure was the first developer of land bordering on Price's village. Ridgway bought that crucial lynchpin tract of 58.31 acres in November,¹⁹⁰ then in January 1888 for one dollar turned the land over to Real Estate Investment Company of Philadelphia, a corporate real estate and brokerage firm he had just founded. The acquisition launched the firm, of which Ridgway was president

¹⁸⁹ Editor's Note: Much of this section on John Jacob Ridgway could be left out of this Cultural History of Narberth – but has been left in for its historic interest.

¹⁹⁰ Editor's note: in an earlier version of this chapter, the author noted that Ridgway paid \$75,000 for the land purchased from Maria Furey subject to two mortgages of \$25,000 each and another of \$7,000.

and his rich brother-in-law, attorney J. Parker Norris, one of the members. From every indication, Ridgway founded this firm for the express purpose of accomplishing Edward Price's goal of buying back this central core of what had been the seventeenth-century Price family plantation, and where several early stone buildings had stood, only one then still surviving.

The Ridgway family had Anglophile interests that soon would make a permanent imprint in names given to our roads and to the eventual borough itself. Settled in this country since 1679, the Ridgways were very interested in their Elizabethan and Jacobean family heritage in England and Ireland where the family has prominent early tombs.¹⁹¹

As soon as his new firm acquired the tract at Elm, John Ridgway mapped a grid plan for streets (that were later simply extended), gave them British names,¹⁹² fixed the size of building lots at about 50 by 150 feet, and numbered each (from 1 to 315). That arrangement has remained the dominant plan in effect with few changes to this day. Windsor Avenue was created as the development's only east-west street and main thoroughfare running along the seventeenth and eighteenth century-Price cow-path¹⁹³ from the former Price barn at Forrest Avenue to the meadow that started at Conway Avenue, and parallel to Haverford Avenue where the old Price waterwheel was.

The single exception to Ridgway's alphabetical listing is Narberth Avenue (east of Forrest), the only "through" street on the tract at the time. This existing street, an extension of historic Old Gulph Road,¹⁹⁴ was just being widened when the portion running through the Ridgway tract was named Narberth Avenue. This name change comes to light in a deed of sale¹⁹⁵ for a Narberth Avenue house on February 16, 1888. The deed says a "plan of land" had already been recorded for the tract. Thus "Narberth" made its first public appearance here as a street name, and not just any street.

Significantly this Welsh name was applied to the main street of the Lady's Book village founded in 1881 on Price's property, adjoining the north side of Ridgway's project. At the time the Richards had already been living there five years, in surroundings that had a kind of open-ended Quaker character.

¹⁹¹ Edwin Wolf 2d, correspondence with the author.

¹⁹² Ridgway named the new north-south avenues in alphabetical order starting at the westerly end with Alton (later dropped), Berkley, Conway, Dudley, Essex, Forrest, Grayling, Hampden, and Iona. Besides English place names and names of prominent Elizabethan public figures, Conway is a true Gaelic Celtic Irish surname as well as the name of a ruined Welsh medieval fortress at Breconshire. Iona probably refers to the island off Scotland. Because it is so near Essex Avenue, Forrest Avenue's name may relate to the extensive Forest of Essex north of London. The spelling "Hampden" is that of the distinguished seventeenth-century English parliamentary leader John Hampden who, like Oliver Cromwell, wanted to emigrate to America but did not.

¹⁹³ See Carden Warner.

¹⁹⁴ This ancient trail is believed to be the one Indians from Passyunk used to go hunting.

¹⁹⁵ Deed Book 320, page 67

In April of [1888], John J. Ridgway began writing his autobiography which gives remarkable insight into the man, his heritage and public career even though it does not specifically mention his real estate venture at Elm. Born in 1843 at 911 Arch Street, Philadelphia, John was the eighth and youngest child of a couple married twenty-two years. His mother Sarah, sister of the eminent surgeon Joseph Pancoast, was forty-one at the time of his birth, his banker father forty-six. John's favorite activities as a child were drawing goats and horses and adding tall columns of figures for visitors.¹⁹⁶ Also he was allowed to light the hall chandelier daily from the shoulders of a black manservant. In the Society of Friends schism, John's father, who had arrived in Philadelphia in 1813 from New Jersey, supported the Hicksites. And John's mother became a Hicksite too, though her son "to this day" (1887) found it hard to understand the distinction between Orthodox and Hicksite Quakers. "My father was more liberal than other Quakers I know or knew," said he, possibly referring to farmer Edward R. Price, (a Hicksite). Ridgway explained that his father was liberal insofar as he never wore a wide-brimmed hat or shad-bellied coat. Nor did his mother ever wear the Quaker dress. His sisters had a piano, he a billiard table, and there were pictures in the house. And yet his father was very faithful in attending meeting on Sundays (John had the impression that his father was long-time cleric of the meeting at Fifteenth and Race Streets). At the Yearly Meetings that were such a vital part of Quaker life, John's father "filled the house with attending members from the country." This is very likely where the Price family members of various generations would have come into contact with the Ridgways, if at no other time for they would have been well aware of the hospitality extended to Friends personally by John's father. Thomas Ridgway left the whole of his estate (\$400,000) in trust, as income for his eight children. And the Ridgways had a tradition, begun by a grandfather in 1776, of marrying on November fourteenth. That way, many generations of the family and siblings would "usually always" celebrate their wedding anniversaries together, including John's marriage which took place in 1867. John Ridgway went to the University of Pennsylvania, was a graduate of its law school and, as required, he entered the office of a practicing attorney (Morton P. Henry). But not before the Civil War intervened.

An enthusiastic Unionist, Ridgway persuaded other fellow Penn classmates to join the Gray Reserves, subsequently the First Regiment, N.G.P. He enlisted as a private in 1861, seeing action at Antietam. And he enlisted in the regular army again in 1863, arriving by way of Carlisle at the Battle of Gettysburg with his five Delta Psi college fraternity chums including one Southerner and losing one of

¹⁹⁶ In his papers at the Library Company of Philadelphia, Ridgway declares his favorite activity as a very young child was being allowed to sit upon the shoulders of his family's black manservant in order to light all the tapers in the Ridgway household chandelier at nightfall.

these comrades under heavy fire. Ridgway also served during the retreat of the Confederate forces at Hagerstown that involved six weeks of hard marching, and a skirmish at Boonsborough.

Ridgway was a close associate of distinguished historian Henry C. Lea who ran the Citizens' Municipal Reform Association, the first group effort in Philadelphia to counteract the abuses of "machine" politics. Ridgway supported that association and also made stump speeches for reform candidates. He himself was elected to represent the Eighth Ward in City Council, serving from 1883-1885. Ridgway knew real estate from his experience as Philadelphia sheriff, a post to which he was appointed in 1887 by Governor Beaver to fill the unexpired term of W. Ellwood Rowan. He served four years as United States Surveyor of Customs of the port of Philadelphia in President Benjamin Harrison's administration - following a surprise appointment he heard nothing about until he read about it in the evening newspaper (1889). As Surveyor, Ridgway arranged a visit of President Harrison to this city where the chief executive was his guest and attended a Grand Army reunion. In the 1870s, Ridgway had been instrumental with his friend Ur. William Camac in obtaining, needed funds and a site for a Philadelphia Zoo, at a crucial moment when neither necessity could be found. It was said¹⁹⁷ of Ridgway that he "had unusual public spirit and affection for his native city."

He seemed to be a problem-solver in unusual cases where others feared to tread. Ridgway was characterized as genial and humorous, with a fund of anecdotes. He was simple in manner and habit, no self-advertiser, and yet with a strong sense of propriety. He had friends in all walks of life, and he had great affection for them. When John came on the scene at Elm, the Parthenon-like Ridgway Library on South Broad Street in Philadelphia had recently been completed and named for Phoebe Ridgway Rush, first cousin of John's father. Phoebe Ridgway, daughter one of Philadelphia's richest merchants Jacob Ridgway, was the daughter-in-law of Benjamin Rush, the surgeon-general to George Washington.

There is no doubt that Ridgway came to his town-building task with Richards' baggage. The name of our important Narberth Avenue appears out of alphabetical order exactly as the main street, Atco Avenue, does in Richards' town plan for Atco – it is almost as if the new name Narberth were being groomed, even then (in 1888), to become our town name. In the Richards' family tradition of town building, the founder never gave his own surname to a town or street, though he might use names otherwise linked with him. One Atco street is named Bartram, for example.

¹⁹⁷ Undated Legal Intelligencer article at Ridgway's death, Library Company of Philadelphia, Clippings, brief handwritten autobiography and his family history on deposit since 1991; J. J. Ridgway often used the tag "Jr." to distinguish himself from his very rich cousin of the same name then living lavishly in Paris.

This is right on track for Ridgway's Anglophile approach as there is a very old mansion, "Ridgway," located about three miles west of the town of Narberth in Wales. The National Library of Wales¹⁹⁸ told me it is unaware of any connection between a family of Ridgways and that mansion. It was already owned by the Fawley or Foley family in 1692, and connected with them until the 1880s, or later.

Probably the existence of the well-known "Ridgway" mansion at Narberth in Wales would alone have been sufficient for John Ridgway to have introduced the Narberth name here even if his family had no connection with the Fawleys or their mansion. By Richards' standards, this would have been an acceptable approach, and Ridgway would have known this.

It cannot have escaped the attention of John J. Ridgway that his banker father had been a long-time close business associate of Samuel Richards' uncle, Benjamin W. Richards, a Philadelphia mayor and acquaintance of Alexis de Tocqueville.¹⁹⁹ The latter and Thomas R. Ridgway (John J.'s father) were both founders of Girard Trust Bank. Also B. W. Richards was its first president and T. R. Ridgway its second president. If Samuel Richards and John Ridgway saw each other at the funeral of Ridgway's father in March 1887, or at any other time that year at the Rittenhouse Club to which both belonged, Richards could have told him about the large farming tract at Elm, ripe for development as a town.

And for the grandnephew of millionaire merchant Jacob Ridgway to have appeared like a knight on a white charger at Elm to buy back much of the original Price plantation – this suggests some careful planning – very likely on the part of Sam Richards and his son W. Bartram Richards, to bring about this arrangement. Surely Price was kept informed that such a customer was coming forward to buy that property – the uncertain fate of which must have cost Price plenty of heartache previously. Both the Richards and Ridgway families had early New Jersey Quaker roots. And Bartram Richards, who was close to Ridgway's age, would have known precisely how to enlist the latter's aid in helping to create Price's town. Not only did Ridgway's new investment firm get involved, but also Ridgway and his wife Elizabeth Fry personally bought a couple of properties here, building a house on one of them.

Richards may even have had some part in suggesting a new name be chosen for the street he lived on or for the town itself. After all, Samuel Richards, whose Richards family lived on its Valley Forge farm during our Revolution's frigid Valley Forge winter and was also kin of George Washington,

¹⁹⁸ For p. 28, Ch. 2.

¹⁹⁹ As it's believed de Tocqueville, while in Philadelphia, had the encouragement of Mayor Richards to travel around as a passenger in the early Baldwin Locomotive trains, this could explain why both Vauclain and Belfield came to live at Elm as Sam Richards' neighbor.

was still the driving force behind the Camden, Ventnor and Atlantic Land Company. In that capacity he had brushed aside an existing place name (Abseekum Island) when, in 1853, he brought more than a thousand acres of beachfront. The cost was one dollar per acre and he proposed to name it “Atlantic City” because, he said, this had a national appeal and there was “much in a name.” It would be hard to imagine that Richards did not have something to say on the subject of a catchy name, or a town needing to be built.

With or without such help from Elm’s leading citizen, Ridgway chose lasting road names and sold fifty-seven lots but built no houses on them. Sales²⁰⁰ were brisk and houses started cropping up like mushrooms on the lots sold. First customer was engineer George Bowers of Philadelphia who constructed a citified mansard-roof brick house on Narberth and Haverford Avenue’s northwest corner lot. First house completed on Ridgway’s tract was for Otis Brothers elevator company president Alfred Q. Lowry at 206 Forrest, still standing. Another early arrival was German-born cabinet maker Fred Bender who undoubtedly hand built his own wooden house, still standing at 217 Forrest, assisted by his two woodcarver sons.²⁰¹ The architect Oscar Frotscher likewise lost no time putting up on speculation a Queen Anne Revival house at 115 Iona, which got him more work in 1889 and 1890 nearby. For wood engraver David J. Hunter, Frotscher did 109 Iona, giving its façade crisply incised exterior ornamentation in the woodwork that would have pleased his client. Both 109 and 115 Iona survive. Gone now is the largest local house Frotscher designed – an imposing abode with a setback at the northeast corner Iona and Haverford Avenues for drug and chemical firm executive Sylvester J. Baker who was the business partner of (and mentor to) distinguished American pictorial photographer John G. Bullock, a founding member of the Photo-Secession group headed by Alfred Stieglitz. Baker was a founder of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. Civic-minded Rebecca Elkinton Bacon’s large stone house at 106 Iona (1888) probably was designed by the Quaker widow’s architect nephew and heir, Paul P. Elkinton.

Narberth Park

The spirit and self-confidence of the prosperous merchant class of that era is vividly reflected in the activity of its novice real estate developer chosen by Ridgway, S. Almira Vance, born Sara Almira Chandler, who was the childless widow of a Philadelphia builders’-hardware manufacturer, importer and

²⁰⁰ Family Empire.... Pages 227-8.

²⁰¹ Bender’s dwelling has elaborate interior floralwork carvings, particularly daffodil paneling in high relief.

dealer made rich by the post-Civil War building boom, and whose cargo ships plied the seven seas. Facing a challenge, Almira gamely launched from her Girard Avenue home a successful venture capital scheme here in December 1888 at the age of sixty-six.

Just after inheriting a life interest in her husband's large estate, Mrs. Vance bought Ridgway's Real Estate Investment Company tract, and thus became our town's largest developer. She may have been seeking a rapid return on her investment that would parlay her "life interest" into independent ownership of her own earnings, or else just relished the challenge. Some seventeen lot sales were being negotiated when S. Almira Vance took over the tract for \$46,500 subject to mortgages of \$40,000. Her lawyer at the time, and for settling her husband's estate, was the young J. Alexander Simpson, Jr., later an associate justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and regarded as America's most prominent Methodist layman.

Young Simpson supported Mrs. Vance's efforts here for many years, and initially he had her architect Angus Wade design a law office here for him on Forrest Avenue, which apparently made Simpson the first lawyer to hang his shingle here in the town. His parents, married brother and two married sisters soon became prominent residents at Elm, though none ever lived on the Vance tract, instead residing in other new houses immediately north and south of it.

Certainly J. A. Simpson Jr. and Sr. strengthened their Progressive Era credentials by their close association with John Ridgway – both in their working life as Philadelphia lawyers (both had served in the sheriff's office before Ridgway ran it, which gave them something in common with him), but also more personally by pitching in to help Ridgway when he needed it with his community-building project at Elm. Ridgway had the satisfaction of seeing the Simpsons follow through on their contribution to Elm far beyond his – or anyone else's – expectation.

During the early days of Vance stewardship, her project as a whole received the name "Narberth Park" on a plan of lots drawn up by civil engineer Edward H. Roberts, and later amended by Horace H. Sayre. The Narberth Park name appears on her first deed of sale, made to William Stanton Macomb in January 1889 (Deed Book 331, page 240). Ridgway who, with his wife Elizabeth Fry, retained small holdings here until 1892, probably proposed the name Narberth Park to Mrs. Vance. This seems very likely because that name was an immediate step Mrs. Vance took after buying her land, presumably before she became familiar with the area. In any event, that designation was crucial and, for Ridgway, may have represented the second milestone (after his naming Narberth Avenue) in a strategy to have Narberth chosen as town name.

“Crystal Lake” is another label that has a Ridgway ring to it. Surely Ridgway would never have overlooked a body of water on his land. Just as Almira Vance’s preference for pert pansy flowers led to her wearing a gold and diamond pansy brooch and matching earrings, so Ridgway may have cottoned to gleaming crystal as an image suggesting Byron (“How the lit lake shines a phosphoric sea...”). Besides, cheerfulness was a quality which appealed to many Victorians, and the Crystal Lake name certainly put a cheerful face on a problem (a swamp) that would vex local developers for nearly two decades.

Probably there is not a Narberthian alive who remembers Crystal Lake’s name. Yet the location of the bed of a lake so-named is described in two deeds.²⁰² As described, its position was within a rectangle roughly 700 ft. x 230 ft. extending lengthwise from Haverford Avenue north along Indian Creek. By 1895, Crystal Lake had been piped underground, but a smaller south-side lake still existed. This lends credence to an oral tradition²⁰³ stating that Indians gave the name Swan Lake to a body of water they frequented extending from today’s Narberth Playground, to Elmwood Avenue on the south side. Of course, William Penn mentioned seeing numerous white swans in his new colony, and the Indian name Karakung (Cobbs Creek, of which our Indian Creek is a tributary), means “place of wild geese.”

Almira Vance’s banker was William M. Singerly, president of Chestnut Street Trust Company, publisher of the metropolitan daily newspaper Philadelphia Record and lately the founding president of the American Newspaper Publishers Association. He and other bankers aided her early phase of local development as mortgage lenders. Also a written agreement stipulated that Singerly would handle promotion of Mrs. Vance’s tract at certain specified times. By this time, the seventy-two-acre Whitpain Township farm (Normandy Farms) in Montgomery County that Singerly had purchased from Almira and her husband in 1873, he had enlarged, turning it into a stock-farm showplace for pure bred cattle. Also, he would have had plenty of uses for builder’s hardware supplied by James M. Vance, as Singerly had been developing in 1886 a large tract of well-designed houses in North Philadelphia.²⁰⁴ Almira, then entering a man’s field, must have found his advice useful for she was possibly 125 years ahead of her time, considering that some of the best advice available today, offering courses and seminars on the subject, [is that] “Women entrepreneurs should have a great relationship with their banker first – before

²⁰² Deed Book 371, page 331, of 1892; Deed Book 398, page 481, of 1894.

²⁰³ Related to me by Anne Berry.

²⁰⁴ West of Broad Street, designed by a gifted architect, Willis G. Hale, whose housing developments in that new dilapidated area have been recognized in recent years as being of National Register caliber.

they become a business owner.”²⁰⁵ He and other bankers aided this early phase of local development as mortgage-lenders. Also, a written agreement stipulated that Singerly handle promotion of Mrs. Vance’s tract at certain specified times.²⁰⁶

Of undoubted significance both for the discussion that led to the excellent choice of an architect for Elm’s Vance tract and its rapid development was the fact that Singerly and John J. Ridgway were virtually next-door neighbors. Their upscale Philadelphia townhouses faced each other across narrow Locust Street just a couple of doors below Rittenhouse Square. Singerly²⁰⁷ moreover had owned tracts of land near those of millionaire Jacob Ridgway (John’s uncle) in North Philadelphia, and surely introduced John Ridgway both to Almira Vance and to the man who became architect of her Elm tract, Angus W. Wade.²⁰⁸ The year that Willis G. Hale was designing Singerly’s North Philadelphia housing operation, Wade was working in Hale’s office, and the two architects shared a compatible outlook on design. Their feisty approach has a considerable burr of personality that at its best merits favorable comparison with the widely acclaimed architecture of Philadelphia’s Frank Furness active at the same period. Hale designed a public-school building for Narberth in 1904.

Angus S. Wade came aboard the Narberth Park project in 1888 soon after entering independent practice upon leaving Hale’s employ, and he continued designing houses on this tract for at least four years. Almira’s agent in land sales for her Narberth Park development was William R. Bethell, husband of her younger sister Emily Chandler. The couple’s youthful son, lawyer-to-be J. Uhle Bethell, already owned land at Elm.²⁰⁹

The thorn in the rose for Almira was that she and J. Uhle Bethell were co-executors of her husband’s estate, and although Bethell had charge of seeing to it that she got what inheritance was coming to her, he fell short of fulfilling that task. Almira was left holding worthless promissory notes. Her apparent answer to this was her permanent departure for New Rochelle, New York out of her nephew’s orbit. Meanwhile, before that happened, builder Warner Davis of Woodbury, New Jersey

²⁰⁵ So says Geri Swift, president of the Women’s Business Development Center and the Women’s Business Enterprise Council of Pennsylvania, Delaware and Southern New Jersey, in September 2015.

²⁰⁶ One eye-catching piece of coverage in Singerly’s metropolitan daily Philadelphia Record was a bird’s eye-view rendering of Mrs. Vance’s fast-growing development.

²⁰⁷ An example of Singerly’s interest in architecture of high-quality design on the Vance tract would be 204 Forrest Avenue by architect Angus Wade, sold in 1891 to Philadelphia coal merchant Samuel P. Rothermel, showing a strong expression of a style that Wade would later use with modifications adapted to narrow lots at 119 and 125 Windsor.

²⁰⁸ Ridgway may have met Wade at Philadelphia’s popular Art Club, to which both belonged.

²⁰⁹ Eventual site of the Church of St. Margaret and rectory. At the time, this was one of the tract’s more desirable locations because it was opposite the residence of federal attorney William von A. Williamson and almost next door to Sam and Elizabeth Richards – a purchase made from Ridgway, and probably steered by J. Alexander Simpson, Jr.

became associated with the Bethells on the Narberth Park development project. That trio, as Bethell, Davis and Bethell (with Emily succeeding her soon deceased husband), began erecting eye-catching Queen Anne Revival houses for Almira's customers and also speculative houses on lots they themselves occasionally bought from her, and using Wade's designs.

These varied houses were stone at the first-floor level and usually fish-scale shingles above with slate roofs, many times patterned slate and patterned siding. Home buyers by this time included business executives Charles E. Kreamer at 114 Forrest; William R. Wright, 100 Grayling; William H. Fussell, 213 Narberth; George W. Yardley, 200 Narberth; Charles S. Reber of Reading, 114 and 116 Essex; patent attorney Thomas J. Bewley, 104 Grayling; and Major Jeremian W. Fritz, celebrated commander of a Civil War Battalion of the Union army, 201 Essex. Fritz's, an expansive corner-type house which was a close variation on the Dubosq and DeMayo houses here, had a thick round turret as its prominent feature. Its architect (Wade) made the most effective use of turreting in the town. This abode with its rambling porches was by 1909 enlarged as Miss Posey's boarding house, which for many years catered to a summer clientele. Later it became the sixty-four room Windsor-Essex Hotel until auctioned in 1934. Thereafter it flourished as Windsor-Essex Inn, a cozy informal residential hotel and semi-public dining room – a place with considerable individuality and small-town flavor. A twenty-three-unit box-like apartment, Essex Manor, replaced it in 1962.

The project was sailing along at full tilt when, on November 13, 1890, the Philadelphia Public Ledger reported that “Davis and Bethell have put up and sold twenty-seven dwellings²¹⁰ on the north side of the railroad, and at this time are completing an average of one a month.” Home-buyers by then included two houses (114 Dudley sold to Fannie E. Eberman, and 202 Forrest sold to merchant Samuel F. Rothermel) showing a strong expression of a style they later used with modifications adapted to narrow lots (119 and 125 Windsor). The style of 207 Forrest appears to be unique among their designs. It may have been a sample house before George W. Lane bought it. Another of their speculative dwellings is 201 Forrest, sold to commission broker Frederick H. Harjes whose son, “Junior,” became a wool importer and owned a fifty-three-acre Valley Forge farm acquired by the Freedoms Foundation as its headquarters in 1949. Lithographer August H. Mueller acquired a Davis and Bethell house at the southeast corner Windsor and Forrest where Edward ap Rees' 1690 stone house had stood. (Price's

²¹⁰ Whether the architect Angus Wade designed every house built here by Davis S. Bethell is unknown. Certainly he designed 119, 121, 123 and 125 Windsor; 101 Grayling; 115 Dudley; 201 Essex; and 202 and 207 Forrest and probably many more of that builder's dozens of Narberth houses.

small early stone barn was at 201 Forrest and the large whitewashed eighteenth-century Price stone house at the southeast corner Narberth and Windsor Avenues, with an access road to Haverford Avenue).

Davis and Bethell sold a handsomely situated, turreted corner house by Angus Wade at 115 Dudley to Francis P. Dubosq of the jewelers' family (sewing-silk manufacturer Charles A. Bohem later lived there). Those same developers also sold a nearly identical model to Louis A. DeMayo at 101 Grayling that survives, as does their proud speculative row of four single Wade dwellings with turreted dormers and turreted balconies at 119, 121, 123 and 125 Windsor. This showpiece quartet of homes, together with the Dubosq house (while it lasted, directly opposite them on its generous setback) served as a movie set for a Hollywood film of the late 1940s about suffragettes, and for other filmmakers.

Apart from Major Fritz's Dubosq-style house at 201 Essex that had expanded to become Windsor-Essex Inn, the largest "Narberth Park" dwelling was a summer residence constructed for Margaret T. Fuller, wife of drover Alfred M. Fuller, on the tract's most scenic woodland site at North Wynnewood Avenue. The whole community was welcome to ice-skate for decades starting c. 1915 on the lake James Artman established on the grounds of that house, "Wynlyn," while he owned it.²¹¹ A Chilton Publishing Company founder, Artman, who had maids and a butler there, lent that same house to the Shakespearean acting team of Sothern & Marlowe (E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe) for summers and whenever they were appearing on stage in Philadelphia, which was fairly often, up until their 1924 retirement. Julia Marlow from England's Lake District, found the setting congenial, while E. H. Sothern always found a ready audience here, in a city where his American actor father still had a devoted following. During Sothern & Marlowe's American tours, their servant invariably preceded them to the next stop to prepare for their arrival. And the privacy of the couple was always respected by Narberth neighbors. Julia's fame as an actress had reached its height around 1899 and 1901. With her husband and co-star, Marlowe did much to visualize and interpret Shakespearean characters, and to increase the popularity of classic drama in her day. Julia in 1901 had a country place at Highmont, New York. By the 1930s, Artman's house, renamed Lakeview apartment, rented large airy rooms to clubman and millionaire Clarence Dolan of Narbrook Park for his special parties when he arranged for showgirls to be brought in from New York by train and taxi to entertain his guests. That house and its lake were replaced by Narwyn Lane housing subdivision c. 1960, but not before the borough manager received an

²¹¹ Editor's note: more discussion about this property and James Artman follows in Chapter 3.

irate phone call from a Windsor Avenue resident one day demanding that he “do something about the frogs.” Bullfrogs²¹² can be especially noisy and are heard more than a block away.

Interestingly, two persons with strong patriotic ties were early arrivals in the Ridgway/Vance tract. Major Fritz the Civil War veteran and Samuel H. Rothermel lived in new houses back-to-back at main intersections. Sam was a cousin of the celebrated history painter Peter Frederick Rothermel of Linfield, Montgomery County, who had been America’s most popular artist throughout the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Samuel and Peter were both prominent members of the Union League of Philadelphia. At Elm, Samuel collected his cousin’s idealized history paintings filled with details that elevate the hero, inculcate patriotism and please the eye. And the Rothermel family retained ownership of its Narberth house for twenty-nine years. Names like Rothermel and Major Fritz were, for many at that time, still infused with the national romance of America as God’s nation in the wilderness, a new Eden. How persuasive a little name-dropping therefore would be for prospective home buyers at Mrs. Vance’s tract.

Indeed, it is quite possible that both Rothermel and Fritz were persuaded to settle here as a result of specific targeting by promotional efforts to attract the “right” people to establish this suburb. Edward Price hated leaving such matters to chance: would his followers – especially team players like John J. Ridgway (himself a Civil War vet) – have acted any differently?

By this time, railroad brakemen and conductors had taken to brightly announcing the rail station name by calling out “El-lm.” However, local residents waxed more sarcastic, nicknaming the place after a popular chewing-tobacco. Accustomed to maneuvering around many mud puddles at the station, they started calling it “Slippery Elm.”

A serious Elm Station train accident²¹³ also occurred around this time as dozens of persons were crossing the tracks to board an excursion train to the seashore, when a fast-moving train rounding the bend plowed into them. Some residents believe the tragedy hastened the choice of a new name for the town, which came soon after.

That Ridgway became the moving force in this town-building project, and continued to be able to inspire others to follow his enthusiastic lead, even after 1892 when he sold the last small piece of his

²¹² Editor’s note: or toads.

²¹³ Willman Spawn, distinguished bibliophile from the American Philosophical Society and Bryn Mawr College library, several interviews in the 1990s discussing this, and the experience of the tragic event by his close kin, Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Kreamer, when her physician was among those quickly sent from the city to treat devastating injuries of the crowd struck by the train at Elm Station.

formerly large land holdings here, can best be understood by comparing Vance's improvement group with two other neighborhood improvement associations that existed in the immediate area around the same time – each serving a housing development that eventually formed part of the town of Narberth. One of these (Belmar) was a spin-off of the Vance tract; the other was totally independent. When Mrs. Vance took over her tract in December 1888, Ridgway had already laid out housing lots and was selling to people who were building on them. So, people from that group of residents and from her residents launched the Narberth Park Association in October 1889. By then, the inexperienced Mrs. Vance was transforming herself into a full-fledged, full-service developer by hiring a gifted architect (probably on the advice of Singerly) and putting together her own construction crew for a sizeable group of mostly round-towered Queen Anne Revival houses to be built. Not until her first big crop of sales of those striking new houses in 1890 gave Narberth Park Association a much-needed membership boost did the organization come into its own as the most dynamic, venturesome and independence-minded of the three voluntary groups. Typically, its members had come of age after the Civil War. Of course, construction at her Narberth Park tract entered a quieter phase after Mrs. Vance moved to New York and transferred administration of her tract in June 1892 to her physician brother there. The panic of 1893 exacted its toll, spelling trouble for a number of banks including Singerly's Chestnut Street Trust Company.

Another developer, Goodman & Clothier, then bought the Vance holdings (150 lots) and revived work on the project in December 1894. That must have boosted hopes of residents anxiously awaiting the court's decision on borough status for Narberth. The partnership was led by two Clothier cousins well connected financially and politically, if inexperienced. Did Ridgway have a finger in their arrival on the scene as well?

An obvious drawing card in their enterprise was the active participation of young Albert E. C. Clothier who "knew the ropes" in the sense that he was the son of the business partner of Edwin Fitler, a millionaire rope manufacturer who had been mayor of Philadelphia a couple of years before and a "favorite son" nominee for president in '88. Of a family predating the department store [Strawbridge &] Clothiers in Philadelphia and very distant kin of theirs, the Clothiers were a very old Quaker family with New Jersey roots. Albert and John B. Clothier lived next door to the Widener Mansion (Willis G. Hale, architect) while it was being built in North Philadelphia at Broad Street and Girard Avenue. That

experience of witnessing construction of the most lavish private home ever built²¹⁴ in Philadelphia came during a period of extensive urban growth and could have been a decisive factor in the Clothiers' wholehearted, enthusiastic entry into Narberth real estate development. They joined forces with local builder George O. Goodman,²¹⁵ all three living here in the midst of houses they were building, as developer Charles W. Macfarlane had been doing on the south side.

Predominant among the varied styles of Goodman and Clothier houses were buildings with a medieval character having lots of roof (often steeply sloping from third story to first) and upper stories that jut out over the ones below. Large houses of this type stood immediately south of the present post office at Narberth and Windsor avenues, Albert E. C. Clothier's home, for example. Some others, smaller, are still standing on Grayling Avenue above and below Windsor, including John B. Clothier's home at 200 Grayling. Other buildings of theirs include a house with country-Georgian details that now forms part of the façade of Mapes's (formerly Davis's) Store landmark on Haverford Avenue, all the homes on the one hundred-block of Conway Avenue, several in the one hundred-block of Dudley, a puzzling (stylistically) mansard-roof house at 111 Iona, and a Queen Anne Revival house at 212 Forrest Avenue for attorney Alfred H. Faber.²¹⁶

Narberth Grove

South of the Thomas tract was more acreage that would one day be incorporated into the borough. This land had belonged to the plantation of Dr. Edward Jones (son-in-law of William Penn's physician, Dr. Thomas Wynne) who spoke about the Indians leaving venison at his door "for six pence ye quarter." That land passed in turn to Dr. Jones's son Jonathan Jones, Anthony Tunis the innkeeper, his son Joseph Tunis, John Dickinson (eminent scholar of the Revolution), Jacob Morris and James Sullivan. In 1863, Charles S. Wood, president of the Cambria Iron Company which made railroad iron at upstate Johnstown, bought from farmer Sullivan the tidy slice of this land that now forms the

²¹⁴ Claimed by several architectural historians, notably George Thomas.

²¹⁵ Of a well-known Ardmore family of carpenter-builders whose local ancestors served in the Revolutionary war, Goodman was a descendant of Johannes Stephen Goodman who arrived from Germany in 1738 aboard the ship "Charming Nancy" and bought a house on a hundred acres in the middle of Ardmore. (*Main Line Times*, March 9, 1950, p. 13)

²¹⁶ The predominance of such medieval details as the jutting upper stories in many of their buildings seems to have taken its cue from an imposing stone summer residence designed for Mrs. Rebecca Elkinton Bacon in 1888 probably by her architect nephew and heir Paul P. Elkinton of Ardmore, and still standing at 106 Iona. Childless widow of Richard W. Bacon of Philadelphia's Spring Garden section whose family had its roots in Greenwich Township (Bacon's Neck), Cumberland County, New Jersey, Mrs. Bacon was a familiar figure on the new streets of Narberth Park in her phaeton carriage. She is fondly remembered as the active voice among Quaker women in our community's earliest quasi-civic group.

southernmost portion of the borough, calling it “Rockland Farm.” Of Salem, New Jersey colonial ancestry, Wood kept twelve Alderney cows, a Dearborn wagon, brown and sorrel horses and a bay’s mare at that farm, marked “C. S. Wood Estate” on the official 1895-96 borough map.

In an 1894 agreement between Charles S. Wood’s executors and the Spring Garden Insurance Company, they jointly declared their intention to go ahead and develop building lots on their tracts independently of each other, now that they were opening up a Woodside-to-Rockland extension of Narberth Avenue called South Narberth Avenue.

There was never a takeover by the insurance company of the Wood tract. Instead this last-to-be-developed large section of the borough stayed a while longer in the hands of its executors (R. Francis Wood and prominent Philadelphia landed gentry John H. Packard, and Charles Stewart Wurts). [Eventually], this remaining Narberth south-side land received the name “Narberth Grove” in a conservative plan of lots drawn up for the executors by Garrigues Brothers in April 1899 and affirmed the following month. On the site of Charles S. Wood’s former “Rockland Farm” there stands the borough’s oldest tree, an enormous white oak, patrician, aloof, about four hundred years old, in the rear yard of 303 Chestnut Avenue – it was a mere sapling when Welshman Edward Jones’s settled this tract in 1682.²¹⁷

Belmar

Belmar was the name of a third tract-house development here before Narberth became a borough. Its location²¹⁸ described as “back of Elm” in the November 1890 Public Ledger account proved prophetic, for this strip of land with its ramrod-straight north-south thrust is the town’s physical backbone. Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority’s buses (#44) to Fifth and Market Streets. Philadelphia from Ardmore still travel daily through Narberth along Essex Avenue passing through Narberth’s center. Elm’s other two major tract-house divisions, both east-west, are based upon farmland property-line divisions dating back to colonial times.

Belmar’s launching by Elm Land Improvement Company took place December 4, 1890 with the acquisition of fourteen acres from the Edward R. Price Estate. This was the first purchase by a newly formed land company established to sell lots, build houses and improve land thereabouts. This firm had

²¹⁷ Editor’s note: Further details about the settlement of Narberth Grove are in Chapter 3.

²¹⁸ The site hugged both sides of what is now North Essex Avenue, then non-existent. From Richards’ property line above Windsor Avenue, it extended to the boundary just south of the present Wynnedale Road, of Jacob R. Hagy’s Libertyville farm. It was bounded on the west by Dudley.

obtained the charter of the old Wayne Land Company, and was operating under its provisions. Its work continued more than a decade.

The prime movers²¹⁹ of Belmar were some of the town's most civic-minded and energetic citizens, several of whom (Kreamer, Lowry, Christy) lived on the Vance tract. These men not only set themselves the task of establishing a more densely settled neighborhood. Some also crusaded to have a church crown the hilltop of this tract. Understandably George W. Christy, an Old City liquor dealer and restaurateur, may have felt a twinge of discomfort when he saw determined efforts under way to found a Methodist church on the tract. The outspoken opposition of Methodism toward the abuses of alcohol was well known. In any event, within three years after he built his large turreted house from the designs of architect Minerva Parker Nichols, Christy in 1891 sold his house on its spacious lot and left the area. Ringing in his ears no doubt was an oft-heard dialogue of that day. Told of the new town of Elm, some Methodists were asking: "Is there to be a Methodist Sunday school there?" The answer came back a resounding: "Yes, the best in the vicinity, and there are no saloons here either." For Christy, staying put in such a "dry" neighborhood would be a lot like exile in a temperance colony founded by Methodist ministers, a well-known example of such a place being Ocean City, New Jersey (1878). As for Christy's house by Minerva at 210 North Essex Avenue, it turned out to be a textbook case of what so often happens when the original owner/occupant of a large built-to-order dwelling sells it after only a short time: drastic alterations by the next couple of owners. (Compare the early exterior view²²⁰ of this house with its present-day appearance).

At Narberth Association's October 1892 annual meeting, a motion was presented to hasten the opening of Essex Avenue from Haverford Avenue to its northerly terminus at Montgomery. A good idea, too, that would make new housing in that vicinity more marketable. When Essex Avenue became the principal street of this tract, picturesque views were obtained with turreted Queen Anne Revival houses built at strategic points along this route. This picturesqueness was first glimpsed from afar, looking northward from the lowest point of the road above Windsor.

Far ahead atop the Essex Avenue hill on Price Avenue's northeast corner could easily be seen the tower and wraparound porch of Mrs. Sarah J. Simpson Frederick's house, 201 Price. The highly visible

²¹⁹ The first slate of Elm Land officers announced during the summer as the group was forming were Charles E. Shoemaker, president and superintendent, George W. Christy, vice president, and A. A. Lowry, secretary. Their office and agency was to be at the train station. After the anticipated September launching of the company was delayed three months, Belmar resident-to-be James Chadwick, son-in-law of J. Alexander Simpson, Sr., emerged as a company president. Charles E. Kreamer became its next president.

²²⁰ Photo from the Caldwell family. (Editor's note: not sure where this photo is.)

tower and porch made the house of Sarah and her building contractor husband John F. Frederick a local landmark until it was “modernized” in the 1950s and the tower and two-sided porch removed. Today as one ascends Essex Avenue from Windsor or Woodbine and reaches that hilltop, the tower of a second house still comes partially into view on the same side of Essex. This was originally the house of Sarah’s younger sister, Mrs. Marian M. Simpson Chadwick (wife of James Chadwick) at 200 Sabine Avenue which has kept much of its original character and appearance. At the outset, Mrs. Frederick’s and Mrs. Chadwick’s houses were identical structures set back-to-back on long narrow corner lots sliced from the perimeter of Edward Forsythe’s property, and facing different streets.

Those two turreted houses were built by the first purchaser of lots in Belmar’s housing operation, the reliable and enthusiastic *pater familias* of Narberth’s Simpson family, lawyer J. Alexander Simpson, Sr. He built them to give Belmar a proper send-off and to provide his two daughters, Sarah Jane and Marian, with a convenient place to live at Elm with their young families.

At the lower slopes of the same hill, Papa Simpson’s publisher son, James Cooper Simpson built a more imposing house at 232 North Essex, that remained in the family a long while. Still standing, this house faces into Woodbine Avenue. Belmar’s principal residence, however, was “Chericroft,” built next door for J. George Bucher, a galvanizing products manufacturing firm president and Presbyterian elder. Sixty-unit Narberth Hall Apartments, put up in 1929, now occupies this site of that large Essex Avenue home. Next door to it at 304 North Essex is a spacious Stick Style house where the Conrad Cooper family lived throughout the 1890s, and family member Francis L. Cooper, a photographer of note, made many photos along nearby streets at the time.

No doubt about it, Belmar disrupted Price’s old “Godey’s Lady’s Book village” plan for large lots more than anything to date, and promised to introduce a major north-south avenue (Essex) that eventually would break up the Richards property, slicing it like a sausage. Narberth Public School – located on Belmar’s major cross-street, Sabine Avenue – opened in 1894.²²¹ Charles E. Shoemaker’s Elm Terrace development, perpetuating today the name of Elm Land Development Company, which he originally led, must be considered integral to the Belmar tract. Several of its houses were razed to expand the public-school property.

If Belmar had a “tract architect,” perhaps he was D. Judge DeNean who designed both the old

²²¹Editor’s note: The reader is referred to Chapter 8 where the (1894) origin of Sabine Avenue is mentioned, thanks to the involvement of Edward D. Eyre, owner of a hardware store in Ardmore.

Methodist church²²² and the public school's original building both the same year, 1893. In 1904, Willis G. Hale designed the new public school, his only known work here (now demolished). Also on this tract, church architect Richard C. Loos designed the (now private) house on North Essex Avenue as a Methodist parsonage in 1905. And prominent architect T. P. Chandler did a stone bungalow for Margaret Mendenhall at Essex and Sabine's southwest corner (1909).

The South Side (or “Southside”)

The southside story picks up in April 1889 when architect and civil engineer Charles William Macfarlane of Philadelphia bought thirty and a half acres of William Thomas' land immediately south of the railroad tract. This completely undeveloped property, although reasonably priced, had just changed hands a couple of times and did not have a clear title to it, which would cause Macfarlane grief at a later date.²²³

Meanwhile, making an adventurous start, Macfarlane quickly showed that he was not a fly-by-night operator. Before putting up houses of his own design, he initiated his own systems of water supply and drainage, and he published his methods in a national trade magazine.²²⁴ The upshot was that Macfarlane earned the distinction of having established here at Elm the first waterworks in Lower Merion Township. That system's most conspicuous feature was the picturesque and rustic water tower of stone and shingle that stood on high ground by the tracks near the present site of Narberth Avenue railroad bridge for many years, and was sometimes used as a supply source by passing steam locomotives. Another feature of the system [were] filtration beds. And, of course, water purification was essential because animal blood was pouring down raw from the nearby slaughterhouse into the stream, creating a nuisance and risk to health if he did not cleanse the incoming water.

Pollution had become a recognized problem in Philadelphia since dozens of mills and factories along the Schuylkill River and Wissahickon Creek were found to be polluting the water supply in the

²²² S.W corner Essex and Price Aves.

²²³ The author's notes state that C. Stephenson Gatchell of Haverford bought 30.556 acres of William Thomas's land south of the railroad track for forty-thousand dollars. The same day Gatchell heavily mortgaged this land and sold it to builder Walter B. Smith who next sold it with full acreage still intact to the architect-builder and civil engineer Charles William Macfarlane of Philadelphia in April 1889 for twenty-five thousand dollars.

²²⁴ Old accounts, doubtless colorfully elaborated by the Pennsylvania Railroad promotional efforts because he had granted them right-of-way and land for the rail station, said this had been done with the understanding that the station would always bear the name “Elm” for Thomas' old home in [South] Wales, and because the elm trees on his plantation were a constant reminder of his Welsh birthplace. There exists a southerly Welsh village, Elm Grove, at S. Florence near Tenby that Thomas may have come from – its location about eight miles south of the larger town of Narberth.

mid-nineteenth century. An aqueduct from upstate was proposed, but a more economical solution proved to be to buy and close industries causing the problem. Starting around 1855, this gradually was done, resulting in thirteen miles of Schuylkill riverbanks being purchased upstream from the Fairmount Waterworks. Moreover, as an outcropping of this effort, in 1869 Fairmount Park, the world's largest park of its kind, came into existence, now comprising some 8,700 acres.²²⁵ Still there were isolated incidents of water pollution of that river caused by industries just outside the park's boundaries - such as the problem of seepage from a slaughterhouse in the city's [East] Falls neighborhood in 1877. The downhill flow of liquid wastes and animal blood from the kill floor of our Libertyville slaughterhouse here at Elm, entering the East Branch of Indian Creek at its very source, a major spring located on the slaughterhouse premises, could have developed into the same type of serious problem if[, as mentioned above] developer Charles W. Macfarlane had not addressed the matter in a practical and forthright way by building a water purification system on his downstream tract-house development in 1889-90.

The Philadelphia Suburban Water Company, the now giant regional water company with 260,000 customers in three counties by 1994, and headquartered in Bryn Mawr as Aqua Pennsylvania, eventually purchased this Elm waterworks,²²⁶ water tower and equipment, as it did several other such facilities in the township around the same time, its thirst for expansion then only just beginning.

By August of 1889 Macfarlane entered into a preliminary agreement with the Pennsylvania Railroad to convey land to them provided it be used exclusively for a "passenger station and appurtenances" to be constructed within five years. It was this same structure that SEPTA leased from Amtrak and replaced in 1981 with a new inbound commuter rail station of steel frame and transparent materials, with glazed marquee, "monumental" stairs, ticket office and rest room (Ueland and Junker, architects).

Macfarlane sold his first house to Grove Locher, a Philadelphia and Lancaster business executive who headed a private bank, in April 1890 for \$6,600. Attractive and conspicuously placed with a deeply dipping medieval-style roofline, this large dwelling at 122-124 Elmwood Avenue faces the rail station. Its slightly later owner was Harry S. Atwood who headed his family's center city carpet firm founded before the Civil War. That same month in 1890, Macfarlane sold homes to silverware merchant C.

²²⁵ Because the Schuylkill River was the lifeline for the region's industrial development, more recently a five-county effort by the Schuylkill River Greenway Association is now under way to sketch a \$200,000 master plan to develop the river as a Pennsylvania Heritage Park corridor running all the way from Southwest Philadelphia's historic Bartram's Garden to Reading upstate. The first guided boat tours of the Schuylkill in more than a hundred years took place in June 1994.

²²⁶ The author was shown those documents during a visit to the Bryn Mawr office.

Arthur Roberts at 114 Elmwood and to real estate agent William S. McClellan's wife Adelia York at 125 Woodside.

In May, Macfarlane registered his compact grid plan for 128 building lots prepared the previous September by Garrigues Brothers, civil engineers. By then, Macfarlane had made considerable progress in putting up substantial, turreted Queen Anne Revival houses with high-hipped roofs on those lots in scatter-shot fashion. He had already named four of the southside's earliest streets (Elmwood, Woodside, Thomas, and Readrah), as deeds show. Only two southside roads are older: Rockland Avenue laid out by farmer James Sullivan before 1878, and what we now call East Wynnewood Road, 1878. Also in May 1890, the Spring Garden Insurance Company began handling the mortgage of a prior owner of Macfarlane's tract.

On November 13, [1890,] the Public Ledger reported that C. W. Macfarlane had already finished eleven houses, was building two more, and "selling them as rapidly as they could be completed." Among the earliest Macfarlane homeowners was banjo maker and music publisher Samuel Swaim Stewart, son of Dr. Franklin Stewart of "Swaim's Panacea" fame.²²⁷ An 1897 account in the nationally and internationally circulated music magazine that S. S. Stewart published had this to say about him:

His home life is most pleasant, and at Narberth [200 South Narberth Avenue] ... is his summer residence. Mr. Stewart and his two bright boys, great horsemen, are frequently conspicuous along the delightful suburban drives.

Another early Macfarlane homebuyer was energetic Wilmington-born lawyer J. Alexander Simpson, Sr. of 116 Woodside.²²⁸ A prime mover in organizational effort in the town, Simpson may have been the highest-ranking member of the Masonic fraternity this community ever had. He came across as quite a strong character, but also quite a sympathetic one, as much as any other individual in the period just before Elm became Narberth. Long active at the Philadelphia Bar and in city politics, he was an expert in election law, served as counsel in many leading political contests before the courts and held a number of elective and appointed offices. A commissioner of the old district of Northern Liberties, he was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1873, the same year serving an unfinished term as State Register of Wills. Simpson was also a member of the city's volunteer fire department and, as was quite common at the time, maintained his law office near Independence Hall.

²²⁷ Located next to Christ Church, he published books and the first periodical of its kind, S. S. Stewart's Banjo and Guitar Journal, begun in 1886, employing national and foreign correspondents.

²²⁸ Editor's note: J. A. Simpson is described earlier in connection with Almira Vance's development of Narberth Park.

Arriving in Philadelphia as a youth from his Wilmington, Delaware birthplace and of Scottish ancestry, Simpson attended public schools, learned the trade of watchcase-maker and briefly went into business for himself as a watchmaker and jeweler, but gave this up to search for opportunities to study law – an appointment as deputy in the Philadelphia Sheriff’s office (where his son Alex also would later serve) strengthening his resolve. Admitted to the bar in 1853, he lived with his young family near where John J. Ridgway was growing up.

When the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie gave a million-and-a-half dollars in 1900 to construct thirty branch libraries, communities reaping this benefit were expected to be forthcoming and provide books and furniture. By this time, the late J. Alexander Simpson’s lawyer son Alex did more. He bought land in the city neighborhood where his family had lived just before moving to Narberth, and deeded it to Philadelphia so that one of the Carnegie libraries, the Haddington Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia, might be erected there in memory of his late father. Alex also erected a Methodist church in the same neighborhood in honor of his mother.

Macfarlane used the tract-name Elm with a flourish – perhaps in deference to the land’s former owner, William Thomas, who may have proposed the railroad station be called Elm or perhaps because Macfarlane knew the water and sewage services he was offering homebuyers were superior to anything yet available in the surrounding township, so he attempted to retain the name Elm as a mark of independence and distinction from the north side’s Narberth Park development. In any event, some people in 1890 and since, not realizing Edward R. Price had founded a town of Elm just north of the tracks as early as 1881, mistakenly have assumed Macfarlane’s subdivision was the first local housing development of that name.

The pace of Macfarlane’s development of his own lots continued at a rapid rate until early 1892. It then slackened for a dozen years, most of his twenty-six sales having occurred early. One crucial event had narrowed Macfarlane’s prospects and removed the drainage and water supply systems from his control. C. Stevenson Gatchell of Haverford defaulted on his mortgage late in 1891, owing \$27,759.42 with interest. Macfarlane and his customers had “release of mortgage” papers for individual lots, so they did not lose the shirt off their backs. Clearly the stage was set for the takeover of the south-side project by the Spring Garden Insurance Company.

That fire insurance firm in Philadelphia founded in 1835 by conservative and practical businessmen acquired the entire tract (except “released” lots) at sheriff’s sale for \$5000 in March 1892. Company president was then William G. Warden. Board members included Addison Hutton, sometimes

called the “Quaker architect of Bryn Mawr,” hat manufacturer John B. Stetson, and banker William Wesley Kurtz whose son William B. Kurtz was painter Thomas Eakins’ stockbroker and a portrait subject the American master painted in 1903.²²⁹

It probably did not escape the notice of Hutton, designer of Philadelphia’s mammoth new Ridgway Library landmark, that John J. Ridgway, kin of the library donor, had been developing land directly across the tracks. That circumstance could have sparked Hutton’s interest in Elm in the first place. And his vote on the board would have carried considerable weight in real estate matters.

Hutton soon designed a wooden field-house headquarters for the insurance company near the station platform on the southside. This small building stood its ground for many years, changing hands several times and serving a variety of uses. After its takeover of the Macfarlane tract, the Spring Garden Insurance Company maintained the streets, lights, and looked after drainage and water supply units it now owned. It sold lots to Baldwin Locomotive superintendent Charles M. Townsend and thirty-seven others through 1914.

Narberth Park Association (Narberth Association) (Narberth’s first Civic Association)

The first local civic group, Narberth Park Association,²³⁰ was founded by fifteen people – four women and eleven men in October 1889. This improvement group became the single most important ticket to local autonomy, and it laid a firm foundation for home rule so swiftly enacted thereafter. This association’s efforts also marked the first time any initiative was taken to provide “north side” community services such as the smaller “southside” had from the start. The eventual fruit of its labors – foreseen by some, but surely not all of its members – was Narberth’s declaration of independence as a borough some five-and-a-half years later.

That this neighbors’ group was a true civic association working for the general advancement of the welfare of the local community as a whole and not just for Vance/Ridgway tract homeowners can be seen from the gradual broadening that the makeup of this group’s membership underwent. Also, it can be seen in the tasks this group set for itself, although it did not always seem to strive effectively to link the interests of residents from both sides of the tracks, as we shall see.

²²⁹ The Philadelphia Museum of Art now owns Eakins’ painting of Kurtz.

²³⁰ The activities of this civic group up to 1895 [the author] compiled from the [Summary of Narberth Records](#) at the Borough of Narberth office.

The fifteen solidly middle-class founders of the organization were a very focused group, the common thread being that all owned large Victorian houses on the Ridgway/Vance tract. But such exclusiveness was short-lived, as the association membership soon expanded to include a dozen other north side homeowners adjoining the Ridgway/Vance tract as well as others living within it. Meanwhile, four prominent “southsiders” soon gave invaluable support and in a couple of cases even served as office-holders in the Narberth Park Association.

That civic group’s first elected officers²³¹ included a corporation president as the presiding chairman, a reminder that much careful attention was devoted by this association to forming a board of directors’ hierarchy of business and professional leaders equal to the challenging task of running their group as a quasi-government organization. Among the first items of business at that association’s October 1889 organizational meeting was the appointment of a three-member committee²³² to visit the county seat of Norristown and investigate the cause of high tax assessment. That action on the matter brought assessment reductions a month later.

Activities of the Narberth Park Association have often been described. There were committees for public safety, public works, ways and means, and membership. Ash collecting was started at \$1.25 per week, garbage-collecting free. A bell was purchased and placed on Forrest Avenue as a fire alarm, fire extinguishers bought, and all-purpose alarm whistles distributed to members. A \$200 reward was posted for capture and conviction of burglars, a continuing problem, along with various “public nuisances.”

Unquestionably, crime²³³ was the most emotional suburban problem at the time, especially in communities located at the city’s edges (in this case, western edge), both along the Schuylkill River and along dry land. Such troubles actually may have spurred the growth and development of Lower Merion’s police force into the model department it eventually became, emulated in many respects (even in its English-style uniforms) by numerous suburban police departments throughout the area.

Within a year of its founding, the very energetic Narberth Park Association leaders, besides forming a range of active committees to seek improvements, also branched out by starting a new tract development, Belmar, which began with an improvement association of its own, its membership consisting of new property-owners there and Vance tract residents. The Belmar organizers soon talked

²³¹ Alfred A. Lowry of Otis Elevator Company elected presiding chairman; Harry J. Ketcham, secretary; Charles E. Shoemaker appointed temporary chair.

²³² Charles E. Kreamer, George W. Christy and William L. Owens

²³³ As late as 1899, citizens were agitating to obtain a “night patrol service.” Narberth Local News, Dec. 9. 1899, p.1.

of building their own church (something like the Narberth Park Association people also were discussing), Belmar being located on the Edward R. Price farm which his executor by then had been slowly selling off as building lots for several years without many takers. This unusual expansion initiative led by Ridgway/Vance tract residents, and participated in extensively by Simpson family members, strongly suggests a new jump-start was being made to reactivate farmer Price's Quaker-friendly town launched earlier with big Hobbs "Lady's Book houses" on the Price farm, but was now going forward focused on somewhat smaller-scale dwellings. By the end of 1890, "Park" was dropped from the association's name.

The unification effort to bring together the several separate tract developments was beginning to look promising. And Price's hand-picked developer-in-residence, stalwart Samuel Richards would have been comfortable with the plans of its organizers (predominantly Methodists) to make the Belmar district – and possibly the whole town – a "dry" community, since Richards and his brother had placed an embargo of liquor²³⁴ in the New Jersey town of Atco that they founded.

Another distinctive feature of the Narberth Park group: besides having ambitious goals, about one-fourth of its members were women, whereas the other two improvement groups apparently had no women members. Possibly the pronounced female tilt to this organization is an indication that not only was the Narberth tract headed by a woman developer, but also a deliberate effort was being made to interest women residing in Mrs. Vance's tract in the town-building aspects of the project at hand. For only a few years earlier, farmer Price had highlighted the classic Quaker tendency to elevate women to leadership roles when he singled out two women – the socially prominent wife of lot-buyer Samuel Richards, and the outspoken wife of the lot-buying architect Isaac Harding Hobbs, seeing to it that those women's names were inscribed as land-owners on official atlas map of 1881, not their husbands' names, although only the latter appear on the actual deeds. Neither Mrs. Hobbs nor Mrs. Vance were Quakers, but John Ridgway came of a Quaker background, as did at least one female member²³⁵ of the Narberth Park voluntary group, and more than a few of its male members. By contrast, the voluntary organizations of the other two tracts had mainline Protestant membership, which at that time called for deference by women to male leadership.

Regular attendance at the Narberth Association monthly meetings averaged between fifteen and

²³⁴ For their restrictive covenant in the deeds of their Atco land holdings prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages, see Camden County Historical Society Bulletin, No. 334, 1981-82, p. 33.

²³⁵ Rebecca Elkinton Bacon.

eighteen members by July 1891. To join that association required, besides payment of an entrance fee and monthly dues, that the applicant receive a favorable vote from members in good standing. Membership was continuing to climb as new housing was completed.

One clear cut way the new residential areas north and south of the tracks showed an early cooperative spirit was by pooling their resources to obtain street lamps. The Narberth Association got moving on this in 1890, as people were wondering if each property-owner should buy a street lamp. Complaints about insufficient lighting and a suggestion that the association take over the lighting of lamps were initially referred to the group's committee on public works. At the time, a lamplighter earned \$7.50 a month looking after the lamps. The next year it was decided that the Narberth Association would "fill, light and attend to and furnish" oil for (thirty-eight) lamps in front of houses of members and non-members alike on both sides of the railroad and pay for same. After electrified street lights were installed by a utility company in 1893, cost benefits were derived from contracting for the work in advance, as had been done for several years already by Narberth Association in arranging for other services. [...]

Typically, the way the Narberth Association conducted its business, it was able to derive cost benefits when contracting for services. At its January 1890 meeting, a contract was made to remove ashes from members' houses, the charge for the entire group (not individually) was \$1.25 a week. Arrangements were also made for removal of garbage free of charge. When residents complained of the irregularity of the garbage collection, the collector countered with a modern-sounding complaint of his own – about people who put ashes into their garbage. Meanwhile the ash collector was requesting that people try to put their ashes in boxes because barrels were just too heavy to carry from the rear of a house. At this time, the association used an empty lot for dumping the ashes collected. By 1892, it was decided that cesspools would be pumped out from October first to April first, only between midnight and six o'clock in the morning. Use of carbolic acid was recommended for wash bowls.

Things were apparently getting out of hand with the large number of local residents being provided for, so a decision was made in February 1893 to stop collecting ashes and garbage of non-members. One of the early actions taken by the new Borough Council (in April 1895) was its agreement to reimburse both the Narberth and Elm associations, the two active community groups, for collecting ashes and garbage on bills contracted since March first. Effective after September first during that first year as an independent town, Council relieved the Narberth Association of the responsibility of collecting ashes and garbage.

Sidewalks were another matter of ongoing concern to the fledgling community throughout this same period. Sap pine boards were used for boardwalks, and there were also plank crossings. Repairs were frequent, and people talked of using flagstones for street crossings as well as macadamized walkways.

Meanwhile, no sooner had new residents started arriving here than they talked of the need for a public school. In April 1890, Narberth Park Association's public works committee was authorized to "call upon the school board and act in conjunction with them in selecting a school site." A special meeting was held in September to consider whether to propose the names of Joseph Mullineaux, Jr. and Alfred A. Lowry to the Lower Merion School Board to fill the "existing vacancy," presumably on that board. A suggestion about putting forward \$500 to start a schoolhouse was tabled until the next meeting. Miss Anna Grace Elkinton, niece of Association member Rebecca Elkinton Bacon, made application to undertake to teach a school, if the Association would take charge of the matter. In January 1892, the aspiring teacher was told the Association could not become actively involved, as the management of schools was not one of its functions. A month later, the committee appointed to call on the School Board reported no action yet. On March ninth, a letter was read from Mr. Bevan, a township school board member, stating that the board was moving in the direction of building a schoolhouse at Elm and hoped to have it ready by September first, 1892. The rapid success of this initiative showed the ambitiousness and clout of citizens' well-organized effort.

Elm Crime (Public Nuisances) - 1889-1893

The new local citizenry living north of the railroad tracks at Elm Station discussed crime for the first time in 1889 at the third official meeting of the Narberth Park Association. On that occasion on November 26, a two-hundred-dollar reward was offered "for arrest and conviction of burglars." And homeowner Charles E. Kreamer of Forrest Avenue at the southwest corner of Windsor was authorized "to procure whistles to be used by members for alarm when necessary." At the December 10, 1889 meeting, a signal – one long and two short – was adopted for those whistles.

Eleven months later at the November 12 meeting, William R. Wright, a homeowner in the first block of Grayling Avenue, cited the unruly conduct of some of the neighborhood boys and said their behavior amounted to "a public nuisance," his heated comment being referred to the Public Safety Committee. In the association's December 10, 1890 report on the unruly boys, the railroad station agent and her sons (or son) were singled out as being responsible for most of the misconduct complained of,

through mismanagement of the station.

The Second Annual Meeting treasurer's report on October 14, 1891 mentioned two dollars spent for cards offering a reward, and six dollars spent for whistles. At the special November 2 meeting called to discuss a rash of recent burglaries, William L. Owens described entering his house on Forrest Avenue's west side corner of Haverford Avenue on October 26 and finding a man in his bedroom. The nearby house of Mr. A. Perry Redifer on the southeast corner Windsor and Essex Avenues was also broken into. The association responded by giving authority to employ a detective at its expense. The association's president was authorized to "write the Governor of the State asking for the appointment of the members of our Committee on Public Safety as special policemen under the Act known as the 'Coal and Iron Police Act.'"

By November 11, the detective had not yet been able to apprehend the burglars. And meanwhile the Committee on Public Safety was instructed "to swear out warrants for arrest of a band of vagrants in the neighborhood, and have them committed to prison at Norristown." (As yet, there were no police in Lower Merion Township.) On December 9, the constable reported vagrants, saying the Norristown prison is overcrowded, resulting in the early release of vagrants. The detective, still searching for the burglars, had not charged for his services. On January 13, 1892 the subject of undesirable tramps in the town was discussed. And the complaints about vagrants and tramps continued into mid-February.

On July 29, a special meeting was held to consider employing a watchman for the town. Payment of one dollar was authorized to be paid to him, whereupon they decided to see if funds could be raised to justify hiring a watchman or policeman for the town. At the August 10, 1892 meeting, it was announced that Mr. Ulrich was hired as watchman, and thirty-six dollars was raised for that purpose.

On May 10, 1893, the Public Safety Committee reported "the stable at Haverford and Essex Avenues occupied by Richard Wright as a dwelling had become a public nuisance and in the event of a contagious disease breaking out would become a menace to the safety of the community; fifteen colored people and three horses had been known to eat and sleep there, although the place was without water and devoid of ordinary conveniences." This was left in Committee with power to act. Doubtless these occupants were hack drivers for the brisk business then being conducted in the transport of sports fans back and forth between the local train station and the Belmont race track on Meetinghouse Lane.

Creation of Montgomery Pike

Also, a significant event of 1890 that unmistakably affected the neighborhood was the creation

of a toll road on Elm's front street (now Montgomery Avenue). That year a company called the Philadelphia, Bala and Bryn Mawr Turnpike Company, headed by a railroad man, was incorporated to improve the avenue and operate it as a toll road whereupon the street became known as Montgomery Pike.²³⁶ Creation of this toll road took place at the height of the trolley line construction craze, and it kept Lower Merion Township entirely free of trolleys, except for the Llanerch line to Ardmore (which lasted to about World War II), several other lines having been proposed. This creation of a Montgomery Avenue toll road was part of a strategy for the railroad to keep its supremacy on the Main Line – and incidentally keep out the riffraff - for it followed eight years after the purchase in 1882 of the nearby Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, the nation's oldest toll road, by a company headed by Pennsylvania Railroad vice president Alexander J. Cassatt. A Lower Merion Township supervisor, Cassatt had been concerned with local road conditions and is credited with macadamizing the township's main roads. To upgrade what is familiarly known today as U.S. 30, he formed the Lancaster Avenue Improvement Company and went to work on it, all the while keeping the toll-taking of that road busy. His basic reason for acquiring this road – and his railroad colleague's reason for creating Montgomery Avenue turnpike as well – was in order to bar trolleys which would compete with the railroad. Those turnpikes were sold to the State in 1917. Some long-time local residents still refer to Montgomery Pike and Lancaster Pike.

By 1915, amid talk of abolishing tolls, discussions in which the Suburban Federation of Civic Associations played a key role,²³⁷ the main objection some people had to settling here was said to be that Narberth had only one means of transportation – trains. Narberth's pro-trolley faction claimed trolleys do more to build up small towns than trains, and that if tolls were abolished and trolleys introduced, Narberth would double its population in five years.²³⁸

As for the housing construction boom in progress in the nearby suburbs toward the turn of the century, certainly a contemporary account had been correct when it declared about Elm and nearby communities:

²³⁶ "Pike" [refers to] a weapon of ancient and medieval warfare that was still used centuries later by lords who stationed a guard with a pike or long shaft barring each end of their road so as to collect a toll from people using it. When the toll was paid, the guard would "turn the pike" and allow the traveler to pass through. On Montgomery Pike horseless buggies, horses and wagons, horseback riders took to the back roads. Tolls in which the toll-collectors lived with their families were built at five intersections along a route of about the same number of miles from the western city limits to Bryn Mawr including the south side of Montgomery Avenue opposite the Merion Meeting House. (This structure still exists. [It] was moved to Meeting House Lane in the Borough.)

²³⁷ Our Town, 4 November 1915.

²³⁸ Our Town, 20 January 1916, p.2. letter to editor from Frank Canfel favoring trolleys for Narberth.

All along the line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, for several miles outside Philadelphia, are indications of remarkable growth and a very healthful condition of matters in the real estate line.

Becoming a Borough

So widespread was community development over a large area of Lower Merion Township, in fact, that public improvements were happening at a snail's pace in this neighborhood. The residents' association of the Vance tract set out to explore what could be done to implement change and speed up delivery of needed services. Thus full-scale mobilization to attempt to become a borough began in June 1893 with the appointment by Narberth Association of a "committee of five²³⁹ ... to look into the advisability of obtaining a borough charter," which had been proposed by one of its members at the monthly meeting. Together the five canvassed "the town," as they put it, and gathered signatures on a petition of "nearly all" the resident property owners. By July, that borough committee reported "satisfactory progress and good prospects of the movement being successful." As active opposition to borough status for Narberth was anticipated to be "confined to two or three resident freeholders" ("northsiders," that is), the association felt optimistic about the outcome. So the discussion turned to boundaries for the proposed borough.²⁴⁰ At the time, the chief attraction of independent rule was that boroughs had wider powers to establish public improvements than could then be attained under supervisors' rule in the township.

Before 1900, Lower Merion Township was a rural area with no police force. It lacked a Board of Commissioners and local ordinances. There were no drainage systems or sanitary sewers or streetlights under township auspices. The Board of Health did not exist, nor were there any playgrounds, parks, zoning and building laws or Fire Marshal. The only way of guarding private property or homes was if individual citizens or groups hired a private policemen or watchman for that purpose. Public law enforcement was in the hands of the constable who, if he suddenly needed assistance, could deputize people from the community (shades of an old cowboy movie). The Board of Supervisors at the time had no clout. It had to content itself with chores such as looking after minor roads. The township school system too was outmoded. Once, when its township supervisors made a move to hire a superintendent

²³⁹ Committee in June 1893 consisting of August H. Mueller, Sylvester J. Baker, Charles E. Kreamer, David J. Hunter, and Edgar A. M. E'Etang.

²⁴⁰ The new committee consisted of a mansion-dwelling pharmaceutical firm head, an investment broker, a wood engraver, the treasurer of a business corporation in the city, and the publisher/lithographer who had suggested taking this step.

at a thousand-dollar annual salary, a bitter attack was launched against their “extravagance.”

Narberth was virtually alone in the county in taking the path it did – its situation quite unlike that of West Conshohocken. Established in 1874, that small borough was carved out of some of the county’s most rugged terrain in equal parts from Lower Merion and Upper Merion townships, to serve an industrial site in otherwise rural riverside surroundings.

Against such a background of need for public services as Lower Merion displayed, and with communities making the best of a difficult situation in the township by organizing their own cooperative associations of residents to do road-building, install street lights and hire private police, why did not more local communities try for separate borough status as Narberth did? Certainly Bryn Mawr and Ardmore came closest to following Narberth’s secessionist lead among the interested parties.

Citizens met in Bryn Mawr in 1895 to discuss that community’s possible secession from the township, but when the question came to a vote, a large majority opposed the move. Upon applying to the court for borough status around the same period, Ardmore was turned down because it included part of Haverford in its proposal and quite a few Haverford people, incensed at this, rose up and fought strongly against it.

Then followed a little introspection on the township’s part, some people in high places putting their heads together and a plan was devised to rejuvenate the township operational methods and create a new form of local government, centered in Ardmore. Thus, largely through Lower Merion’s initiatives, the legislature of the Commonwealth passed the First Class Township Act. The terms were that any township in the state believing itself no longer a rural area and having three hundred residents per square mile was eligible to set up a government appropriate to a city community, while still remaining a township. The line quickly formed to take advantage of the new law. And the first community in the state to do so was Lower Merion, closely followed by Haverford and Radnor townships, which in this way gained every right possible under borough government. Lower Merion’s first board of commissioners was organized on March 5, 1900. And before the end of the year the township had a police department comprising a chief and six patrolmen who took to the streets on horseback and pedaled their bicycles.

Momentum kept on building in Narberth to reach all the way toward independence in the form of incorporation and the obtaining of a charter. Yet the boundaries set forth for the proposed new municipality totally omitted Elm’s housing subdivision which had so many amenities immediately south of the train tracks, and this spelled trouble ahead. After the Grand Jury approved the borough petition

by a seventeen to four vote, efforts were made to win over opponents of the Borough Plan and surveyors' services sought. Yet by year's end, "several exceptions had been filed at Norristown" – that is, objections to the proposal – so the committee sought expert advice on this matter. The court decision, expected in February, when it finally came two months later was a turndown. The borough committee reported that "Judge Swartz had refused application for a borough charter, assigning as his principal reason that we did not include the whole village."²⁴¹ And this was true. Even despite the pulling together that had been accomplished by the quasi-civic association, the two sections of town seemed to be operating on different wave lengths.

For the residents of Mrs. Vance's and other adjacent north side housing tracts had acted only on their own behalf when they sought borough status. Having no formal connection at all with the separately run southside or its water and sewage systems, and despite their common post office in the railway station (both facilities recently renamed Narberth), they excluded the southside from their proposal. And for their part, the southside residents still felt self-sufficient, rhetoric or no rhetoric. This is reflected in a deposition then before the court declaring that the neighborhood south of the tracks had "all the heart could ask for, such as elegant roads, well-kept boardwalks, elegant water supply, first-class drainage."

Add to this the fact that considerable opposition to creating a borough was voiced by owners of large property, by the railroad and by others who saw no benefit. And it is not surprising that Judge Aaron S. Swartz ruled against the borough charter the first time around. The court's decision indicated that the Act of Assembly dealt with incorporation of a whole community, not just one part of it. Undeniably the judge considered the southside essential to the Narberth community.

It was back to square one for the Borough Plan measure, and this caused some momentary confusion in the ranks. The borough committee was enlarged to twelve members, and instructed to continue its efforts. Three days later the size increase was rescinded, and the committee's five-member makeup resumed. Whereupon A. H. Mueller resigned from that borough committee, doubtless feeling keenly the sting of a major setback in an effort that he had not only advocated, but led. Meanwhile, a bigger task lay before the association of dealing with the new ultimatum it now faced: either gain southside residents' support on the borough question, or else concede total failure of the project.

241 In the first proposal to County courts to incorporate Narberth as a borough, the proposed boundaries will surprise some. They were to be the center lines of North Wynnewood Avenue at the railroad tunnel to Montgomery Avenue along it to Merion Road, along Merion Road to Bowman Avenue, to the railroad tracks, along these to North Wynnewood Avenue. At the association's annual meeting on October 10, 1893, a report was made that "The Grand Jury has approved the Borough petition by a vote of seventeen to four." Whereupon it was decided to try to win over opponents of the borough plan with a view to "reconciling them and securing their cooperation."

Narberth Association's response to this challenge was immediate. Redoubling its efforts, it authorized an April 1894 public meeting to discuss the borough proposition. In so many ways, it was already behaving like an arm of government. One outcome of this was creation of a Citizens Committee on the Borough consisting of fifteen male members – a prominent banjo manufacturer being the only “southsider” among them, and the others a familiar enough group. They had plenty to do, and they did it, judging from the results.

In June 1894, a larger group of citizens returned to court with a new petition specifying the southside as far south as Rockland Avenue should be incorporated as Narberth. In it they declared there were 129 property owners. Of some 78 resident freeholders, 47 were recorded in favor and had signed the petition (including Elm's hand-picked “first couple,” Samuel and Elizabeth Richards), one resident remaining neutral. Some 38 non-resident freeholders signed the petition, as well as about 70 out of a total number of about 120 voters. Each of the various categories had a majority in favor, one of the petitioners, August H. Mueller, stated.

This second appeal to court was successful. The report of the county Grand Jury for the June sessions 1894 said simply that the application received the necessary majority of members' votes. But the Narberth Association noted the actual Grand Jury tally was twenty-two to one in favor of incorporation.

When Judge Swartz finally confirmed that Grand Jury's finding on January 21, 1895, he fixed the Narberth boundaries somewhat differently than proposed. He included the area south of Narberth rail station, all right. But because it was exclusively farmland and had no building lots yet laid out in it, he sliced off and excluded from the new borough one 61.5-acre section southward from Haverford Avenue extending from Narberth Avenue to Montgomery Avenue and Merion Road, and as far as the railroad track, letting this remain as Merion. He probably was unaware that some of the land he excluded had been part of Edward ap Rees' original land grant from William Penn (1682), nearly all of which is contained in Narberth Borough. At the same time, in accord with the court's decree, the judge set the date for the first borough election as the third Tuesday in February 1895.

In large measure, the successful persuasion of southside residents to consolidate as part of the new town resulted from long and careful preparation by “the Narberth Association of Elm, Montgomery County, Pa.,” as the local civic group was called after dropping the word Park from its name.²⁴² Long

²⁴² The word Park had been dropped from the association's name on 10 December 1890, according to Narberth Association minutes.

before the Narberth borough question had its day in court the first or second time, the gentle arm-twisting began. Thus, gradually the leading members of the Elm Association residents' group "southsiders" had begun to attend Narberth Association meetings, and Elm Association even had one "mole" active in it, the tireless community-building J. Alexander Simpson, Sr., father of Mrs. Vance's lawyer. Meanwhile, Reverend Philip L. Jones was the lightning rod of the Elm tract's sizeable settlement of Baptist clergy when it came to outreach matters of this kind, and even the Elm subdivision's founder C. W. Macfarlane attended some of those Narberth meetings. When those "southsiders" did attend, they found other local residents present who lived beyond the confines of the Vance tract itself to the north of it, and beyond Belmar also because the Narberth Park group knew how to encourage broad attendance. For a single term each, Narberth Association even had, as its president and vice-president respectively, the two above-mentioned "southsiders" Simpson and Jones. The minutes of the meeting that saw the election of Simpson as Narberth Association's new president – he was the only "southsider" who ever held that post – note that Simpson expressed in fitting terms his appreciation of the honor conferred and promised to do all in his power to assist in making the Association an instrument for the general advancement of the welfare of our community.

There seems little doubt that, in Simpson's eyes, advancement of the community's welfare clearly mandated one thing: unification for self-rule. Meanwhile, the presence of Belmar attendees at the meeting seemed assured due to the "subsidiary" status of this tract-house development as a Narberth Park offshoot. Simpson, a Belmar founder, was a member of all three residents' groups. Apparently there was never a time he did not think of the community as a whole.

So, in its persistent efforts to knit a community together, the Narberth Association overcame many obstacles in securing the indispensable cooperation of the southside community group. Elm Association was the voice of residents whose tract had offered the next-door Narberth Park residents stiff competition – those aloof "southsiders" regarding their much-touted development as far superior to anything the north side had to offer. They too had a church of their own. Besides, it would be decades before some far north-end sections of the new borough gave up (some of them reluctantly) their use of well water, while Elm Association's residents could boast of having had indoor spigots and plumbing since 1890.

Worthy of note, while townspeople were awaiting the judge's final decision on the borough question late in 1894, Narberth Association's existing slate of officers was re-nominated and reelected for another term, enabling those most involved to wait out the results while in office. This dovetailing

of efforts is but another indication (of many) that the Narberth Association was indeed a quasi-government body. Parties most opposed to incorporation, said to be some large property owners, the railroad, and others, meanwhile apparently had stopped saying no, but were they convinced, and actually saying yes? This is not altogether certain.

Nearly two weeks prior to the approval by the county court in January 1895 of the incorporated Borough of Narberth, and in hopeful anticipation of this major step, a citizen proposed going ahead with the necessary preparations. By then, the association's president already had appointed a committee to meet the committee from the southside, so those two groups might together select candidates for Borough officers to be presented at the forthcoming town meeting. This was approved, and done. The fact that only one south-side candidate was elected in that first borough election does confirm that most of the momentum for self-rule still was coming, as it always had, from the north side. So, at the outset at least, the leadership was indeed concentrated there.

In December of that first year, after it was decided to place the books and papers of the Narberth Association in the custody of the Town Clerk, that quasi-governmental organization disbanded, "having been relieved of its responsibilities by the Borough Government."

Emblazoned on the center of Narberth's corporate seal is a treaty elm, symbol of our former village that Price founded at the place where Indian councils were held. At this time, a tradition was well established whereby certain individuals and institutions (notably Haverford College and Pennsylvania Hospital, the nation's first) planted a "treaty elm," either by obtaining a cutting taken from the famous elm itself in Lower Kensington that had sheltered William Penn's celebrated treaty with the Indians of 1682 or by planting another elm of the same species in memory of the Kensington tree, and calling it a treaty elm. The branches of that particular elm tree were considered emblems of peace and are mentioned as such in Judge Peter's lengthy poem, "Penn's Treaty Elm," which begins:

Let each take a relic from that hallowed tree,
Which, like Penn, whom it shaded, immortal should be.
As the pride of our forests, let Elms be renown'd,
For the justly priz'd virtues with which they abound.²⁴³

Completely surrounded by 23.34 square-mile Lower Merion Township, the borough occupies

²⁴³ Opening lines of the lengthy poem by Judge Richard Peters, John F. Watson, Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time (Edition of 1854, published by subscription), v. 1. pp.145-6.

0.52 square miles, its boundaries the same now as originally set. Ours is the only community in Lower Merion Township except the borough of West Conshohocken (1874) ever to sever ties with the parent township. Narberth accomplished this when efforts to attain boroughhood were at a fever-high pitch, during the time that nearby Ardmore and Bryn Mawr briefly flirted with seeing their own independence. But subsequent passage of a township classification law definitely cooled down the fervor of communities seeking borough status. And when the question of re-joining the township did eventually come up for discussion twice (during the 1930s), it was not due to dissatisfaction over Narberth's form of government. Instead it was seen as a "big easy" to obtain assistance for the struggling local public school.²⁴⁴

Rockledge, another Montgomery County borough (established 1893 from within Abington Township to the northeast) in the 1920s became the only municipality in the county ever to have presented a petition (later withdrawn) to the courts to secede and join neighboring Philadelphia County. By such a move, those borough residents had sought to improve their streets. Located far up county in relatively unchanged rustic surrounding, the borough of Green Lane, established in 1875, is Montgomery County's smallest incorporated community, with a population of five hundred forty-two in 1980 and an expanse of 0.31 square miles.

Summary

What was the importance of community and of community organizations in creating the look and feel of a town here? Some of those ingredients had lain dormant and simply awaited widespread use, like the rail station that, when new, stood aloof and lone here beside an old regional road across farmland. It was a station frequented mainly by Centennial crowds and later only by racetrack buffs who seemed the exclusive users of that station stop for the next few years. And soon there was the nucleus of a new Quaker-friendly community, Elm, struggling to be born on a local farm just north of that station, but so far consisting only of big mansions on large tracts – a farmer's unfulfilled dream of what a new town should be, with himself as developer. Yet within a decade, some activity materialized about putting the farmer's village idea into action. At the same time another promising town-building ingredient was clearly mandated in writing when, just south of that rail station another devout farmer

²⁴⁴ Editor's note: In another version of this event, the author stated: "In 1936, there was a court hearing for a hotly contested petition to recall Narberth's borough incorporation, but the petition was withdrawn when the evidence seemed to show that some people had signed more than one name. A citizen's group calling itself Victory Committee for Home Rule for Narberth went home happy that day."

sold land for a housing subdivision with a deed restriction stipulating that a Baptist church permanent structure of stone must be constructed there within 24 months. True, Quakers had rallied around to create the beginnings of the town, but it was Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists who most earnestly took up the cause, initially building community by constructing churches and a public school before seeking self-rule. These new residents were remarkably successful and swift in obtaining results, considering the opposition they faced from the start and for years to come from some powerful opponents such as the railroad. But no sooner did they pull together as a community than the recognition they sought swiftly came.

Chapter 3 - Physical Development and Sections of Narberth - 1895-1920

Introduction - Progressive Narberth – The Shaping of a Community.....	131
Sections of town.....	132
Sections of town, contrasted	134
Class differences	141
Early religious groups	143
Class differences in ethnic groups	145
Enablers of industry	147
Class differences among ethnics - Irish	148
Class conflict in the military	149
Class and jobs.....	154
Ethnics, jobs and migrants from the South	154
Town-Making a Deliberate Policy.....	156
Early Leadership	157
Six Leaders.....	160
Churches in Narberth	164
Early Construction on North Wynnewood Avenue (Narberth’s “Gold Coast”)	172
The Arrival of W. E. DuBois	174
Narberth Grove	179
Brick Row	183
Two Builders – Early Twentieth Century - The Harris-Smedley Rivalry.....	184
Individual Houses	195
Southside	196

Introduction - Progressive Narberth – The Shaping of a Community

No sooner did the ink dry on the judge's signature of the 1895 document declaring Narberth's independence than the town was propelled into a period of more rapid growth in building construction of all types than at any other time before or since. Networking launched the borough and networking sustained it, as the elected volunteers running the town government and the various community groups learned to cooperate. This was the Narberth of the YMCA that outshone a rival such facility built a year earlier at the nearby township seat. It was the Narberth of patriotic display and fireworks, of sports teams galore of all ages, of historic pageants, and the mecca for construction of fleets of bungalows when moderate-price housing was scarce in the region; also the Narberth of contests with neighboring communities over civic betterment, one such initiative having brought town planners of wide reputation here to advise on creating a "garden city" inside the town's borders.

This chapter will examine the array of vital and diverse construction that consolidated Narberth's various neighborhoods between 1895 and 1920. It will take stock of this independent town's strong sense of its own cultural centrality among communities located at rail stops stretched out along Philadelphia's Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. It was this confident sense of well-being which encouraged Narberth civic and religious leaders to construct or embellish numerous buildings for public and private use at this time. The breadth of some of these undertakings made Narberth an excellent training ground and destination for developers, architects and builders working with a wide range of approaches – their efforts, varied as they were, resulting in a town with a cohesive strength. It also will explore the class distinctions that long existed in the locality but began having clearer expression in the various neighborhoods between 1895 and 1920. This chapter also shows how Narberth leaders with Progressive Era goals bridged their class differences to seek community betterment in 1895 – 1920.

The year 1895 was a magic moment in Narberth. The collective faith in something new was very strong and seemed to generate the excitement of a virtual space-launching for participants. Would the momentum of self-rule continue? And who was leading the charge to take over the difficult task of creating the look and the feel of what was by then beginning to be billed as a "year-round home town" to distance it from the old public perception of Philadelphia's Main Line as a place just for summer villas of the rich? This was a key consideration, especially as the first few houses built for Price's town had resembled big summer villas and this seemed to be the early orientation even of the idealists among local developers.

Sections of town

As for its sections of town and how they differ, you just had a quick look at how some of those sections in the older, larger northside have evolved compared with the smaller but quite individualistic southside. And, of course, the town is separated into north and south by the railroad's main line tracks partly elevated on an embankment and featuring both local and long-distance travel - some of it going from New York City to the state capital in Harrisburg and beyond. Also active early on the northside was its main street business district at the rail station, with another business district soon to start along the town's front street (Montgomery Avenue). Also, by then on the northside, Shand Athletic Field was serving our public schools. Our YMCA's members' indoor sports facilities were being used, as well as its members' meeting rooms and the Y's library.

But as late as 1920, still there was no major playground in the town. Thriving on the northside by this same were three churches. And directly across Montgomery Avenue stood two more houses of worship - toward the east the venerable Merion Friends Meeting and at the western end opposite us, All Saints Episcopal Church. Certainly Narberth's "northside" had long been a mix of all classes of people.

By contrast, the southside seemed (by 1895, ever since its first housing tract went up in 1890) more evenly middle-class, had one church and was otherwise completely residential with no commercial district or parks. Its last remaining sizable farm had reached by 1920 an advanced stage of housing development. Significantly, on the east side of S. Narberth Avenue, there is a sizable piece of Narberth land that had belonged to our Revolutionary War patriot John Dickinson whose use of it in his writings about his Pennsylvania farm helped end British rule in America.

During the 1895 to 1920 period, class differences were strikingly evident in the way certain large projects involving housing accommodations were pursued and adopted in the town. The trustees of the Wood Estate²⁴⁵ who chose Harmon to market building lots in that southside farm came of rather patrician background (as had the backers of the town of Elm that Price had started on his farm with the idea of expanding it). And there's every indication they worked hand-in-glove with the goals of Narberth's town fathers. The trustees' initiative also widened the perspective of those elected officials about suburban housing nationally by demonstrating that taking advice from outside sources could be

²⁴⁵ Richard Francis Wood, John H. Packard, Charles Stewart Wurts and George W. Wood, executors of the estate of Charles S. Wood who resided at 1023 Spruce Street in the city at his death in 1873, leaving a wife, Julima F. Both Packard and Wurts were his socially prominent Spruce Street neighbors. At the time, C. S. Wood was president of Cambria Iron Company and had holdings in many other iron and steel companies, also held a pew at St. Luke's Church. R. F. Wood then lived at 1023 Spruce, G. W. Wood at 2030 Spruce. Was Richard F. Wood Charles's son? Probably, but it doesn't say.

beneficial. Those trustees threw open windows of opportunity that could be pursued by others - and were soon carried out when it came to designing a model community that originally was to have included Narberth's recreational grounds for the whole town. For while no large playground had yet been built here by 1920, much thought had already been given to the subject.

Doubtless the ambitious developer of small tract houses on the northside, William T. Harris, never stopped bragging that someone of Susanna Bodine's high social standing contributed to his brash enterprise. For indeed Miss Bodine purchased many of his new housing tracts here in their raw state, to enhance each lot with shrubbery including Wholert's flowering trees, before resale. And she thus added a touch of glamour for customers as they then purchased their house from her instead of from Harris.

As for the background of the Brick Row housing block developer, although unknown, does suggest someone who knew how to turn a profit from constructing flat-roofed affordable housing near a race track with a strong blue-collar following. And quite apart from having financial resources at his disposal, that developer quite likely came from a working-class background himself. As for the developer Harris, he also probably came from modest circumstances, as is suggested by the unusually simple and plain Narberth accommodations his parents and his sister had, shortly before he moved here himself.

By contrast, Narbrook Park model community had the civic association's full financial support and the municipality's encouragement. And it mainly resulted from rarefied thinking and ideas of some of the best minds and community planners of their day, which is a kind of aristocracy in its own way.

Before mentioning the specific residential development of the larger northside, it seems appropriate to turn our attention to two of its most singular features in our entire town of Narberth - one ancient and almost forgotten over the years, the other a site where farmer Price first chose to build one of his houses that's survived well beyond its 1895-1920 span.

It's been more than 300 years since a distinguished descendent of the Yale family arrived from Wales with kin to settle in 1683 upon hundreds of acres of Lower Merion Township land she had purchased from William Penn - only to discover Swedish settlers already living on a vital section of that very same land. What to do? Catherine Thomas immediately generously responded in a positive way by marking off some 24 acres where Swedes were living and put a fence around it protecting it for them. That same fascinating "Swedish triangle," all of it in the Borough of Narberth's northside, is still discernible for careful observers - even now.

That "slice" includes all of Wynnedale Road's varied and plentiful middle-class housing, and goes across the street (Essex Avenue) to, and including, the #1104 Montgomery Avenue house of

distinguished F. Millwood Justice (designed and built for him in 1889). From there it travels westward along Montgomery Avenue's ridgeway path already existing in 1683 with primitive buildings on it, and two possible "survivors" at 1226 Montgomery Avenue and 610 Shady Lane. An early building existed directly across Montgomery Avenue, possibly intended to let Mrs. Thomas' kin keep an eye on things involving the Swedes. Libertyville eventually evolved, with its own "take" on this "oldest" part of town.

Sections of town, contrasted

Just as Narberth's northside section from 1895 to 1920 seemed to have far greater diversity in the classes of people living in it than the southside, so too the northside by then gave plenty of visible evidence of neighborhoods built gradually over a much longer period of time than the southside. Numerous styles of architecture consequently were represented, not all of it domestic. Thus new construction along the northside's main roads might be flanked by glimpses of history, ranging from a log cabin to several imposing houses the Quaker farmer Price had built for the town of Elm he established on his farm, to a developer's tracts of small bungalows.

Most of the town was arranged in a grid of streets but its curving northside front road, an ancient ridgeway and former Indian trail, meets all its cross-streets at an angle, like the edge of a piece of cloth cut "on the bias."

Narberth's "big Victorians" and its other pre-1895 large houses then had pockets of open land around them. The adult sports teams so popular at the time often chose those lots to play home games, until such time as each location was developed and the town baseball team had to move on. Still, there was considerable northside open space remaining throughout this period, some also on the southside. Narbrook Park had virtually the town's only curving roads.

Houses on the southside of town occupied straight streets almost without exception, and some of these residences were fairly large, but not mansions in the same sense as several of those north of the tracks.

What better contrast do we have for us to be able to see the achievement of Narberth's founder Edward R. Price as a town builder summarized in the icon he gave us, namely, Vauclain House. That's the large, architect-designed house Price had built, held a mortgage on while architect I. H. Hobbs

owned and was completing it, and that Samuel Vauclain and his young family²⁴⁶ were the first to live in it, calling it their home for 16 years.

Price's goal had been to build the kind of northside houses on his land that would attract flourishing industrialists to occupy them. With Samuel Vauclain, Price got his wish in his own lifetime.

Significantly for us, Samuel Vauclain was living in this house when he won his prize for locomotive design at the Paris Exposition of 1900. {As mentioned earlier, t]hat occasion marked the first time American industrial achievement was recognized in Europe.

Too often forgotten today is the fact that Philadelphia was then the leading industrial city in the U.S. This Hobbs-designed house at 206 Price Avenue is thus an eloquent reminder of one Welsh-American farmer's unusually keen awareness of strong industrial might developing in our city, and the steps he personally took to confront it and find ways of encouraging it as early as 1881. For in that year, Price officially launched the town of Elm (Narberth) on his farm specifically to mark the 200th anniversary of Charles II of England's granting a charter to William Penn for Penn Sylvania. (Land the Price family owned was never part of the "Swedish Triangle" or of Libertyville.)

The name Vauclain house would give suitable priority to a Columbia Railroad theme always relevant in a community that rail-line passed through going west and east, mostly just below Montgomery Avenue. Nowhere locally was that route more cherished than in the 200-block of Price Avenue where two major players in Columbia Railroad activity resided - attracted to live there certainly because Columbia train tracks had run across their property, and many of the stone sills were still scattered around.

T. Broom Belfield manufactured all kinds of brasses including bells, rods and whistles for Baldwin locomotive works. As soon as he purchased a property with two new Hobbs houses on it, he occupied one himself and set the other one immediately aside for its permanent guest, Samuel Vauclain, the top Baldwin official. How did Belfield learn the property was for sale?

Quite likely he heard of it from Samuel Richards living in a new Hobbs house at Elm, and a go-getter who had built the first railroad across New Jersey. Belfield and Vauclain would have listened to him or to his son, S. Bartram Richards, and his bride Mary Dorrance Evans, the pair newly settled with his parents at their 224 North Narberth Avenue address. Farmer Price, an aging bachelor, had chosen the

²⁴⁶ Several of the Vauclain children played on the grounds around this Vauclain house. One of those children eventually married Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., son of the Pulitzer Prize founder in St. Louis.

Richards family to lead his new town of Elm, and they took their “assignment” seriously - two generations of them at the above address at the same time.

Interestingly, Edward R. Price, to start his town, picked an architect, Isaac Harding Hobbs, who was the favorite architect of Lewis Godey, publisher of the leading women’s magazine nationally in the 19th century. Clusters of Hobbs-designed houses rapidly sprang up across America and had become known as “Godey’s Ladies Book villages,” because Ladies Book readers could purchase patterns for such houses, and not just dress patterns, through the magazine. The difference at Elm was that the designs for Price’s several Hobbs houses here were all originals.

Appropriately too, the Atlas map of 1881 showing the tiny nucleus for Price’s town on his farm has written across parcels of land the names of two women – Samuel Richards’ wife Elizabeth and Hobbs’ wife Mary Magdalene. (The father of Elizabeth E. Richards, by the way, was one of those high-flying Philadelphia industrialists, John B. Ellison, founder of one of the largest cloth-importing houses in late-19th century America.) So, once again farmer Price had his fingers on the pulse.

One exceptionally rare and overlooked northside section of town, where the name Libertyville originated, never belonged to the Price family. This turf can claim a longer history of occupation of its small landholdings by people of different ethnic stock than any of the area’s large surrounding farms, through the late 19th century. Of course, Narberth in reality is not one village but the conglomeration of a succession of settlements – Native Americans, Swedish, Welsh, Germantown German, the Hamlet of Libertyville that gave its name to a large area, the nucleus of a suburban town, Elm, and several almost simultaneous new housing developments - before becoming a borough in 1895.

Surely Edward Price attempted to normalize things by creating his nucleus of a “Godey’s Lady’s Book town,” calling it Elm, after the recently built Elm Station on the Pennsylvania Railroads Main Line. His Victorian-period town plan of 1881 for houses on large lots was a high-minded example of patronage.

And for contrasts, Belmar surely was the most systematically organized section of Narberth that became part of our borough. Often described as “back of Elm,” it was launched December 4, 1890 by Elm Land Improvement Company with the acquisition of 14 acres of Edward Price’s property. Its work continued more than a decade. This strip of land gave more of a north-south thrust to Elm’s layout than new northside housing areas yet had, with Essex Avenue its main road. The layout extended from just south of the present Wynnedale Road of Jacob R. Hagy’s Libertyville farm, reaching on down to just below Woodbine Avenue’s beginning. Belmar’s land was bounded on the west by Dudley Avenue.

The name “Belmar” would have had particular appeal for the very early New Jersey background of both Sam Richards and Ridgway. For in the New Jersey town of Bellmawr,²⁴⁷ the Marquis De Lafayette with 300 of his regular men and the township militia fought and won a major battle against the British in November 1777 there.

Also the important 1904 addition to the 1893 public elementary school at Belmar was by a nationally-known architect Willis G. Hale, believed gifted by prominent donor William Singerly. Belmar’s handful of exceptionally energetic and determined new arrivals eagerly sought a much more dense settlement of our area. They wanted housing, a school and above all a church. Full of courage, Belmar’s newly elected officers crusaded to have a church crown the hilltop of their tract.

Giving Belmar its proper send-off was the reliable and enthusiastic Simpson family. Papa Simpson built a house for each of his two married daughters, Sarah and Marian and their young families. Meanwhile, on the lower slopes, Papa Simpson’s publisher son, James Cooper Simpson built an imposing house at 232 N. Essex, and remained in it a long while. Belmar’s principal residence was “Chericroft,” built for J. George Bucher, a galvanizing products manufacturing firm president and Presbyterian elder (this house replaced by 66-unit Narberth Hall Apartments in 1929). Immediately below 232 N. Essex were two houses just within Belmar for two prominent individuals – Richard H. Wallace²⁴⁸ and Cardin Warner.

Then a terrible blow struck when fire totally destroyed the nearly completed church. This happened during America’s financial panic year of 1893. Methodism by then had entered a phase of unprecedented growth in this country that would continue a number of years. Methodists were doing great work in revival meetings in places like Philadelphia’s Armory Hall. Large Methodist churches seating upwards of 1200 people were rapidly rising at major intersections in Philadelphia neighborhoods. Elm’s was a modest structure by comparison, its sanctuary seating 450, plus a Sunday school below. And it lay in ruins.

Finally, almost two years later the church, its seats arranged in the then popular amphitheater fashion, was dedicated (September 1895). The architect D. Judge De Nean had stayed the course, but the builder this time was new - and reliable.

²⁴⁷ Narberth’s Belmar name was derived from the New Jersey town of Bellmawr in Gloucestertown Township. And the founding grandfathers of both Sam Richards and J. J. Ridgway in America had first lived in this area of South Jersey before the Revolution.

²⁴⁸ Richard Wallace’s son, Brenton Greene Wallace (1891=1968), born in Philadelphia, graduated Penn Charter School 1909, got B.S. in economics at U. of PA in 1913; in 1914 started firm of Wallace & Warner with architect Fred Warner and was active in it, after briefly studying architecture at Penn. Brenton Wallace published the book Patton and His Third Army, 1946.

The successful two-year struggle by that 13-member congregation to rebuild its church after catastrophe struck, was the single most substantial contribution to forming a new spirit of cooperation that soon developed among the town's then three Protestant churches over the ensuing decade. Such an initiative, well organized and consistent (as Charles E. Kreamer's detailed journal shows) did more to bind together varied groups of the new town's Protestants, both those with and without formal church affiliation, than any other single community-wide event until the founding of the local YMCA in 1907.

The catalyst was unquestionably broker Charles E. Kreamer, a man with a socially prominent invalid wife and a wide range of business and social acquaintances throughout the metropolitan area. Taking up where his late friend J. Alex Simpson, Sr. had left off, he made the task of rebuilding Beth Raffan a popular cause among all kinds of donors, not just Methodists or local residents. Besides the stimulus of frequent benefactions from himself and his own family members, he personally sought and obtained subscriptions ranging from fifty cents from poor people to more generous amounts from prominent Philadelphians.

Topping the list of such subscriptions was a symbolic gift, a bell-weather of success for the project as a whole. It came from his client Edward T. Stotesbury, a multimillionaire partner of J. Pierpont Morgan, a name that is to banking what Dom Perignon is to champagne. Kreamer, a specialist in traction stocks, was Stotesbury's broker. An Episcopalian son of Quaker parents, Stotesbury had built his reputation on his uncanny ability to tell whether certain loans were wise. A donation from him in a come-from-behind struggle was seen as a good omen, especially in view of the fact that Stotesbury's office, besides having encouraged Elm's frightened Methodists, had done more than any other group to allay the financial panic of 1893. At the time, gold was so scarce in the U. S. Treasury that Uncle Sam was obliged to buy gold to replace it, and Stotesbury's firm supplied this. Far from aloof, he was considered more like an old Philadelphia merchant in outlook. Stotesbury and Cyrus Curtis of the Curtis magazine-publishing empire became Philadelphia's civic idols of the 1910s decade.

Methodism was America's largest denomination while Charles Kreamer was leading the crusade to rebuild the ruined church. And Methodists were at the time a sensitive barometer of American culture. Theirs even were described as the most American of American churches - in large part because Methodism has always emphasized the experiential and the practical over the intellectual and the speculative. The Simpson and Kreamer traits of going light on theology and heavy on good works, and Kreamer's follow-through that was very organized and incurably optimistic, can be seen as typically Methodist - as much so as hymn-singing. Such traits have the potential to assimilate new viewpoints that

gradually has aligned some individual Methodist congregations in this country with civil rights, antiwar, sanctuary, environmental and feminist movements.

Since Libertyville and the “Swedish triangle” cover generally the same ground, the 1880 Federal Census for Libertyville is especially helpful revealing a lively mix of some sixteen family groups large and small. Clearly several butchers are continuing active work here, even after Libertyville’s nearby rail station flag stop was eliminated. These are Daniel and William Connor and William Pavill. Another of the Libertyville Pavill butchers had lately advanced himself by relocating to the renowned Reading Terminal Market in the city.

Libertyville farmers are the familiar ones, Jacob Hagy and Norris Hansell, Jr., in 1880. And that year the Super family had its seven adults and five young children living at home, which adjoined the workplace of the Supers’ blacksmith and wheelwright shops.

Other occupations at this busy place included Alex Enochs, a marble-cutter; William C Ducomb, a music teacher; William Burgess and William Shoemaker both milkman, and John Coheen a house painter; also two carpenters, George Mowrer and Howard Williamson; and a black couple, Charles W. Jackson, a coachman, and his wife Ella Jane Jackson, working as a servant. Meanwhile, Julia Oler on her own and Sarah Tunis looking after her daughter, both come across as heads of households. Hearing again the name Tunis at this location carries us back to Colonial times.

Almost exactly a century after the above-mentioned 1880 Federal Census report on people living in that section of Narberth known as Libertyville²⁴⁹ became public, someone quite friendly with one of the key families agreed to be interviewed about the large Super family. Since early childhood and for decades she²⁵⁰ knew them. Upon first meeting them at their 1256 Montgomery Avenue home next to the springhouse of the East Branch of Indian Creek, the Supers immediately showed her their apple tree that grew from an apple core thrown out of the window of a Columbia Railroad train very near the springhouse.

The Supers’ #1256 Montgomery Avenue house had its main front entrance facing that highway, and located on a major ridge with sloping land on both sides of it as well as springs, which attracted the earliest settlers. At the rear of the house Mabel described a “lovely porch” on the basement level slope. It led into the kitchen and dining room. The street-level’s four rooms served as a dining room, sewing

²⁴⁹ The Federal Census report for Libertyville in 1900 still used that reference, even though its land by then belonged to the Borough of Narberth.

²⁵⁰ Mabel Fritsch Knapp of North Wynnewood Avenue, Narberth, based upon her interview with the writer October 27, 1979.

room, library and “a space for those who were elderly.” Mabel had known what turned out to be all seven of this Super family’s children – all somewhat older than herself.

The brothers George and Frank Super were “egg and chicken route men” who bought from farmers and sold in Narberth. “Wonderful friends they were, keenly interested in spinning history, nature and people’s yarns,” said Mabel. Their sister Caroline, by then one of five daughters, was a seamstress - everything from beautiful wedding gowns to seasonal family dressmaking - and is remembered as “very jolly and kind to children.” Caroline also got help sewing hems of dresses from her sister Jane, very tall, frail, yet who loved to sit and spin a yarn. Their sister Edna was very thin and unwell, but never let you know it. Her specialty was making visits for the family when someone they all knew had died or was ill – or just to bring some goodies. She was the main cook and housekeeper, had a dry sense of humor. Edna and Jane tended the old-fashioned flower garden, and loved to give flowering plants to anyone interested, and that included Mabel.

Frank Super was the only one of those seven children who married. He lived on Dudley Avenue, Narberth until his wife died, then moved back to the family homestead with a daughter. There was a Charlotte Super in the family (Frank’s child?) who for many years was a bank teller in Narberth. Also, Mabel remembers an elderly maiden aunt, Elizabeth Super, living at #1256. And she was most profoundly impressed by the fact that the Super household always took care of relatives as they aged or had troubles. And this meant constantly carrying lots of trays up long flights of steps. And she recalled one of their aunts in particular, a nurse, who helped in many ways there over the years. It struck Mabel as ironic that when that nurse herself needed help, she finally ended up in a Lutheran home after caring for so many.

North Wynnewood Avenue’s corridor in a westerly direction, from Windsor Avenue to Montgomery is regarded as an area that has produced persons of glamour and high achievement, with hints of strong and interesting family background – especially in the earlier years. One such individual was George A. (Frolic) Weymouth, chairman of the organization he founded in 1967 (Brandywine Conservancy and Museum of Art) and who, after continuing as its chair for 48 years, became its co-chair in 2015, and died in April 2016. His father from Wynnewood and his mother a DuPont, Frolic, their eldest child played as a young boy at Clarence Weymouth’s borough home on N. Wynnewood Avenue below Sabine.

Above Sabine on the borough’s side N. Wynnewood Avenue side from Mrs. Belknap Lyons Lea’s mansion “Edgewood,” came her daughter as a bridesmaid for Happy Rockefeller’s wedding to Nelson.

Below Sabine at 243 N. Wynnewood Avenue, the distinguished chemist Prof. Samuel P. Sadtler was a colleague of famed early photographer of sequential photos, Eadweard Muybridge. Living next door was Stephen Paschall Morris Tasker of the Hudson Bay Company, who later published his book Steve Patrols More Territory (1936). Living later at #243 was Hillary Clinton's son-in-law as a child, until his parents started adopting too many children to continue any longer to fit in. And they moved to Penn Valley. Famed writer of adventure books Daniel P. Mannix and wife Julie Junker of "Spanish House," N.E. Corner Sabine & N. Wynnewood kept a cheetah in an outdoor pen. And an American bald eagle, Aquila, that once escaped. And Narberth Fire Company was called to a Brocklehurst Avenue rooftop to lure the hungry bird down.

Class differences

Class differences as they were manifested in Narberth in 1895 were clearly tied, at least in public perception, to the house size of the family occupying it, and the number of servants they had. Of course the reality was much subtler, but it eluded persons easily satisfied to equate social status with visible signs of a person's wealth.

During the 1895 to 1920 period, no single Narberth street or district was solidly upper class. Instead there were clusters or single mansion-like houses along certain roads in 1895 - on North and South Narberth Avenue, Montgomery Avenue, N. Wynnewood Avenue, Price Avenue, Essex Avenue and Haverford Avenue. By 1920, the upper crust label had attached itself, at least according to some, to the Narbrook Park district which was still under construction and had seemed resolutely egalitarian in its origins.

The most clear-cut symbol of high-status housing in Philadelphia metropolitan area suburbs in the 19th century was the "country villa," defined as belonging to a family whose primary residence for voting was a townhouse in the city. Earlier in the century this could mean a villa such as, for example on the banks of the Delaware River at Andalusia in Bucks County where the family seat of Philadelphia's Biddle family still is, or even for others as far north as Trenton, New Jersey. But with the Railroad Age and the growth of suburbs along the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line in particular, after mid-century it meant villas conveniently located close to villages springing up around its suburban commuter rail stations.

And Narberth had its share of these big dwellings in which a Quaker or Protestant family divided its time between "country living" and its Philadelphia townhouse. This widespread practice, seen here by 1883 in Price's village of Elm, caught on and continued at least into the first decade of the 20th

century among the town's two-house families, most notably Richards, Belfield and Vauclain. But this practice was also taken up by at least a few less affluent middle-class residents who were building themselves a sizable house here in the late-1880s and early-1890s.

As the focus inevitably began shifting from villas to construction of smaller houses on modest-size lots, Narberth encouraged this transition by adopting as its promotional slogan: "the Year-Round Home Town." (Actually, the distinguished Richards family whose mission it was to carry out Edward R. Price's town-building aspirations, managed to keep its Narberth residence as its principal address until after the crucial vote for independent boroughs status in 1895, thereafter dividing its time in the traditional way.

How long did Sam Richards town-building spirit live on in the new borough? Until at least 1920, for it is often reflected in the vibrant hands-on activity of C. Howard McCarter who built a sizable house on the far south side just before 1895 that was the first new construction in that part of town. Living comfortably there, McCarter and his wife began raising their family. It was as if, besides heading the school board, here was a man with a mission. And I think the answer is to be found in the fact that the dynamic McCarter partnered a Philadelphia real estate firm, McCarter & Richards, with Samuel S. Richards of Bryn Mawr, believed related to "our" Sam Richards. (Richards family members tended to encourage each other's projects, especially where land was involved, and family members were very skilled at creating ambience in new communities. Must have pleased McCarter enormously when Narberth's American Legion Post was named after his brother-in-law and Samuel Bartram Richards must have been amazed to hear of it.)

Several of Narberth's prominent two-house families came of the genuine upper-class, while others had newer high-income sources. Another dozen or so of the most prosperous local families known to be living here at the time were also not home, for whatever reason, when the Census taker came calling in 1900. Even so, the Federal Census Report of that year provides an unusually vivid picture of the startlingly high figure of 92 live-in domestic servants employed in our as yet sparsely settled half a square mile at that time. By then, most of Narberth's large houses had already been built and there were as yet, very few small dwellings in which domestic workers might live independently. The then new double-file of twin houses marching up Conway Avenue's 100-block was about as small as a Narberth house got in those days, and the block of rowhouses known as Brick Row would not be built for another year. Surely such a sizable servant class denotes a certain prosperity here among middle-class Narberth residents at the time, not just among its elite two-house families who then most notably included Richards, Belfield, Vauclain and others, does it not?

Early religious groups

By their active participation in creating the look and feel of a town here, several religious groups made an immeasurably important contribution of lasting value. In so doing, they also freed Elm rail stop from a period of dormancy after the Centennial Exposition, when the only regular users seemed to be the race track fans. Elm Station had stood aloof and alone before; this time its dormancy was again brief, as the religious link trumped all other considerations with the founding of several churches in quick accession.

First, there was the nucleus of a new Quaker-friendly community, Elm, struggling to be born on a nearby farm just north of that station, but so far consisting only of fair size mansions on large tracts - a farmer's unfulfilled dream of what a new town should be with himself as developer. Quakers had been attempting to stabilize a volatile neighborhood around their ancient meetinghouse.

One other promising town-building ingredient was clearly mandated in writing: just south of that rail station another devout farmer, this one Welsh-born, sold his land for a housing subdivision with the deed restriction stipulating that a Baptist church permanent structure of stone must be constructed there within 24 months. True, Quakers had rallied around to create the beginnings of this town, but it was Baptists, Presbyterians and Methodists who most earnestly took up the cause, initially building community by constructing churches and a public school before seeking self-rule. Such devoutly religious new residents were remarkably successful and swift in obtaining results.

Certainly some of the most galvanizing civic and borough council leadership that Narberth was privileged to have between 1895 and 1920, and later, came from the active membership and elders of the Narberth Presbyterian Church congregation. It is difficult to see how the town would have fared without the leadership of those laymen. Nor did they occupy every position - just crucial ones, and they had excellent backup from the same source.

Augustus J. Loos is the outstanding civic leader among these Narberth Presbyterians. His wise guidance and strengthening hand led every major progressive initiative undertaken by Narberth during a twenty-year period. In that time frame, he shepherded three such projects, all of which still resonate. The first was creation of a YMCA complex that outshone its competition in the surrounding township at a time when such rivalries mattered. Second was his willingness to shoulder the main responsibility for creating the cutting-edge Narberth Park model community undertaken as a civic challenge and to solve stubborn local problems. And thirdly Loos linked the closing and sale of the Y to creation of Narberth's

much-needed large community playground with its adjoining community building complex by seeing to it that the Y funds were kept ready and waiting for that purpose.

What served to reinforce the effectiveness of Loos' actions throughout this period was the formation of kinship alliances between Loos' family and that of his Narberth neighbor, the chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Alexander C. Shand. These two Presbyterian men were brought closer together by the intermarriage of their son and daughter, respectively. Bonds thus established helped all three projects mentioned above to be realized - and were crucial too in persuading the Pennsylvania Railroad to give up owning a large tract of land it planned to develop for its own use as a freight-car yard. The railroad finally acquiesced because Narberth was persuasive in arguing that it wanted - and needed - that same land to establish its major community playground, which became one of the early public playgrounds on the mainline - its existence pre-dating parks launched under Works Progress Administration auspices in a number of other Main Line communities.

But at the same time, another type of galvanizing community leadership held sway on Narberth's southside. This energetic enclave of nationally prominent Baptist clergy, all of them "doctors of divinity," chose besides their regular daytime church-related activity in center-city Philadelphia, to spend every spare moment as community-builders in our new borough. Instinctively they felt the pressing need for such volunteerism. And quite apart from the practical advantages of their actions for the growth and development of our town, it was the dignity with which they greeted their fellow citizens of various faiths while being, culturally speaking, "on the same page" that hit home. And these heartwarming results were so undeniably an elemental rock of culture that even those few observers who might otherwise suspect self-interest from a church group with a project of this sort are likely to have accepted the homage as sincere.

In retrospect, it is very clear that Narberth's very strong early developmental phase as an independent town owes a great deal to the presence of that national leadership elite of Baptist clergy and their families who settled around Narberth's small Baptist Church of the Evangel where some of the Bucknell family, worshiped before the turn-of-the-century and afterward.

Those ordained ministers who included heads of both departments - publishing and missionary - of their eminent organization, threw themselves into community activity in Narberth in their spare time, making a very important contribution.

The publishing department's two branches were led by Rev. Philip L. Jones, D. D. (very much in demand as a keynote speaker) in charge of books, and Rev. Christopher R. Blackall, D. D. and M. D. for periodicals. Meanwhile, Rev. Robert G. Seymour, D. D. headed the missionary department.

Their activity ranged from serving as first chairman of the town's public high school/elementary school board, first president of the fire company, to involvement in the towns YMCA instruction of children and adults, and supervision of our Holiday House for underprivileged children. Each of those three men was an original. Rev. Blackall, a New York and Chicago physician, had joined the ministry after serving on the Civil War battlefield as a surgeon with the 33rd Wisconsin volunteers. Rev. Blackall (1830-1924) also backed his young wife²⁵¹ as a community leader when she became the active chairperson of the town's major, first community-wide historical pageant. Eugenia likewise served as the very effective first editor of the civic association's widely-read, long-running weekly newspaper Our Town. It should not be underestimated the valuable assistance this dedicated and advanced-thinking enclave gave in forming the basic community spirit that was instilled in the townspeople during a 30-year time span (1890-1920) while the Baptist influence here was at its peak. Sporadic influence set in motion from that source continued here into the 1950s. That this clergy group²⁵² served not just the interests of its own denomination here, but demonstrated a much broader outreach, is the marvel of its accomplishment in Narberth. And its example appears to have had a lasting beneficial effect on volunteerism, a Narberth benchmark, by nourishing its roots.

Class differences in ethnic groups

Among the Quakers (or Friends), there were no clergy and no class distinctions at the meeting. Sociologist E. Digby Baltzell has noted that Quakers desiring to enhance their social standing have tended to become Episcopalians. Of course, invited to live here both as the new town's Quaker "first family" and as a promoter of its community growth and development, the Samuel Richards family kept faith with that symbolic role. And although the period of greatest Richards influence in Narberth peaked before 1895, their presence²⁵³ continued another two decades more quietly. Those Richards family

²⁵¹ Eugenia Hitchcock McLure had married Rev. Blackall in 1900. The genealogy of Rev. Blackall and Eugenia was graciously provided to the writer by... The couple lived in Narberth until... (Editor's note: These omissions in the text.)

²⁵² Besides clergymen Jones, Blackall and Seymour, the enclave included Rev. Harry Malcolm Chalfont, Rev. Frank S. Dobbins and Prof. William B. Godfrey. Both Blackall and Chalfont are listed in Who's Who in America, 1926-27 edition. Early pastors of Narberth's Baptist Church of the Evangel were Rev. Thomas C. Trotter (1823-1901) and Rev. Harold Kennedy. The only major figure from Publication Society headquarters not residing in Narberth at this time was its General Secretary from 1895-1917, Rev. A. J. Rowland, D.C., who hailed from Baltimore, and my mother knew of as an impressive fatherly individual who used to read Dickens' works to his young children by the fireside. My artist mother was a lifelong friend of his artist daughter Kathryn Rowland who later lived at "Hoptoad House" in rural Maryland.

²⁵³ As soon as Hobbs built Richards' large 224 N. Narberth Avenue house in 1883, young architect William L. Baily, a Haverford College grad, made alterations and additions to this residence (1893), the same year he designed Haverford Meeting House with Arthur Truscott of Baily & Truscott. This was a good fit for Sam Richards, as Truscott had done house designs for Godey's Ladies Book in 1885-86, and farmer Edward Price would have appreciated Baily's Quaker connections.

members living here since the early 1880s, were of high social standing, their direct line of family roots stretching back to colonial era Merion Welsh Quakers who settled initially in New Jersey and Ohio, while another direct line linked them to John Bartram, America's first important botanist. Several other high-status Quakers of English heritage also settled here shortly after they did, each building a rather large house and joining the movement to organize the town independently.

As the town's few Catholics were contending with their local minority status throughout this period, Protestants tended to lump them together as if all Narberth Catholics were working-class, which they were not. The hostility Catholics could encounter on a daily basis caused some to limit their participation in organized activity to functions of their parish church. There were as yet no signs of local civic leadership among these Catholics, and any local political clout they might gain seemed still a long way off.

It is worth remembering that when Narberth's Catholic church was founded on Christmas 1900 with a Mass at the home of its most prominent family, it was headed by a cultured arbitrage broker of French background. And he had close links with Delaware's DuPont family. That founder of the Christmas start-up of St. Margaret of Antioch Catholic Church in Narberth began with its scattered parishioners gathered for the event at Derlyn, the Victorian mansion home of its benefactors, stockbroker Nicholas H. Thouron²⁵⁴ and his wife Anna Dutill Smith Thouron (a physician's daughter) on Merion Road's high hill. Nicholas H. Thouron was a great-grandson of Pierre Thouron, a general in Napoleon's army whose son, a political refugee, became a rich Philadelphia ship owner. Nicholas had a rash of Margarets in his family – his grandmother, mother, sister and his only child, each with its variations in the name. And it even included a Sister of Mercy across the street, a close friend of Mrs. Anna Thouron. And furthermore, the parish Church of St. Margaret, when built in Narberth, has memorials to Nicholas' kin, tributes he personally solicited from his family. Nicholas Thouron also personally became choir director and also established a yearly academic prize at the parish elementary school.

So Father Cowley, St. Margaret's first pastor, settled the church site problem of lacking a corner location by buying a Narberth Avenue triple-lot which already contained a turreted 1888 Queen Anne Revival-style house (by Angus Wade, architect) where publisher Samuel Irvine Bell had been living.

²⁵⁴ Nicholas Thouron, whose brother was an administrator at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and would have chosen several of St. Margaret's Church's white marble figure sculptures. Nicholas' close kin, John Thouron of Chester County, PA, married a DuPont. When Queen Elizabeth II visited Philadelphia in 1976 for our 200th anniversary of independence as a nation, she knighted John Thouron.

This attractive house became the rectory and still is. Building of the church occurred in stages. The basement church by Canadian-born architect John Flynn was finished in 1902. Dedication of the English Gothic style church of Avondale granite with Bavarian stained-glass windows (Edwin F. Durang & Son architects - actually designed by the son soon after his prominent father's death) took place in March 1914, two years after it was designed. Also, it's a rare church to have been built in the middle of the block.

Narberth acquired its Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity in 1921. Evangelical meetings were held in a tent on the site before the church was built on a hilltop at the southeast corner of Narberth and Woodbine Avenues in gray stone of Gothic style and dedicated in May 1925 (George Baum, architect). It developed full-fledged attendance of every kind by the 1950s, and has a dedicated staff.

Enablers of industry

Reinforcing Narberth's connection with manufacturing that it had indirectly at first because Mrs. Samuel Richards was a daughter of one of Philadelphia's foremost industrialists, the devout Quaker John B. Ellison, was the presence here of several prominent younger captains of industry. These self-made men included a couple of industrialists and a high-ranking railroad official in residence up to and after the turn of the century. Each had risen from humbler circumstances than Narberth's late 17th century Welsh Quakers. And those newcomers broadened the ethnic bases of the town's most prosperous residents somewhat by bringing Scottish, French and again English ties to the fore.

By this time, that other essential Anglo "enabler" of town building, John J. Ridgway who tells in his journal²⁵⁵ of being a young Civil War vet sitting transfixed as a guest of Abe Lincoln's at the White House while the president both spoke and received dispatches from the front, Ridgway had begun handing over the reins of community guidance here to others. With his task for farmer Price completed, Ridgway sold his, by then, small remaining Narberth land holdings. Ridgway's "deputies" here during his high point of service to the new community had been the Simpson lawyers, father and son, who were of middle-class Methodist background and shared Ridgway's Progressive-Era outlook. And the follow-through by each of those men was a model of its kind that laid solid groundwork for the future. And of course, the Richards "deputies" here in the early decades of the 20th century seemed to be C. Howard McCarter and his business partner in real estate Samuel S. Richards²⁵⁶ of Bryn Mawr.

²⁵⁵ His Journal, at the Library Company of Philadelphia.

²⁵⁶ The McCarter & Richards business name continued after Richards' 1914 death; McCarter died in 1928.

Here and there remnants of upper-class presence [have] remained throughout the town's history and most recently [were] noticeable among the two sets of overseers of southside landholdings - the several trustees of the Spring Garden Insurance Company, and others looking out for the development of Wood's "Rockland Farm." In both instances, wise choices were made reflecting reasonably advanced thinking of that day.

Class differences among ethnics - Irish

As for Emerald Isle heritage in general, the popular perception that, before World War II, Narberth had only two kinds of Irish - "lace curtain" and "shanty" Irish - is a great over-simplification. By 1900, Narberth had several streams of Irish-born persons maintaining independent households including the owner²⁵⁷ of the local General Wayne Inn who was listed among the towns few "capitalists." It also had a merchant who owned and occupied²⁵⁸ one of Narberth's larger houses. Other Irish-born homeowners at that time included people in service occupations such as a head blacksmith, the owner of a local livery stable, and a Protestant evangelist. Each had arrived young in this country more than 25 years earlier. The other Irish-born heads of household in 1900 were working-class men such as hackman, a carpenter and four railroad workers including two conductors. Yet by 1920, and occasional Irish family here was able to send its children to private preparatory schools, although attendance at parochial and public schools was more typical.

A clear indication that the early St. Margaret's parish church congregation was predominantly of modest means can be gleaned from the fact that for some years that church held its services in the basement (crypt) it had constructed, unable to build stone walls above ground. Meanwhile, the Brookhurst Avenue district just north of the borough was already an "incubator" or staging area for newly arriving families of various nationalities (including Irish Catholics), who would later settle within Narberth. The Irish families of adjacent Brick Row did not rent-to-buy as eventually the Italians did. However, a number of Irish families who rented in the 100-block Conway Avenue did later eventually buy there and settle for a couple of generations in a neighborhood that has continued to have a feisty working-class flair and closely-knit character. Neighborhoods that intermittently came to have an "Irish" character from their settlement by Irish-born and by people of Irish heritage, including Protestants,

²⁵⁷ James Baird, born 1850 in Ireland, an 1872 immigrant, naturalized, a weaver, married Scottish-born Sarah McDonald in 1876 Presbyterian ceremony; they lived with daughter Helen, 22 in a mortgage-free home they owned on N. Narberth Ave (1900 Federal Census). He then died 29 October 1900.

²⁵⁸ James McAnally, born Ireland 1850, immigrated in 1869, now married with three children, just moved into a Haverford Avenue house formerly Marmaduke Moore's that he would sell to A. J. Loos five years later.

especially between the two World Wars were Windsor Avenue, upper Conway Avenue and small streets north of Sabine such as Homewood. The occupations of these homeowners varied widely from prosperous businessman with large families to (often childless) couples who worked as domestic servants (maids, butlers, chauffeurs) and grounds keepers for old Main Line families such as Thayer, Griscom and Roberts as well as for families with newer fortunes (Gibson).

And while Irish-born working-class families tended to cluster somewhat in the beginning, the middle and upper-middle class residents of Irish descent have invariably put down roots in scattered areas of the town from the start. And while an unusually large proportion of Irish-borns arriving here up to the post World War II era worked as gardeners and landscapers initially, Irish shopkeepers such as at the long-lived Shea's Pharmacy were strikingly few by comparison at any period. For Protestants of other nationalities - people with earlier roots in this country - held the reins of Narberth's shopkeeping turf over a long period, threaded through quite often by Jewish shopkeepers, and in the early 20th century by a lone and during Chinese laundryman. The bulk of the large Irish Catholic influx here in the post-World War II era migrated from densely settled West Philadelphia neighborhoods, coinciding with a much larger migration from there to Delaware County's Upper Darby.

Class conflict in the military

An especially ugly face of class soon raised its head in an uproar right here in Narberth over the unequal public response when two Narberth soldiers - a lieutenant and a private - were killed in action in World War I at almost the same time.

Effects of that global conflict had permeated all levels of American society, yet the heavy toll it took in human lives also oddly accentuated in 1918 and 1919 the gaping social inequalities among various dead Narberth soldiers, thus causing deep hurt that only time could heal. The flashpoint came when American Legion Posts were being established across the country, and the one to be launched here would receive the name of a Narberth lieutenant, one of the eight servicemen from the borough killed in action in World War I.

The sad news about the loss of the lieutenant's life immediately had been greeted here in the town publicly with high tributes²⁵⁹ published about this courageous individual from an old American family, followed by a quick momentum to name the local American Legion Post after him.

²⁵⁹ Our Town's first report of Speakman's death appeared in the form of a tribute written by public figure Fletcher W. Stites and published 12 September 1918, p.4.

By contrast the other fatality, an Italian immigrant laborer who was a munitions carrier on the same battlefield with the lieutenant, was met with official silence locally and no mention of him whatsoever appeared in the Our Town newspaper. Nor was that private soldier included on the “honor roll” of 94 living and seven other killed-in-action Narberth servicemen at the “welcome home” celebration in 1919.

And the fact that it was the son of a prominent local family who lost his life at the front also raises the question whether any other Narberth casualty of World War I besides Speakman ever even stood a chance to be commemorated by having the local Legion Post named after him. Very likely it was a familiar lament, especially among foreign-born Americans with patriotic inclinations across the nation at the time, that mainly gold-star servicemen with “connections” were getting the nod in the naming of Legion Posts. But the topic was especially poignant in Narberth, where an Italian-born private soldier assigned to ammunition transport for Speakman’s own unit lost his life in the same battle - a man who, back home, had probably been a construction worker of Narberth housing development.

Even before the town newspaper reported Speakman’s death, and not that of private Domenico Corvaro, and unrecorded sharp dispute²⁶⁰ suddenly raged on the back streets of Narberth over which soldier died first. The official town version claimed it was Speakman, but even the official records,²⁶¹ when checked, are somewhat cloudy on this point. One military historian²⁶² has suggested too that it is not written in stone that a Legion Post must be named for the first combat casualty.

Memories are long. And even after World War I, antipathy toward local people of German immigrant background and their offspring continued to be strongly felt by some, regardless of social standing. Effects of this were manifested in a number of ways, such as by people changing their German-sounding surnames to something approximating it in English (for example, Fox for Fuchs, in a case of an advertising man who later became town council president). Even German immigrant families well-known locally such as the Theobald Harshes who had to American-born soldier sons in Narberth “Welcome Home” parade for returning World War I veterans, experienced this sharp prejudice.

The two men in the eye of the storm that followed had lived two blocks - and worlds - apart. Harold Davis Speakman,²⁶³ a bachelor engaged to be married, lived on Essex Avenue near Sabine, while

²⁶⁰ Brought to the writer’s attention by a retired teacher, Elizabeth Smedley, with vivid recollections of the event.

²⁶¹ Obtained from the State Military Archives, Harrisburg showing activity of both these deceased men in the same area around the same time. These papers are part of a compensation program.

²⁶² Telephone interview with military archivist Harry Parker, State Military Archives, Harrisburg, 22 October 1996.

²⁶³ Eldest son of Wildey Enoch Speakman and his wife Emma Davis (whose sister Jane married Wildey’s brother George Washington Speakman), Harold came of an old Chester County family whose antecedent, Thomas Speakman, a Quaker, left England in 1712 at age 21 and settled in Concordville, Chester County. Speakman descendants are still numerous in that

unmarried Domenico Corvaro²⁶⁴ was a renter on Brick Row's Hampden Avenue. Could that shroud of local silence over the immigrant soldier's death have occurred because notification of it went, as it did, to his father in Abruzzi as his next of kin, instead of here?

Whatever the cause, that lapse grabbed the attention of the whole town, and people took sides as the prospect of naming the Legion Post advanced. At times, the debate turned ugly, with various critics attacking Lt. Speakman's social connections in high places compared with Corvaro's humbler status. Some complained of ethics bias, others asserting that Corvaro died before Speakman, and that this had been concealed from the public

Speakman probably was best known for having played on Narberth's 1915 Main Line League champion basketball team which went undefeated that year, playing indoor games. Also his sister Eliza F., was married to C. Howard McCarter, that ubiquitous realtor you've been hearing about. And that couple was one of Narberth borough's founding families.

The long-time Narberth school board chairman, McCarter ran around in a Stutz Bearcat, one of the town's few cars. And his St. Bernard dog was a regular feature at Station Circle under the elm tree where it spent most of the day, even though its owner's big southside house was some distance away. That large animal was unbothered by any traffic congestion, as safe basking there perhaps as any "sacred cow" in India, because that pet was like a town mascot²⁶⁵ in the pre-World War I era.

Speakman had enlisted in the Army Medical Corps soon after war was declared, and rapidly became a sergeant. Wanting a more active role, he transferred to the infantry, and when his 112th Pennsylvania Regiment embarked for France, he received his lieutenant's commission, serving with the Twenty-Eighth Infantry Division. For hours a fierce battle raged when American troops were ordered to capture the little town of Fismes which the Germans had re-taken. Speakman's company was sent forward in a final effort to capture the position. He was charging ahead of his men when a German shell landed in the midst of a group of Americans, killing Speakman and several of his men in early September 1918. They were lost in the great conflict raging in the fields of Flanders and Picardy, and Speakman's mother visited his grave in France. Speakman has long been described as the first Narberth

county, and several of Harold's relatives on the Speakman side lived here in the borough while he did. His two younger brothers did not serve in the military. Harold, educated at Philadelphia public schools, was of a slight build, average height, had blue eyes and a light complexion, his family recalls. An oil portrait of him is on permanent display in the Legion Hall at the community building. See The Speakman Family in America by Emma Speakman Webster. Phila: Henry Ferris, 1930; supplement, 1970.

²⁶⁴ His records are more difficult to come by, as no one in this State applied for compensation for his death apparently.

²⁶⁵ Recollections of Margaret Eyre Russell, third installment, prepared September 1980 for this writer by the Southsider, kin of architect Wilson Eyre.

man killed in action in World War 1, but (perhaps to quell the local rumors to the contrary?) even his father felt compelled to write to Harold's commanding officer to get clarification of when his son's death actually occurred. The first public activity in which the new Legion Post participated soon after its founding²⁶⁶ was the long-awaited, heartfelt "Welcome Home Reception to Our Soldiers and Sailors by the People of Narberth" on October 25, 1919. After what must have been one of the biggest parades in town history including veterans of the Civil War, Indian War, Spanish American War, and featuring probably more than five dozen Narberth servicemen returning from World War I, there were numerous speeches and a full-course filet of beef dinner at the YMCA, followed by a dance at Elm Hall. The Chamber of Commerce Band of Ardmore provided musical selections for this affair, and the favored dance music was one-step, fox trot and waltzes with a bit of jazz thrown in. This home-coming reception was initiated by the Narberth Home Guard members, who distributed thank-boxes to every residence in the borough in order to gather contributions - an effort that proved successful. Meanwhile their ranks expanded to form a general committee by including representatives from each church and various community groups. As the balance of funds from the thank-boxes was to be set aside as the nucleus for a fund for a permanent memorial, the volunteers called themselves the Soldiers' and Sailors' Reception and Memorial Committee. And of course the Legion Post took part in the speeches, and its emblem appeared prominently on the back cover of reception program, in deference to the Home Guard's primary role in this effort.

Certainly the "honor roll" listing of Narberth's World War I veterans in the official "Welcome Home Reception" program of that day's events did include names of Italian-American vets (with a couple of omissions and other mistakes). Yet the impressive official wide-angle portrait of sixty-four Narberth World War I veterans photographed that day by Keystone Photo Service includes no Italian-American vets at all among the dozen or so of them eligible to be in the picture. This suggests that these men, perhaps all or mostly construction workers from the Abruzzi region near Rome, may have stayed away from the entire October 25 celebration deliberately, just as they stayed out - or, some say, were kept out - of the Speakman Legion Post after the first Narberth man killed in action in World War I, their friend and neighbor Domenico Corvaro from Abruzzi, they believed had been passed over in the selection process for naming the new Legion Post, as had another Narberth casualty, Salvatore

²⁶⁶ The Harold D. Speakman Post, No. 356, American Legion, was founded September 26, 1919 at a meeting in the firehouse attended by 37 veterans and the county organizer, E. Pennell. Officers elected for the Narberth post on that occasion were a team of two former Army lieutenants and two former sergeants.

Carbonetti.²⁶⁷ Certainly a disproportionately high percentage of losses for one small ethnic group in a town then still so tiny.

The botched acknowledgment of Corvaro's death, although indefensible and deeply resented by the Italian community and by other citizens didn't just melt away at war's end. It took an event like that mishap to raise the level of attention to the point where cultural change was possible. A quite unusual custom evolved in its wake - it's believed this happened long before Narberth's Italian-American Citizens Club opened its new headquarters, 309 Iona Avenue in March 1949. What had transpired was that each year the very large Narberth Memorial (Veterans Day) Parade for nearly the next 80 years wound its way through town by stopping to fire a 21-gun salute not just once but at two separate flagpole-marked locations.

The first of these always took place at the Italian-American Veterans' Memorial on Iona Avenue near the home Private Corvaro had been renting in 1918, followed by an identical salute plus speeches at the town's major Veterans' Memorial at Narberth Playground. That faithfully observed and very remarkable Iona Avenue custom occurred for the last time in 1997,²⁶⁸ long after most people had forgotten why there were two stops, and considerably after Corvaro's name had been added to the town's official veterans' marker.

Undoubtedly the stopover along the parade route, in what is still sometimes called the "Italian neighborhood," represented an olive branch extended by volunteer organizations in the community to this ethnic enclave and its old soldiers, in order to repair damage done by earlier exclusions. Uniting the two sides would have been better, yet at least "separate-but-equal" showed that solutions were being sought, even if only a compromise was reached.

And what was the response of the local Italian-American community? After a slow start before 1920, that community²⁶⁹ grew and flourished as a closely settled unit for decades, seeming to settle deeper than ever into the role of solid working-class people who, like stubborn peasants of old, scorned the public taste, dismissed witticism and theory, and (literally just cultivated their garden) - often making it seem that the fig tree, and not the cherry blossom, was Narberth's official town tree.

²⁶⁷ The names of both Domenico Corvaro and Salvatore Carbonetti are listed now in bronze at Narberth's War Memorial.

²⁶⁸ It was my privilege to ride in that motorcade both in 1997, and several times previously. Ray Woodall, a very community-minded citizen and direct descendant of Thomas Jefferson, made the determination that the tradition should be ended, and got approval that year. As of 2013, the Iona Avenue flagpole still stands, minus any inscription on the base of it.

²⁶⁹ Some of the town's Italian-born men during the Great Depression of the 1930s and later had maintenance jobs with the borough that included trash-collecting. These meticulous workers well-remembered in their spotless gray cotton starched uniforms always returned trash cans they emptied into their truck by placing them inside the homeowner's property, never leaving them empty on the sidewalk - a caring habit, much appreciated.

Class and jobs²⁷⁰

As for class differences in occupational groups, at the outset, the town had a strong early representation of managerial types in industry such as railroading and manufacturing closely related to it. Such persons as well as lawyers, bankers and brokers traveled a short distance to work by train. Many businessmen, several publishers, architects, engineers and professors also commuted by train to their center-city offices. Many other jobs were local and business - or service-oriented, ranging from physicians and shopkeepers to racetrack-related occupations. Later the Pennsylvania Railroad would transfer whole offices of white-collar workers from the Midwest to Philadelphia, and many of those employees settled in Narberth, making this a “Little Altoona” of free-pass-riding workers. The Narberth Fire Company has long been exceptionally well-supplied with volunteer firefighters because so many of its best and most dependable men worked in or near the town.

Class difference often manifested themselves paternalistically at this time in job relationships between parent-like individuals and persons they may have cherished yet regarded as their “inferiors.” Two examples from the early 1920s in Narberth may suffice. One was the prominent local woman, a physician’s wife, who marched here proudly in KKK processions wearing her sheet, but also gave her black maid tickets to a movie about Abe Lincoln. The maid then asked, “Where shall I sit?”²⁷¹ which brought them ready reply: “Anywhere you like,” for seating at the local movie had lately been desegregated. The other example²⁷² is the Narberth Postmaster who regularly gave an illiterate local black day-laborer his dignity each weekday when Henry came to collect his mail. After greeting that customer with, “Ah, I see you haven’t brought your reading glasses, Mr. Allen,” he then read Henry’s his letters. One of Henry Allen’s regular jobs in the mid-to-late 1920s²⁷³ was grass-cutting the entire open-space greenery at Narberth Park’s using a simple grass mower he pushed.

Ethnics, jobs and migrants from the South

So many migrants from a single region of the South (Virginia) were working in close proximity to one another in Narberth by 1900 that they could easily provide information, advice and material resources to newcomers even before they themselves were settled in socially bounded migrant communities. Yet none of these domestic workers seems to have put down roots here in the town where

²⁷⁰ Editor’s note: This section and the following section duplicate information contained in Chapter 7.

²⁷¹ Told to this writer by the former maid of a local physician’s family. She was Ellen Cosby of Wynnefield, Philadelphia.

²⁷² Told to this writer long ago by a long-serving Narberth postal employee on the job.

²⁷³ My parents began seeing this in 1925.

they were comfortably employed. A strong clue about why this occurred is perhaps found in an oral history account of an old adage handed down in an old Narberth family to the effect that all black servants were supposed to be gone from here each day by dusk. Such a “tradition” sounds more like an ad hoc control mechanism that may have evolved after 1900 within a 20-year period as soon as individuals from the initial flock of black servants had begun to settle in their own neighborhoods in Philadelphia or as close as Ardmore and Haverford.

Despite some possibly deliberate “distancing” of their living quarters, there were nonetheless two independent black households in the town in 1900 - those of a Massachusetts-born day laborer²⁷⁴ active in Narberth through the 1920s and a childless couple²⁷⁵ of early middle age from Virginia. These households were located on Narberth Avenue below Woodbine in a nondescript old building inconspicuously set far back from the road in a residential section. The only other household of “people of color” was that of the town’s Chinese laundryman,²⁷⁶ who lived adjoining his downtown shop for many years.

In that Federal Census, Narberth’s white live-in servants in 19 households had just slid into a bare minority of 45. Among that live-in-group, Pennsylvania-borns were still a substantial number - eight men (including two coachman and one gardener) and 11 women; plus one white woman each from Virginia and New Jersey. The foreign-born white segment reflects dominance of female Irish domestic workers. Eleven households employed 14 fairly young Irish-born women who had immigrated in the 90s and one Irish-born married couple. At the same time, eight other households employed an English woman, and English coachman, a Scottish gardener, two Scottish women, a Danish couple, a Belgian man and one German woman.

In another way of viewing the servant situation at this time, Narberth’s slightly longer-established grouping of northside residents had 70 live-in servants (41 white, 29 black) in 1900, while the southside, not yet fully developed and with its strong Baptist tilt, had 22 live-in servants (17 black, five white). Of course, the “country villa” owners were absent from the Census counts as well as about a dozen other prosperous local families who were not home that day for the count. Even so, the Federal Census report of 1900 provides an unusually vivid picture of the startlingly high figure of 92 live-in domestic servants, white and black, employed in our as yet sparsely settled one half square mile at that

²⁷⁴ Henry Allen, born 1864 of a Massachusetts father and a Virginia mother, rents his house (Federal Census, 1900).

²⁷⁵ George T. Mercer, born in Virginia 1868 and wife Sadie, born in PA 1874 of Virginia-born parents, married five years. (Federal Census, 1900).

²⁷⁶ Lam (Daniel?) Lee, born in China of Chinese parents 1865, immigrated 1888, an alien living in a mainstreet rental unit. (Federal Census, 1900).

time. Until examined closely, such a sizable servant class seems to denote a certain prosperity here among middle-class Narberth residents, not just among its elite two-house families.

Then too, there were as yet up until about 1914 very few small dwellings in which domestic workers might live independently. The rental district of 100-block Conway Avenue had, according to the Census, attracted a carriage painter, day laborers of various nationalities, a railroad conductor, stonemason, carpenter and salesman as tenants. Besides that double file of twin houses, Brick Row's rental houses would soon offer possibilities. All of these early occupants are thought to have been white.

Town-Making a Deliberate Policy

Increasingly it is clear that Narberth's existence as a community resulted from a deliberate policy. The town-making was deliberate, and the independent status came about when the opportunity presented itself to go one notch further as a way of Narberth's defining itself more fully. And the emotional tide, already at high pitch, carried it across that great divide. Why, compared with other places, did the idea of independence attain such popularity here? Politically, it was perhaps a safe response to the crime and lack-of-services problem which, for a time, frightened citizens almost as much as the local crime wave at the outset of the race track era had frightened farmer Price.

Narberth by 1895 was a fast-growing place offering a vivid contrast between newly built suburban accommodations for mostly city people and scattered small old farms that were all that remained of this locality's agricultural past since the breakup of the big farms... not that there is any comparison between this project and the vast urban sprawl engulfing the American countryside and farmland far outside our cities today. An enormously significant factor in staving off such chaotic growth here at the time had been one farmer's resolve to stabilize his neighborhood around a nearly 200-year-old Quaker meeting house by doing everything possible to build up a sense of community. And to him, that meant creating the nucleus of a town on his own pristine, inherited farm while he was living on it, so he could thus hope to exercise some control over the project - an unusual initiative of its kind.

Fourteen years after that jump-start (and eight years after farmer Price's death), Narberth became an independently governed town. Would the momentum of self-rule continue? And who would seize the reins and take over the difficult task of creating the look and the feel of what was by then being billed as a "Year Round Home Town"²⁷⁷ to distance it from the old public perception of Philadelphia's Main Line as a place just for summer villas of the rich especially inasmuch as the first few houses built for Price's

²⁷⁷ This became Narberth Civic Association's official motto in 1914.

town had resembled big summer villas, and this apparently was an orientation common also to many other area developers in the early-1880s.

Well, the immediate and obvious answer about future leadership for the new town was provided by the judge at the county courthouse when he set a February 3, 1895 date for Narberth citizens to go to the polls and elect their first slate of borough officials, all unsalaried.

Yet even, as that initial vote was being tallied, those candidates for burgess and for six councilman-at-large posts fully realized that successful leadership was going to require considerable and sustained input not just from office-holders like themselves but, in order to make a go of things, also from a host of volunteer organizations not yet founded. Fortunately, at crucial times during Narberth's first 25 years of independent rule, close cooperation was achieved between elected officials and various kinds of organized volunteer effort that had no ties to government.

Early Leadership

Certainly, the lines of early leadership had been rather clearly drawn. At the fountainhead was farmer Price, his network consisting of veteran real estate and town developer Samuel Richards, who was active through early 1895 and signed Narberth's document in favor of independent rule, on down through a man with strong credentials to be Richards' choice of "quarterback" calling the signals which resulted in town consolidation, John Jacob Ridgway. Richards is undoubtedly the person who brought into Elm's town-building project this leader whose early activity had foreshadowed the Progressive Movement in Philadelphia. Though of different generations, they are a close fit in their upper-class backgrounds, strong Quaker credentials, and the two hailed from the same block in Philadelphia.

And to have a sense of the real story of how Narberth became a town, and an independent one, never mistake one at the center for one playing a supporting role. Otherwise John J. Ridgway (1843-1924) could easily be overlooked. J. J. Ridgway was the catalyst who got the stalled town-building project at Elm moving again with renewed vigor after it had begun to seem permanently bogged down. He entered on cue, paving the way for volunteerism to flourish, when he bought a strategic former Price tract that had slipped away from Price family ownership and had become an investment property for speculators, advantageously close to the railroad station.

There had been about Ridgway much that fascinated Edward Price. Not least was the interesting "coincidence" that both lawyer Ridgway and farmer Price each had for his original forebear in America a Quaker who built a Friends Meeting on his primitive plantation. John was a fifth-generation descendant of Richard Ridgway, an English-born convert to Quakerism who built Springfield Friends

Meeting on his place in Burlington County, New Jersey, and Price whose ancestor built Merion Friends Meeting.

We know for certain that John J. Ridgway chose Narberth's name. But where did he get it? If you ever stop to think about it, Narberth's front street, Montgomery Avenue, is a ridge. Creeks flow from springs on both sides of it. A considerable ancient ridge also exists in the town of Narberth in Wales where a well-known "Ridgway" mansion has existed for centuries.

So Narberth is named for a town in Wales, which is right on target for Ridgway's studious Anglophile approach. Ridges in these two places are trail-blazers.

Moreover, there was a refreshing note of free-wheeling audacity about Ridgway as he kept adding to it evidence of taste and resourcefulness to match. Imagine the picture: Ridgway was trying hard to build a tiny, full-fledged Progressive Era town about two miles from Philadelphia – at the time the most politically corrupt major city in America; ... trying to deliver on his considerable promise, mulling over his rather close ties to Benjamin W. Richards, the Philadelphia mayor who had hosted the historic visit to the city of Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville²⁷⁸ who had come to study democracy in America after the French Revolution; ... trying hard to instill here in this tiny new town the very features that appealed most to that early distinguished visitor.

De Tocqueville had praised our system of small property holders, saw religion as securing the moral base for democracy, the unique role of voluntary groups to represent diverse popular opinion, rejected the enslavement of blacks, and asserted that for any one class of people to be totally in charge spelled certain mediocrity.

Ridgway seemed to realize that even on a very small scale such as in Narberth, those features work best. We can imagine how he might appreciate that Narberth, founded to protect an ancient Quaker meetinghouse, already had three new churches and was still seeking additional houses of worship in 1895. We would soon struggle hard to avoid becoming a one-class town of any sort.

Topping off his many achievements here, Ridgway brought the investor Mrs. Vance, represented by her young lawyer, J. Alexander Simpson, into the project as developer. And the moment he did, Ridgway was a made man in the eyes of Simpson's lawyer father - as indeed he should have been. This was putting a lot of responsibility on that young man's shoulders. But it was much more than that to the Simpsons, for the whole family, including parents and three of their other married children and their

²⁷⁸ Across the centuries, the Ridgway and Richards families are intertwined in a number of ways besides at Elm. In one example, J. J.'s father Thomas Ridgway succeeded Benjamin W. Richards (host of de Tocqueville) as president of Girard Trust Bank upon Richards' death in that post.

families, immediately jumped into Elm's town-building project themselves in various capacities that included buying and/or building new houses here and moving in - adjoining but not on the actual acreage of Mrs. Vance, as if not to "crowd" young Alex by meddling in the affairs of his client. Alex meanwhile opened a law office in the heart of downtown Elm. His publisher brother James Simpson²⁷⁹ would put down roots here the longest and was in the first round of persons elected to borough council in 1895. No other family did more in various community-building roles especially during the 1890s in an array of voluntary organizations including those of the churches than the Simpsons.

From humbler roots than Ridgway, and very able themselves, the Simpsons would have regarded Ridgway as a hero and role-model because of his active role in the general reform movement in Philadelphia led by the Citizens' Municipal Reform Association of which he was a member and often a candidate on their Reform ticket. For his part, Ridgway recognized the spark in young Alex Simpson that eventually led him to the State Supreme Court, and understood that he could be trusted to follow through on a commitment.

An election law specialist, young Alex Simpson (1855-1935) had a reputation for being ready at all times to support any movement for civic betterment.²⁸⁰ Even as early as the 1880s, he was a member of Philadelphia's first Committee of One Hundred,²⁸¹ his eventual elevation to the State Supreme Court drawing heavy fire from machine politicians.²⁸²

Meanwhile, ever since John J. Ridgway became involved in carrying out Edward R. Price's wishes to create the town of Elm at the height of his own busy career, he never could take his eyes off happenings in Narberth for very long. After all, he had founded the Real Estate Investment Company²⁸³ (1889) with himself as president and his lawyer brother-in-law J. Parker Norris as secretary. And he did this principally to handle the sale of numerous housing lots here, having introduced the name Narberth initially as a street name, while the town itself was still called Elm.

²⁷⁹ His house still stands at 232 N. Essex Ave facing the start of Woodbine Ave, in the Belmar district.

²⁸⁰ Godchades, Frederic A. (ed.), Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography (New York, 1937), v. 22, p. 1-3

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² To note the way U.S. Senator Boies Penrose, boss of Philadelphia's "machine" politics, fought hard against Alexander Simpson, Jr.'s 1918 elevation to the State Supreme Court, see the weekly Philadelphia Young Republicans, Aug. 14, 1918, p. 1-2, with its tirade by Penrose. The vehemence of the attack portends well for Simpson's judicial integrity.

²⁸³ Its prominent advertisements in city directories in 1890, 1895 and 1899 named its officers; in 1890, it listed a branch office at S.W. corner Washington & Passyunk Avenues.

Six Leaders

Six of the most noteworthy men who provided timely and outstanding leadership during the borough's earliest decades were, in ways that matter, six of a kind. For despite their varied backgrounds, each seemed far more comfortable building up a new town than as the city-dwellers they had been previously.

One of the six who made an especially energetic arrival here at Elm was *F. Millwood Justice (1864-1935)*. Turns out he had married into the family of the famed early silversmith Philip Syng, Jr., when he married Mary Syng Letchwood. The renowned Syng was an Irish-born Anglican with a Swedish wife. "Mill's" business as a silverware company importer/exporter was enhanced by such a link. The couple built an important large house (still standing at 1104 Montgomery Avenue) in 1889 by the leading woman architect Minerva Parker Nichols of that period. Mary's lawyer father also lived there. And its location was within the "Swedish Triangle" district. Of course "Mill" served on Narberth's first Borough Council. Of his and Mary's several daughters, one of them married Burgess George M. Henry.

The second of these individuals, *J. Alexander Simpson the elder (1824-1894)*, had balanced his interest in law with a period of government service before helping to make a true town here at Elm Station. Born at Wilmington, Delaware, Simpson, while young, was living rather near the Ridgways in Philadelphia and seemingly headed toward a watchcase-maker's trade when he switched to studying law. Besides early employment as a soldier in the Philadelphia Sheriff's office presumably in 1887 while Ridgway was sheriff, Simpson eventually specialized in election law, held a cabinet post in State government, and his memorial was a gift of land in West Philadelphia from his son and namesake so that a Carnegie Library might be built on it. Dedication to public service was ingrained in both men, and this had a considerable impact on other family members for several generations. Also an election law specialist, young Alex Simpson (1855-1935) had a reputation for being ready at all times to support any movement for civic betterment.²⁸⁴ Even as early as the 1880s, he was a member of Philadelphia's first Committee of One Hundred,²⁸⁵ his eventual elevation to the State Supreme Court drawing heavy fire from machine politicians.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Frederic A. Godchades (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography* (New York, 1937), v. 22, pp. 1-3.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ To note the way U.S. Senator Boies Penrose, boss of Philadelphia's "machine" politics, fought hard against Alexander Simpson Jr.'s 1918 elevation to the State Supreme Court, see the weekly *Philadelphia Young Republican*, 14 August 1918, pp. 1-2, with its tirade by Penrose. The vehemence of the attack portends well for Simpson's judicial integrity.

A faithful attendee at Narberth Park Association meetings prior to the town's achieving independent rule, the *Reverend Philip L. Jones (1838-19--)* had been quick to embrace new challenges as they arose from circumstances. Thus he was a compelling choice to serve as the first chairman of the school board that Narberth was required by law to establish upon becoming a self-governed municipality. The same British-accented Reverend Jones also became the second president of Narberth Fire Company, which was the first major volunteer group founded in the new borough. Selection of this prominent Baptist Publication Society book editor and former pastor of a Baptist church on Philadelphia's South Broad Street, came at a time of crisis and helped smooth over troubled waters just after Jones' predecessor made a hasty exit from that fire company post amid criticism. At the time, those jobs as school board chairman and fire company president were two of the most highly esteemed – and high profile – positions of trust in our community, and custom fully sanctioned the choice of a Protestant clergyman to fill them. This leader, however, was considered unduly harsh in one respect: he forbade smoking at school board meetings, which in retrospect makes him seem a man for today and astute.

Next, the broker *Charles E. Kreamer (1849-1922)*,²⁸⁷ a Vance tract resident from the start, was the nearest thing the peripatetic J. A. Simpson the elder had as a back-up in his community-building efforts. Narberth Association's only member to hold an elected post in that group throughout its existence – Kreamer was its treasurer – he also strongly supported the Belmar tract development and the foundation of its first Methodist church, overseeing rebuilding of that church after its tragic destruction by fire (probably arson) just before its opening. That loss was a blow of such magnitude to the fledgling congregation that it probably contributed to Papa Simpson's sudden death during widespread financial Panic of 1893. Kreamer kept a detailed journal of efforts to reconstruct that ruined church. Besides he also strongly encouraged the founding of the local Presbyterian Church, and was a long-time prominent official of the fire company here. Because Kreamer's foremost client for stocks was the enormously rich Edward T. Stotesbury, one of the leading public figures of that time in Philadelphia, it is tempting to speculate that the quietly forceful Kreamer became a leader here at Elm due to the involvement in the local town-building effort by clients of his. In the business of taking calculated risks, Kreamer was also a crosser of boundaries of class who had the common touch. For besides being the local firemen's best friend, Kreamer, after his invalid heiress wife died, turned heads and withstood his own family's

²⁸⁷ A co-partner in a leading Philadelphia brokerage firm Emory, Freed & Company. Five interviews with Kreamer's grand-nephew, bibliophile William Spawn, 1990s, most notably 30 November 1994; also Kreamer's journal, United Methodist Church of Narberth (archives transferred to United Methodist Church of Bryn Mawr, 2013).

disapproval by marrying a much younger woman of far simpler tastes from upstate, the local Methodist church organist.²⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the “monuments” by which the above-mentioned industrialist *Augustus J. Loos (1853-1926)*²⁸⁹ is best remembered here in the town, or should be, are his leadership, much of it behind the scenes, in undertaking and following through on three of Narberth’s most important early projects: the YMCA, creation of a Garden City district known as Narbrook Park as a nonprofit venture in which the whole town participated, and the Narberth Playground. Neither he nor the elder Simpson could have accomplished what they did without really strong backup team support. And the power elite Loos involved in his Narberth projects included high-ranking Pennsylvania Railroad officials and their kind. Founder of a lubricating oil firm that still exists but is no longer family-owned, Loos was treasurer of the Philadelphia Oil Trade Association, and he and his wife were members of Cornell University’s graduating class of 1877.

The most culturally astute of these six leaders, A. J. Loos saw it as his duty to provide high-quality cultural and recreational resources and even a “model community” – each as an educational service to those who by reason of birth, social position, economic status or educational background did not, to put it in the vernacular, “know what they were missing.” In Loos’ eyes, culture for the masses included hefty doses of a reasonably high artistic culture, regularly administered as part of his social responsibility.

The singular achievement of landscape architect *Anton Emil Wohlert (1869 -1941)*²⁹⁰ was that, after immigrating to this country from Denmark as a youth, he quickly rose to be put in charge by the Pennsylvania Railroad of Landscaping all its train stations between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, then moved on to attain a national reputation as a nurseryman specializing in Asian trees and plant materials. Yet after settling here when the borough was a dozen years old – thus Wohlert was the last of these six community leaders to arrive here – he never missed a beat locally in building public awareness of the importance of landscape, trees and plants in everyday life, performing much public service in this

²⁸⁸ Correspondence with Roberta M. Lewis, executive assistant to the president, Devereux Foundation, 14 January 2013. [Editor’s note: this footnote belongs in this paragraph but the editor is not sure it belongs here.]

²⁸⁹ Correspondence and interviews with Loos family and Cornell University; obit, *Our Town*, 13 February 1926, p.1; *ibid.*, editorial by Howard A. Banks, 20 February 1926, p.2; *ibid.*, recreation board tribute, 27 March 1926, p. 5; Cornell University Record of the Class of 1877 (Ithaca, 1923), pp. 56-58.

²⁹⁰ Correspondence and interviews with Wohlert family and various libraries including the Library of Congress. The Wohlerts were my close neighbors. One account, noting his supreme self-confidence, refers to him as “Augustus Evergreen Wohlert” in *Our Town*, October 1918. Another, *bio. Ibid.*

endeavor, and helping to found several volunteer organizations in the area, often teaming up with Curtis Publishing Company executives on local projects.

So the closer one looks at the lives of these community leaders and at their volunteerism, the more convinced one is that these six men, known for their capacity for enthusiasm, were profoundly engaged by life. Each had in varying degrees a down-to-earth streak and each also had serious interests apart from his main line of work. Moreover, just as none was bent on pursuing an easeful life, so too all were constantly on the move, striving to pull things together and strengthen them, mostly by their activity within the numerous volunteer groups they either founded or energized. And certainly a ripple effect was felt among the many other individuals who followed their example and joined them in their efforts. So much so that the Borough of Narberth within its first two decades won widespread recognition as a community on the move – a reputation it sustained for decades.

As for the six town councilmen and the burgess elected in February 1895, they were successful businessmen, mostly heads of their own firms or corporate leaders, including Sylvester J. Baker, a drug and chemical firm executive who was a founder of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science, a silverware manufacturer and importer, the Otis Elevator Company president, and a publisher, while the newly elected burgess, August H. Mueller, was a publisher of railroad atlases who had led the unsuccessful first drive for independent rule here. Nearly all were veterans of the campaign for Narberth's independence as was the man chosen for town clerk. The council members in turn elected as the first Narberth borough council president Richard H. Wallace, executive at a large center-city Philadelphia insurance company. Wallace, a "new ace," had not previously held office in any of the three residents' groups. A Presbyterian family man who hailed from West Philadelphia, he is best remembered as the father of the architect who became U.S. Army Major General Brenton G. Wallace, author of a biography of his World War II commander, five-star General George Patton.²⁹¹ Besides one or two Quakers, the council comprised mostly members of mainline Protestant denominations.

Meanwhile, A. Perry Redifer,²⁹² a manufacturer of lasts,²⁹³ was named clerk, which even then was a fairly heavy-duty job, foreshadowing the eventual need for a borough manager.

The first item of business at the first borough council meeting²⁹⁴ in March 1895 was, not surprisingly, to set a tax rate – of five mills, expected to produce \$18,572 in revenue from \$371,450 in

²⁹¹ Patton and His Third Army, 1946.

²⁹² The house he then lived in is still standing at S.E. corner Windsor & Essex. That's 119 N. Essex.

²⁹³ Editor's note: a "last" is a block or form shaped like a human foot and used in making or repairing shoes.

²⁹⁴ Borough of Narberth archives, a prime source.

assessed property valuation. Taxable properties totaled 151. One of the earliest ordinances tried to limit unrestricted wandering of horses and cattle within the borough. Only persons who already had pigs in their possession were allowed to keep them, another ordinance specified. Other achievements the first year included founding a Board of Health, building a Windsor Avenue sewer with lateral connections at all cross streets (built by Goodman and Clothier), and macadamizing some streets. By December 1895, assessed property value rose dramatically to \$636,600 and a \$12,000 bond issue authorized public improvements.

But another matter also receiving early attention from the new borough council was whether it would reimburse the Narberth Association for money it had voluntarily expended for lighting of streets and for the collection of ashes and garbage during the period after council had been organized, namely after March first. The answer came back in the affirmative, that council would reimburse both the Narberth Association and the Elm Association for such expenditures. Next, on September first, 1896, council took over the responsibility of collecting ashes and garbage and of maintaining the electric lights, thus relieving the Narberth Association of those duties altogether. Finally, after reimbursements from council were received and settlement of other accounts, each member of Narberth Association in good standing – about eighteen persons – received a pro rata share of the proceeds of that group’s holdings when the organization disbanded in December of that first year of independent rule, its work completed.

With independent status in 1895 came the necessity for Narberth to establish its own separate school district. To that end it also purchased the already operative public school (built 1893) from the Lower Merion township school district. Narberth maintained its own school district until enactment of the School Consolidation Law in 1965.

Churches in Narberth

Religion is that which “binds,” so it was recognized that, just as nearby Merion Meeting once bound an entire Welsh community together, so too a projected new town of many hundreds, even several thousand human beings, would be bound together by other systems of belief and practice than those of just one tradition. Thus, the Public Ledger, reporting on the progress of the three tract-house developments at Elm, was able to declare on November 13, 1890:

The People of Elm are bestirring themselves in the direction of securing churches, and a movement is under way that promises well for an edifice for the Baptists. It is said that N. [sic] S. Hopper, a Philadelphia broker, has agreed to subscribe ten thousand dollars towards the

building. At present services are held in a vacant dwelling. There is some talk, too, of a Presbyterian church and subscriptions are about to be solicited for the establishment of such a church. It is likely that the ground required will be donated by a lady deeply interested in the growth of Elm.

The Baptists did indeed build the first church, the Presbyterians the second and the Methodists a third, all before 1895. Thus, by the time the borough came into existence, Narberth already was a place recognizable by its houses of worship. Two more churches, Catholic and Lutheran, soon rounded out the picture. Like Merion Friends Meeting, the Baptist, Presbyterian and Catholic churches are located on Edward ap Rees's original Merion Welsh land grant (1682), while the Methodist and Lutheran churches occupy land similarly granted to Hugh Roberts in 1681. Today, as much as ever, Narberth's five churches draw the surrounding houses together. Church bells and recorded hymns are regularly heard.²⁹⁵ Additional binding together comes from the presence of Main Line Reform Temple and All Saints Episcopal Church standing at the borough perimeter, just outside it, as Friends Meeting does.

Narberth's only south-side church is *Baptist*, located on a piece of the former hundred-two-acre farm of William Thomas, a long-time member of Lockley Baptist Church, Hestonville in West Philadelphia. Several factors favored a Baptist church here, besides any link there might be due to previous ownership of the land by a devout Baptist.

One was the arrival in the nearby Fairview neighborhood in their new house "Pennhurst" of a couple known for their Baptist benefactions, Harry S. Hopper and his wife Harriet M. Bucknell (of the Bucknell University family).

Another enhancement: Baptist minister Rev. Thomas C. Trotter, Sr., recently retired pastor of Byberry Baptist Church and kin of the well-known early furniture-making Trotters of Philadelphia's Elfreth's Alley and of Victorian painter Newbold H. Trotter, settled on Elm's south side surrounded by his various adult children, several of whom bought Macfarlane houses close to the church, as he did.

Also, clergy from the Baptist Publication Society, which was responsible for Philadelphia's dominance of the Sunday school literature publishing scene worldwide at the time, also made a bee-line for Mac's houses and started an enclave in Elm's south side that supported community progress and provided community leadership. The Baptist enclave, which included several ministers, for example supplied Narberth's first public school board president, English-born Rev. Philip L. Jones. One of

²⁹⁵ Editor's Note: No longer are these bells played.

several Baptist Publication Society editors residing here at the time, he was formerly pastor of South Broad Street Baptist Church. Another one of these authors and editors was the prominent Rev. Dr. C. R. Blackall, an author and editor of Baptist Superintendent, who had also been a Civil War battlefield physician. His third wife, known professionally as Mrs. C. R. Blackall, was the first editor of Narberth Civic Association's Our Town newspaper and originator of the 1914 historical pageant. Another resident clergyman with ministries elsewhere who participated actively in borough life was Rev. D. Elim A. E. Palmquist, Woodland Baptist Church pastor, Philadelphia Council of Churches organizer, and member of the Philadelphia mayor's crime commission, active through the mid-twentieth century.

After services and bible school began in autumn 1890, the Baptist mission was organized and linked with the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia. In June 1891, Harry S. Hopper bought a lot from Macfarlane agreeing that a "substantial stone" church and Sunday school be built there within three years, the deed says. A cornerstone was laid October 10. Miss Caldwell sang the "Psalms" at the formal opening in April 1892, the Public Ledger noting that \$4,500 of the church's eleven-thousand-dollar cost had already been paid. Church seating capacity was 245 and basement Sabbath school room, a hundred twenty-five.

Following Rev. Harold Kennedy's installation as pastor, the mission gained independent status as the Baptist Church of the Evangel. It had a hundred-thirty members by 1907. In 1923-24, an entirely new Gothic church (Victor D. Abel, architect) was built adjoining the old sanctuary, [at one point] a thrift shop. Of the ten pastors who have succeeded Harold Kennedy, Rev. James C. Flanagan presently [was] the first to combine his ministry with a full-time job in business. True to tradition here, Narberth's Baptist community has always included several resident clergymen with ministries elsewhere who participate actively in borough life.

During the Vietnam war, counseling was available to war resisters from the young minister at this church, when such support was not widely available on the Main Line. Under its current minister, the church follows a fundamentalist course and also pursues a ministry to the physically handicapped.

Journalistic speculation that "a lady deeply interested in the growth of Elm" would donate land for a *Presbyterian* church proved overly optimistic. In May 1891, nearly six months after that Public Ledger report, the woman in question – she was S. Almira Vance, developer of the Narberth Park tract and daughter of a prominent Presbyterian minister – sold land at Windsor and Grayling avenues to Narberth Presbyterian Church trustees for twelve hundred dollars. Nonetheless Mrs. Vance probably did greatly welcome the idea of this church on her tract. Her father, Rev. George Chandler, had done

pioneering work to build up a new church in a closely-knit community. He had served as the First Presbyterian Church of Kensington founding pastor from 1814 to his death in 1860.

The Presbytery of Philadelphia-North went along with the proposal for a Presbyterian church here because none existed between Gladwyne and Overbrook. It next appointed a committee which met in June 1891. On that occasion the group received nine members, was declared a full-fledged church, elected five trustees and named two elders. Services began in a vacant house at 116 Elmwood. The church charter was recorded July 6, and a frame structure dedicated in November.

Dr. William Young Brown's installation as first pastor took place in 1894. After fire destroyed the wooden church,²⁹⁶ the cornerstone of a new edifice was laid in January 1897. Of the opening service in the new church on September 9, the Public Ledger reported that the Holmesburg granite structure was built substantially, big enough, and "of an appearance" keyed to demands of an increasing population rather than the short-range needs of its small flock. Designed by architect J. Cather Newsom and built by Benjamin Ketcham's Sons, the structure drew praise for its picturesque exterior, its tiling, oak paneling, and lofty tower with thousand-pound bell. The name Conrad F. Clothier ([Philadelphia] Mayor Fitler's business partner) led off the list of memorial windows designed by Alfred Godwin and William Reith.

Pew rents were abolished in 1912. When membership reached 500 in 1925, a Gothic addition (Mr. Graves, architect) was built and dedicated. In the six hundreds since 1929, membership rose to 737 in 1938. Assistant ministers and student assistants had been added by the time Rev. Bryant M. Kirkland was called to New York's Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in 1946, membership then totaling 938. It peaked during Rev. Robert J. Lamont's pastorate at 986 in 1949. Since then the figure has settled into the eight hundreds, save for a slight dip during the sixties. An extensive church addition with Gothic entrance façade (Clarence H. Woolmington, architect) was built, 1955-7. During the current ministry of ninth pastor, Rev. George Callahan, the church ventured into charismatics. Narberth's last three mayors came from this congregation, also at least three foreign missionaries, and ten ordained gospel ministers. Newest of these is Narberth-born William F. Dean, ordained and installed as this church's assistant pastor, both on the same day in 1981.

Narberth's only church transplant is *Methodist*. Beth-Raffen Methodist Episcopal Church was originally founded in Fairview in 1884, eight years before a decision was made to build its permanent building here. We got the church thanks to a devout divorcee's bequest and strenuous efforts on the part

²⁹⁶ Editor's Note: January 1896

of two Elm community leaders. She was Mary F. Thompson. They were J. Alexander Simpson, St. and Charles E. Kreamer.

Actually, the initiative of four Lutherans spearheaded the founding of Beth-Raffen. Members of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ardmore, they were Samuel B. Tibben, August M. Bornmuller, George G. Holliday, and Samuel F. Tibben. They signed a statement in March 1881 declaring need for a Lutheran church and Sunday school for themselves, their families, and neighborhood. They offered a lot on Conshohocken State Road one mile south of Mill Creek and building stones, but to no avail. On their second try, they won Methodist approval.

The first Methodist class meeting took place in October 1884, with Mary F. Thompson of Fairview and her adopted daughter Priscilla N. Thompson in attendance. Services were regularly held in farmer Samuel B. Tibben's Fairview home until a wooden church was built on their lot. The Beth-Raffen name and a constitution were adopted in 1885. Attached to what is now called the Gladwyne United Methodist Church, Beth-Raffen Mission came into the orbit of Mary F. Thompson's varied Methodist benefactions at her death in 1888. Her gift of \$1500 "to be used as they shall deem best" is believed to have clinched a decision to build a permanent structure eventually.

J. Alexander Simpson, Sr. and Charles E. Kreamer thought it ought to be sooner rather than later – and at Elm. By 1892, banker Kreamer was running the "Belmar" tract house project of the Elm Land Improvement Company which had everything to gain from securing a church as focal point, just as the other two, bigger, competing developments here had done. They won their goal by becoming active participants in the life of the mission, then still under the wing of the mother church in Gladwyne. In 1892, J. A. Simpson, Sr. was elected a Beth-Raffen trustee and placed on a site-search committee. In less than two months his committee report of a desirable lot at Essex and Price avenues here was adopted. Appointed to the building committee were Simpson, a Simpson son-in-law, and Kreamer. A raging fire destroyed the nearly completed church. Finally finished by a new builder under architect D. Judge DeNean's supervision, the structure was dedicated in September 1895. Independent status in 1897 brought a new name, Narberth Methodist Episcopal Church.

By 1925 every inch of that "little church on the hill" seemed crowded by 291 active members and 287 Sunday school pupils and teachers, so a new church in the late English Gothic style (Alexander Mackie Adams, architect) was planned. Pledges were taken to meet costs, and construction was to start in five years on three acres of Barrie land purchased across from the old church.

Then suddenly the Great Depression of 1929 struck with full fury soon after the ground-breaking. Plans went ahead anyway. Eventually not only did the local bank fail which held the

construction funds, but some of the church's very active members died or were transferred. Still the people completed their task. This larger church, with stained-glass windows by H. L. Smith Company, was dedicated in September 1930, a mortgage-burning ceremony held in 1951. Continuation of this costly project in the face of many obstacles is probably Narberth's most heart-warming Depression story.²⁹⁷

In 1946, an amplification system for the church tower carillon was presented to the church by its members to memorialize deceased (Robert Compton, William Haywood, Charles Latch, C. J. Rainear 2nd) and living church members who served their country faithfully in World War II. These chimes and hymns vary according to the church season and patriotic holidays. They play daily at noon and six-thirty in the evening and Sunday mornings.²⁹⁸

While still attached to Gladwyne, this church had seven ministers, subsequently twenty-three ministers including presently Rev. John L. Taylor. Two Narberth mayors (then called burgesses) namely Fletcher W. Stites and Henry A. Frye, came from this congregation, now known as the United Methodist Church of Narberth.

The smaller Beth Raffin church building survives as a private house fitted out by its owner during the 1940s with woodwork, fireplaces, flooring and wrought iron chiefly from the demolished (Lindenhurst) mansion of department store tycoon John Wanamaker (a Philadelphia civic idol of the 1890s decade) living in suburban Jenkintown.

Rev. Richard F. Cowley celebrated the founding-day Mass of St. Margaret's *Catholic* parish on Christmas 1900. For the occasion, the new parishioners gathered at "Derlwyn," twenty-room residence of the church's first and long-time benefactor, stockbroker Nicholas H. Thouron and his wife Anna Dutilh Smith Thouron, daughter of University of Pennsylvania medical professor Francis Gurney Smith. Great-grandson of Pierre Thouron, a general in Napoleon's army whose son, a political refugee, became a rich Philadelphia ship owner, Nicholas Thouron had a rash of Margarets in his family – his grandmother, mother, sister, and his only child. The parish church in Narberth has memorials to them, tributes Nicholas personally solicited within his family. There is also a window portraying St. Margaret of Antioch.

Regular Masses were first held in Narberth's Elm Hall fire station. By 1901, the Maguire's "Court-Hay" estate, a picturesque Wynnewood Avenue site (formerly Mrs. Fuller's, later Lakewood

²⁹⁷ This large former church property as of 20016 was transformed into twelve residential units for purchase, nine of them with built-in garages. Three of the residential units occupy the former Vauclain House.

²⁹⁸ Editor's note: Sadly, the chimes are now silent.

Apartment, now Narwyn Lane subdivision) was officially targeted the most desirable location for a church. It was unavailable.²⁹⁹ Area Catholics then totaled 276.

[As indicated earlier,] Father Cowley [had] settled the site problem by buying a Narberth Avenue triple lot, sale of which to J. Uhle Bethell in June 1888 had forecast Mrs. Vance's imminent takeover of the Ridgway tract. Publisher Samuel Irvine Bell had lived in the turreted Queen Anne Revival house Davis and Bethell built there. That residence became and still is the rectory. Building of a church occurred in stages. A basement church was finished in 1902. Dedication of the English Gothic style church of Avondale granite with Bavarian stained-glass windows took place on a snowy day in March 1914. Visual evidence suggests that the church was designed by a parishioner, Canadian-born architect John Flynn, nationally recognized for his massive Columbus, Ohio fire house just before he moved here.

By 1929, in response to outbreaks of bigotry during the Smith-Hoover presidential campaign when Klansmen had marched up Woodbine Avenue (in the parish, also in Narberth postal zone, but not in the borough) to light a fiery cross, St. Margaret's parishioner and advertising executive, Karl H. Rogers started the Catholic Information Society of Narberth. This "Narberth Movement" published (until 1942) widely circulated booklets with catchy titles. Those interfaith pamphlets aired Catholic doctrine on a "take it or leave it" basis, without argument. The movement went national, was copied overseas.

In 1937, James J. Duffy became the first of fourteen parishioners ordained a priest. By 1979, the congregation comprised 1,250 families or about 3500 persons. After one year as seventh pastor here, Monsignor Francis Bible Schulte (he is the third consecutive monsignor to run this parish) was ordained an auxiliary bishop to John Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia in August 1981. Bishop Schulte's background is school administration. Currently president of Middle States Association accrediting agency for all colleges and schools in the region, he is the first priest so-named. He is also the first pastoral auxiliary bishop of Philadelphia to be posted in Montgomery County, the first in a Main Line community, and Narberth's first bishop. Auxiliary bishops go where the people are. This parish has long had a reputation for one of the highest attendance ratios (2,300-2,500 on a typical Sunday), one of the highest ratios of people taking communion (more than a hundred thousand communion wafers used here annually), and for financial support of any church in the archdiocese.

Two other bishops resided in St. Margaret's parish previously, both as exiles (at the Sisters of Mercy motherhouse in Merion), namely George J. Caruana, Archbishop of Malta (1947-51) and Joseph

²⁹⁹ Editor's note: The reason is given in the next section.

M. Yuen, Bishop of Chumatien, Honan, China (1956-69). Chaplain of the same motherhouse until 1940 was Rev. Francis Brennan, later a cardinal posted in Rome who, in 1968, attained the highest Catholic church office ever held by an American.

By 1901, twenty-seven St. Margaret's pupils were enrolled in parochial school, but not in Narberth. Since 1884, local Catholic children had attended "University School" run by Sister M. de Mercedes in a house, St. Isidore's, on the present site of Waldron Academy, Merion. Not until 1922 did Father Cowley purchase a house at 209 Forrest to be used for education, making it official a parish school was located in Narberth. Into it he put forty-eight pupils for a year until he constructed a school (designed by William Webb Donohoe of Donohoe and Stackhouse, architects) on the site.

In 1925, St. Margaret's School cornerstone was laid, dedication occurring the next year. One hundred-two pupils were enrolled then, and Sisters of Mercy from Merion conducted the eight grades. Dennis Cardinal Dougherty presided over a ceremony for the first full-year graduates of the school in 1927. During Rev. James F. Toner's pastorate (1938-53), parochial pupils reached the three hundred mark. Monsignor Joseph M. Gleason in 1968 constructed a new school (Henry D. Dagit & Sons, architects) and convent, turning the old school into a parish center. From 1969 to 1973, the latter served as religious school and synagogue of Temple Beth Am Israel. Since 1967, a St. Margaret's School Board appointed by the pastor has functioned. In 1980-81, parochial school enrollment was 288.

Narberth acquired its *Lutheran* Church of the Holy Trinity in 1921. First meeting in October that year was attended by eight persons. It took place a month after the idea of founding the church was born. Next a canvassing committee obtained eighty-five charter members, and the first service took place at the YMCA in December. Formal organization followed in January with ninety members enrolled. Sunday school started in March.

After arrival a year later of the first pastor, Rev. M. E. McLinn, overcrowding was noticed at the YMCA and a building committee formed to purchase land. Anne Berry tells me that she recalls having attended some evangelical meetings in a tent that, around that time, covered the present Lutheran church site at the southeast corner Narberth and Woodbine avenues. A springtime 1924 groundbreaking for this hilltop Gothic church of gray stone, designed by architect George Baum, was followed by dedication in May 1925.

Next pastor, Rev. Cletus A. Senft, spent his entire thirty-six-year ministry at Holy Trinity. A combined parish house and parsonage annex was dedicated in 1940. The church greatly expanded its membership after Pastor Senft returned from a leave of absence as a Navy chaplain with the Seabees in the South Pacific. Various parish groups in existence almost from the start of this church (the church

women, church school, choir and youth organizations) developed more fully in the fifties. Peak years of membership were 1959-61, with 552 persons. Rev. Kenneth F. Frickert was the next pastor. Under the fourth minister, Rev. Orion A. Eichner, Holy Trinity membership is 441. Fifty-three percent of these persons live in Narberth and the pastor tells me that an unusually large percentage of them have long-time association with this church. As Holy Trinity is located near the scene of the April 20, 1981 fire that destroyed several homes, it served as headquarters for dispensing needed help and supplies to the homeless for some time afterward.

Early Construction on North Wynnewood Avenue (Narberth's "Gold Coast"³⁰⁰)

[Toward the end of the nineteenth century,] the important unanswered question was: where to build a Catholic church? The Maguire family's "Court-Hey" property on the borough's western edge - corner of Windsor and North Wynnewood Avenues and extending up into a wooded area - was officially deemed the most desirable location. In that general area, too, was a large rugged summer residence built for the wife of a rich Philadelphia drover, Alfred M. Fuller. For more than a century [since then], people wondered why the Maguire land was unavailable. Turns out that Edward T. Maguire Jr. definitely did have something else in mind for that attractive property, although we don't know how much thought he gave to the destruction that would inevitably be caused by wiping out an exceedingly rare and intact woodland site.

For in fact, Court-Hey stood on high ground on the tract's most scenic site surrounded by a virtual forest of exceedingly tall oaks, beech trees and tulip poplars at North Wynnewood Avenue, which would have required leveling the forest (a tornado entering Narberth at the tunnel a century later took care of that). Originally the Fuller house had overlooked Ridgeway's Crystal Lake from its own high position.

Maguire seemed to have very much his own focus within that property that extended northward from Windsor Avenue and included plenty of land. For him its centerpiece of it all was the location of a house³⁰¹ he wanted built at #219 North Wynnewood Avenue. In 1907 that house was completed, having

³⁰⁰ Editor's Note: The author's notes state in reference to North Wynnewood Avenue being considered a "gold coast," that it was "not necessarily that rich people [lived] there, though some have. It's that the large, deep lots [were] a pot of gold for future development purposes."

³⁰¹ Edward T. Maguire Jr. had obtained a deed, dated 8-11-1900, for the architect Charles J. McIlvain Jr. to design this #219 North Wynnewood Avenue house. Eventually the Fritsch family, living there, owned this deed. Seems likely Maguire had engaged the architect before hearing of the church idea. E.T. Maguire had commissioned architect C.E. Schemerhorn to design two houses on N. Wynnewood Avenue in 1903.

been built for Maguire daughter's wedding gift. As Mr. Maguire died before she had occupied it, she was forced to sell³⁰² it to settle her father's estate.

During publisher James Artman's³⁰³ ownership on the far west side of what had been called Court-Hey, it's strongly believed that the delightfully picturesque lake he had built on his property in 1915, containing an island, was designed by Robert Anderson Pope, the same landscape architect who designed our adjacent Narbrook Park. Mr. Artman had an unusually generous habit of lending his house to the internationally-known Shakespearean acting team of Sothern & Marlowe whenever they performed in Philadelphia. Edward Sothern was a second-generation acting favorite locally and his British wife Julia Marlowe was a native of England's Lake District. On their last national tour before retiring in 1924, that year neighbors were especially respectful of the couple's privacy. This my parents living here at the time, and frequent theatergoers, were told about the local custom by young respectful neighbor, Peg Bailey of 30 Narbrook Park, keenly interested in cultural matters.

James Artman's Lake from the start was used for swimming and ice-skating for family members. (Vera,³⁰⁴ one of their children, is said practically to have raised her younger siblings, Marian, James and Teddy); and recreation for the whole community was permitted there as well. Artman built a corral and kept a few forces and had a greenhouse. He likewise took over the large Fuller house³⁰⁵ with its commanding view. This building had continually active life for decades.

When Artman took it over, this was two-story house with a large attic. Resourcefully, he reshaped the roof and thus made better third-floor rooms. That house had a huge center hall, serving also as a living room. Because this space was two stories high, it led off to other rooms.³⁰⁶ Artman's property was about 6 acres, not counting his #9 house in Narbrook Park.

Gradually, Lakeview, as it began to be called, became an apartment house. But the huge center hall could still be rented for special events. And in the 1930s, that hall served Narbrook Park millionaire Clarence Dolan as his preferred choice for his largest parties, sometimes including showgirls from New York, delivered to Lakeview's door by Narberth taxis.

³⁰² Howard and Mabel Fritsch bought the #219 house on two acres and were the first people to live in it. Their daughter, Mabel Fritsch Knapp, was born there. In 1939, they built a next-door house at 217, moved in, and sold #219 to A.G. and Effie Dean of fond memory. Author's source: Mabel Fritsch Knapp, October 24, 1979, two-way correspondence.

³⁰³ Founded by James Artman, the Chilton Publishing Company in 2016 is located in Radnor, PA. Its flagship is the Iron Age Magazine. Its publications currently include the Chilton Automotive Manuals.

³⁰⁴ Mabel Fritsch Knapp, correspondence with the writer, October 27, 1979.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, October 27, 1979.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

Toward the end of the days of Narberth's great Lake, it had become more of a duck pond. And yet the sound frogs make, loudest of all the bullfrogs, had been known in Narberth since our earliest recorded history. It had been commented upon too in published writings around 1800 by English visitors to their Marion Welsh friends as being characteristic of this place.

However, while the Artman-built Lake existed and with good will about children welcome to swim, ice skate or sled, there were occasional complaints. Like the time a Windsor Avenue resident angrily phoned Narberth's borough manager, insisting: "Do something about the frogs!" A conventional Narwyn Lane subdivision eventually followed c. 1960, after the lake's water source from Wynnewood was piped under to join Narbrook Park's Creek.

Lakeview Apartment finally met its end because of hurricane Hazel,³⁰⁷ when two giant White Oak trees crossed each other, damaging it, and requiring rescue of its last occupant.

Beyond that, James Artman also built a house on his property where it extended into Narbrook Park in order to comply with the civic association's wishes, and intending to offer it for sale. The architect D. Knickerbocker Boyd designed a very attractive red-tile roofed Arts & Crafts house there overlooking its surroundings from high ground. And when John B Williams, a Curtis Publishing Company executive and an enthusiast of this civic project, was choosing a site for a house at #33 Narbrook, he chose a fairly close variation of Artman's #9 house. This one, however, combines its red-tile roof with a red brick foundation. Both houses have featured a similar type of second-floor northside "sleeping porch" with a tall bank of small-pane window glass, then popular in 1915 – 16. Both houses were built by W. D. Smedley. Not surprisingly Michael N. Collins, chief engineer at Curtis Publishing, bought # 33 and three generations of the family lived there.

An English Episcopal Bishop arriving from England in August 2014, stayed alone at #9 Narbrook in its owner's absence – his mission to bless the Valley Forge Chapel wedding of an American-born Narberth lass³⁰⁸ and an English lad. Two years later the couple were working in Burma.

The Arrival of W. E. DuBois

The sluggish comfort of the familiar in Philadelphia was avoided just then by the arrival in town of W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963), the top scholar of Black America in the first half of the 20th century, ready to begin what was anticipated as his great earliest work - a groundbreaking study of blacks in the

³⁰⁷ Ibid. M. F. Knapp.

³⁰⁸ From the Greene-Grove family at #25 Narbrook.

city's Seventh Ward. Its findings were expected to strike a heavy blow at the city's very corrupt political "machine." DuBois' arrival to be here for one year was famously co-sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania and the College Settlement Association.

Certainly John J. Ridgway a reform-minded lawyer trained at U. Penn, and as a Republican known to be interested in the advancement of blacks³⁰⁹ following the Civil War in which he fought, had to have been anticipating this event. Philadelphia at the time had grown nine-fold in 40 years, was then the nation's second-largest city and had the largest black population in the North. Not surprisingly the shadow of slavery and the Civil War loomed large here. Pennsylvania had outlawed slavery in 1780.

Certainly, the Progressive Era was a time of thinking about race. Baptist Church officials nationally had been trying to help young blacks in the South stabilize their lives ever since the Civil War ended. And J.J. Ridgway seems to be one of the American Baptist Publication Society's main local listeners who accepted their strategy on the matter and may have contributed some fine points to it without wanting to take credit.

One strong hint of this is the timely way Ridgway set up an "oversee-er" position on the south-side for a businessman whose progressive-style community outreach throughout the town would last for decades. And it started with that individual's³¹⁰ settling into a new house with his bride and taking on as his business partner an older man believed to be Sam Richards' distant cousin.

Initially, Baptist presence at Elm/Narberth had begun with Sunday services attended regularly by members of the philanthropic Bucknell family.³¹¹ With that auspicious small beginning, Ridgway may simply have reached out enthusiastically and invited the staff of the national Baptist publication headquarters in Philadelphia to take advantage of living in Elm's new south-side housing, fully equipped with fresh water supply and sewage disposal - an easy commute by train to work in center city on weekdays.

Starting in the early 1890s, that's what the Baptist staff did do, and thus entered into a wide range of progressive activity in their "spare time" in this new suburb. Quite prominent among those Baptist ministers living here was the specialist in finding jobs for young black women from Virginia. He was a very busy man here. And there's just no other reasonable explanation why so many new young

³⁰⁹ [Ridgway] has always been a very earnest abolitionist..." Biographical Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania in the 19th Century, Philadelphia: Galaxy Publishing Co., 1874, Charles Robson, editor, p. 91. See its specifics about Ridgway's work with Henry C. Lea's Citizens' Municipal Reform Association.

³¹⁰ C. Howard McCarter and his new business partner, Samuel S. Richards of Bryn Mawr.

³¹¹ Harry S. Hopper and his wife Harriet M. Bucknell (of the Bucknell University family) built their new home Pennhurst in nearby Fairview.

black arrivals were working as live-in domestics in modest middle-class Narberth households in the 1900 Federal Census at that particular time.

Such hirings in Narberth would have gratified Ridgway, especially in the run-up to DuBois' arrival. Hired for this unprecedented task, W.E.B. DuBois, a Fisk University in Nashville-trained black academic, stepped right up. Wearing a homburg, spats and carrying a cane, he began knocking on thousands of doors in 1896 in the Seventh Ward where roughly 9,000 of Philadelphia's nearly 40,000 blacks were living, isolated by race in a city of more than one million whites. While gathering his data about people's marriages, jobs, income and education so the public would know the truth about the lives of African Americans, DuBois lived with his bride of three months in a rented room (where he also began writing his book) over the College Settlement cafeteria, 700 Lombard Street, then one of the ward's roughest neighborhoods.

That revolutionary sociological study, The Philadelphia Negro,³¹² was published in 1899. Though impressed by the report, progressive political reformers seemed unable to use its revelations about corruption effectively as a battering ram against the entrenched political "machine," which continued in power until the 1940s. Sociology, gradually evolving meanwhile, wasn't seen as a "go to" resource for solving society's problems. So the groundbreaking book tended to be ignored by its sponsors.

And what of the mansions in the Seventh Ward and a scattering of prominent residents there? The "Seventh" did include S. Bartram Richards, his widowed mother and wife Polly Dorrance Richards - all three living at 2115 Pine Street when not in Narberth - and J.J. Ridgway's brother-in-law J. Parker Norris at 2122 Pine. Ridgway lived a short distance away in the "Eighth."

Likewise Susan Wharton head of the College Settlement Association and a Quaker - she welcomed W.E.B. DuBois's coming to Philadelphia. She lived in the Seventh Ward at 910 Clinton Street. Closely related to Penn's Wharton School founder Joseph Wharton,³¹³ Susan Wharton also may have been a Richards relative at least in their social circle and that of J.J. Ridgeway. Various distinguished black residents at the time had lived in this ward the longest, most of the other blacks being new arrivals.

³¹² There's also a 1996 edition. In his 1899 first edition, DuBois already recognized that the two classes of blacks he'd noted already had morphed into four. Also his famed "The Talented Tenth" essay (1903) about the urgency of black social responsibility was also ignored initially - something he still lamented so many decades after the abolition of slavery.

³¹³ This Wharton Business School founder also co-founded Bethlehem Steel and Swarthmore College, the latter link highlighting his Quaker credentials.

The Ridgway and Richards families had been on friendly terms since the late 17th century in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and were used to the idea of working together for the common good when asked. So, when J.J. Ridgway and Sam's son, S. Bartram Richards realized that the 1899 publication of DuBois' book about the Seventh Ward wouldn't deliver the fatal blow to Philadelphia's corrupt political machine that Susan Wharton expected, that setback did nevertheless have a silver lining.

It freed Ridgway and Richards to examine sympathetically what Baptist clergy were achieving modestly in Narberth with on-the-job training for newly arriving young black woman from Virginia, to let them see that these progressive Baptist clergy had more than a paternalistic view of the black race - instead they were using all the means that they had to reduce segregation and solve difficulties that existed in the South.

Narberth, with three new housing subdivisions operational by 1900, would hardly seem to have much need for live-in servants in this largely middle-class community. And yet the federal Census of 1900³¹⁴ shows that our then still sparsely settled borough was home to an astonishingly high number of 46 live-in black servants in 42 white households – apparently as near the crest of the largest black population Narberth, always a very white town, ever had. Bear in mind, this was not yet the “year-round” home town it aspired to be; the richer families all had their principal residence in the city where the Census-taker officially visited, ignoring their “country” address.

Narberth's live-in black domestic servants at that time were overwhelmingly Virginia-born women, most born within fifteen years after the Civil War. This heavily female representation from Virginia corresponds closely with the population figures citing the origins of Southern blacks living in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward³¹⁵ at this time, and far outnumbering those in any other Northern State. This was twenty years before the Great Migration of 134,229 black Southerners who came to Philadelphia when local industries recruited black workers from the South to fill jobs vacated by people aiding the war effort in World War I, representing a 58.9% increase from 1910. So, what about those turn-of-the-century Virginia domestics? Did they in fact come to Narberth under Baptist auspices?

³¹⁴ Narberth borough's live in blacks in the Federal Census of 1900 comprised 29 Virginia-born women and four Virginia-born men, including two coachmen. Most other live-in black servants also were women - three born in Maryland, two each in Pennsylvania and North Carolina and one each in Delaware, Georgia, New York and Washington, D.C. plus one coachman each from Delaware and West Virginia.

³¹⁵ “Special Report on Negro Domestic Service in the Seventh Ward, Philadelphia” by Isabel Eaton, Fellow of the College Settlement Association (an undated portion of text). Isabel Eaton was a close friend of Susan Wharton and gave invaluable assistance to the Seventh Ward's DuBois project, her specialty being black domestic service and sweatshops. She was known as one of the “women of Hull House” in Chicago.

Yes, I firmly believe Virginia-born blacks living in Narberth borough in 1900 did come here under Baptist auspices. Yet definite proof is lacking. A first effort by the writer to compare these names in the 1900 Census with specific school lists of graduates came to naught in Virginia. Beyond that, some of the unusually high number of Virginia-born domestics living in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward may also have arrived there with Baptist encouragement.

For America's Baptist church leaders had identified as one of their denomination's major goals the use of "strategic alliances" to educate and help black former slaves in the South after the Civil War. Those church leaders viewed networking as an engine of economic growth that could benefit black people. Often in cooperation with the American Baptist Publication Society [with its] national headquarters in Philadelphia, the American Baptist Home Mission Societies began channeling much of their energy and resources to educating blacks in the South.

This took the form of being actively involved with three schools in Virginia: Hartshorn Memorial College in Richmond (founded 1883), Virginia Union University (1865) in Richmond, and Tidewater Collegiate Institute (1891) in Chesapeake. Hartshorn was a woman's college, Tidewater a co-ed school preparing students for college-level work — domestic science being a major emphasis at all three schools.

So it seems likely that due to the relative closeness of Virginia and Philadelphia and the contacts of both these groups, the Publication headquarters and Home Mission Societies with the schools, that students well-trained in domestic science there might be referred to Publication Society executives for employment.

The Rev. Robert G. Seymour, executive director of the Missionary Department of the American Baptist Publication Society in Philadelphia, and a longtime Narberth resident,³¹⁶ not only could have been but I believe definitely was the lightning rod who brought so many Virginia-born domestic servant candidates to Narberth. (His own household had one such servant, age 19, in 1900.)

It is also possible that the unusually large number of Virginia-born domestics living in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward had arrived from those same training schools through Seymour auspices, and were already there when DuBois interviewed them in 1896.

Founded in Washington D.C. in 1824, the Publication Society transferred its headquarters permanently to Philadelphia in 1826. And as this city thereafter became a great industrial mecca, the

³¹⁶ 120 Woodside Avenue

Southern blacks arriving here who already had formal training³¹⁷ stood the best chance of success in their adopted city.

In one instance here in the borough in 1900, two young black women from Virginia with an odd last name, perhaps sisters, worked as maids for white families on opposite sides of town, suggesting there had been careful early processing or placement of new arrivals in the heavy influx from “Ole Virginie.”

Seems quite natural but some day Philadelphia blacks would want to know more about how they happened to move northward from the South. And now this interest is being recognized and celebrated as never before with an interactive public history document “Goin’ North.” A prize-winning work in 2016-17, including personal interviews, it covers the first Great Migration from the South of this city 1910-30. The study of the second Great Migration, 1940-1970 to this city is now actively underway.

Meanwhile, two widely circulating ideas about ways to build up a suburb came to roost here soon after 1895. One was a private initiative, the other a civic enterprise. And despite their dissimilarity, the first of these efforts helped smooth the way for the second, 35-house Narbrook Park.

Narberth Grove

In the lead-off project, Wood, Harmon & Company, advertised as the nation’s biggest and best known suburban real estate marketing firm³¹⁸ and headed by William E. Harmon was given the task of converting the borough’s last-remaining rural section, “Rockland Farm,” into the “Narberth Grove” suburban district. The year was 1899, and this high-profile firm with offices in 25 cities including Philadelphia, immediately began on May 30 a lavish whirlwind advertising campaign for the project in metropolitan area newspapers.

This same William E. Harmon was a prominent leader in the nation’s progressive movement including one of its activities, namely playground associations³¹⁹ then springing up around the nation

³¹⁷ The American Baptist Historical Society in Valley Forge, PA on July 29, 1993 provided detailed information on American Baptist Home Mission Societies’ extensive post-Civil War education of Freed People in the South done especially by the three schools in Virginia mentioned above. I next had correspondence with one of them, Virginia Union University in Richmond in 2004. Meanwhile, the current address of the American Baptist Historical Society is now in Atlanta, Georgia (as of 2013).

³¹⁸ The three partners in the real estate firm of Wood, Harmon & Company lived at scattered locations – Charles E. Wood in Washington, D.C., William E. Harmon in Boston, and Clifford B. Harmon at 1413 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. It is unknown whether Charles E. Wood was related to the Wood family, previous owners of this tract. Other projects were in Brooklyn, N.Y. and in Pennsylvania at Glenolden and Folcroft in Delaware County including farmland.

³¹⁹ In 1906, these associations merged, including the one in Philadelphia, to become the Playground Association of America (PAA). Ibid, David Glassberg, P. 54-55.

since 1895. That fact and his close association on the national scene with landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., with whom he soon would be working on the Forest Hills Gardens development, seem significant. For Narberth likewise became linked with several other persons actively involved in working on Forest Hills Gardens housing reform community in Queens, New York, as soon as its Narbrook Park civic venture began a few years later.

In its nine-page Narberth Grove illustrated brochure,³²⁰ the Harmon firm described itself as the “largest suburban real estate operator in the world” and developers of seventy suburbs across the country. The leaflet claimed that statistics showed more fine houses had been built within the previous three years in the Narberth vicinity than at any other point along the Main Line. It described the Narberth Grove site as “half-covered with a wealth of towering chestnuts, oaks and maples from which it takes its name,” yet very accessible - only six and three-quarter miles from City Hall. The brochure was liberally sprinkled with such catchy sayings as “Everyone knows the character of the homes on the Main Line. Within a half-mile of Narberth Grove is one of the handsomest homes on the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad—that of its President,” “Train service is unsurpassed...” “Philadelphia's finest suburban homes are on the Pennsylvania Railroad,” “The majority of Philadelphia’s wealthiest men live on the Main Line...” “Two dollars, first payment, secures any lot on the property” and finally “Don’t wait a single day, but call at our office for tickets and GO!”

All was ready for the development firm had left nothing to chance. It had graded and macadamized all the tract’s streets under direction of the borough engineer, installed granolithic sidewalks, electric lighting, and eighteen-inch drain pipes and planted some shade trees. Also it had established a Western Union Telegraph office at the corner Chestnut and Essex avenues to be open day and evening. And the firm was offering a total of \$15,000 in cash prizes to the first 141 lot-buyers, provided those purchasers immediately built on the lots in accord with restrictions and were residing at Narberth Grove before October 1 of that year. The Wood, Harmon & Company itself built nothing here, instead concentrating its efforts on trying to stimulate the lot-buyers to take this next step themselves.

Restrictions on the lots specified that only persons of good character need apply. Also, “first-class stores” were to be allowed on certain avenues, but no building on any property could be used for the manufacture or sale of intoxicating liquors. And blocks of houses or flat-roof dwellings were unacceptable, lot sizes varying from 25 X 50 ft. to 125 to 170 ft. deep. Although the firm claimed that

³²⁰ In the writer’s possession, it was made available to me by Delaware County historian Keith Lockhart.

every lot was sold a week before opening day, there were glitches, so its remarkable list of free offers, liberal terms and low prices was renewed and extended to June 5, 1900.

Of interest is the way photographs of various dwellings served as a selling point in the promotional brochure. Featured on the cover page is a sprawling, impressive stone residential complex³²¹ of multiple units never built here, captioned: “You can own a home like these at the unsurpassed suburb Narberth Grove.” The only landmark in the immediate area, a true survivor so far, is the C.S. Wood family’s “Rockland Farm” mansion, an imposing turreted stone manse pictured in the Narberth Grove promotional brochure. It’s actually located just outside the borough.³²²

Also pictured off to one side is the only house (C. Howard McCarter’s) standing on the Narberth Grove tract when its lots went on sale. Another view of the McCarter house (since replaced by a low-rise apartment) and of the adjacent Macfarlane tract’s S. S. Stewart residence, 200 South Narberth Avenue with its encircling porches (since inhospitably removed, giving the house a shorn look), further enhance the brochure. Two years’ free train rides for customers may have induced some people to buy lots immediately and Wood, Harmon & Company even promised to job hunt for any of its Narberth Grove customers who chanced to lose their job while building on this site. And so Narberth Grove prospered, but at its own pace. For the 1908 railroad atlas map shows that only about seventy houses had been built on that tract's 296 lots by then.

William D. Smedley, a local resident, was the builder most closely identified with plentiful construction of southside houses both at Narberth Grove and on the Spring Garden Insurance Company's tract during the first three decades of the new century. As a developer, Smedley engaged the services of architects but in certain instances was chosen by architects as their preferred builder. Other builders active on Narberth's Southside included Elmendorf Hedden (son-in-law of prominent local Civil War vet Jeremiah W. Fritz) who did much construction in Merion, Samuel T. Atherholt who got his start working for W. D. Smedley and owned Anthwyn Farms by the time of its development, and George W. and Abel Bottoms³²³ who did many houses on South Narberth Avenue.

³²¹ Its location not disclosed.

³²² On the S.E. corner Rockland and South Narberth Avenues. Harmon’s Narberth Grove brochure on page 9 states this mansion is valued at \$75,000. On its front cover, the brochure pictures existing housing elsewhere (and rather luxurious) suggesting both kinds of substantial construction of stone are “attainable” here.

³²³ South Narberth Avenue work by George W. and Abel Bottoms was the subject of an interview of the writer with the widow of the grandson and namesake of builder Abel Bottoms, Dec. 18, 1994. The Federal Census of 1910 for Narberth listed George W. Bottoms.

No shop was ever built on the Southside. And the Narberth Grove brochure does not identify the tract's streets³²⁴ by name (Grove Place evidently was not yet laid out in May 1899).

William Harmon's innovative marketing of America's suburbs had been considered cutting-edge when he pioneered it in the 1880s because it answered a fundamental question: how does a real estate development speak for today? And since he adopted a sales pitch mainly targeting potential homeowners tired of renting, his slogan was "Every Man His Own Landlord," Harmon's installment purchase plan with low down payment and low monthly installments offered dozens of incentives to Narberth Grove lot purchasers of the 296 building lots available. These were located along tree-lined streets Wood, Harmon & Co. had just built with sidewalks, while maintaining a number of stately oaks.³²⁵ The sales pitch touted Narberth's nearness to the city and other advantages of its location. And while the Harmon firm itself did none of the actual construction, it took a more far-seeing view of what could be accomplished by such a development than today's average developers of suburban tract housing, who so often view their projects simply as business ventures.

For Harmon showed his true colors as a Progressive when he declared that offering "thrifty artisans" the opportunity to own property was important "from the standpoint of social stability."³²⁶ And indeed, no sooner did news circulate about Harmon's 1897 overtures to buy a gentleman farmer's land for development than artisan-builders began moving into town in really significant numbers in anticipation of work aplenty. Also the way Narberth civic leaders brokered the arrival of the Harmon firm on the local scene left nothing to chance.

But it was that wise clarion call so many qualified artisan-builders and several architects heeded that ultimately made a huge difference in the quality of housing construction here during the period up to 1920. Even the star builder preferred by the local establishment at the time and most often the builder of choice for the Narbrook Park project was someone apparently attracted to live and work here by the Harmon announcement, William D. Smedley.

³²⁴ Narberth Grove's streets were all of Chestnut and Merion Avenues on both sides, the north side of Rockland Avenue, Woodside Avenue where it travels south from Chestnut Avenue, South Narberth Avenue below Chestnut Avenue, and Grove Place.

³²⁵ Significantly this Harmon land included some that had belonged to patriot John Dickinson, deeply interested in his ancestral roots there.

³²⁶ Wood, Harmon & Company's nine-page illustrated Narberth Grove brochure, 1899.

Brick Row

But after two steps forward with housing construction on Conway Avenue's first block and the launching of Harmon's Narberth Grove, came a step backward in terms of modern suburban amenities being offered with the construction of the Brick Row rental housing tract in 1901.³²⁷ This U-shaped block fronting on three streets contains 37 flat-roofed row houses that all were dependent at that time on well-water from an outdoor pump. And they also had outhouses. With Brick Row, there was none of a debater's insistence on a position.

Brick Row's construction was a throwback to providing working-class housing of an unquestioned, long-established type, with nary a thought about whether the intended accommodations were for city or suburb, let alone the fact that most other recent housing in town had been built with indoor plumbing and an indoor drinking water supply.

Not surprisingly, this housing complex – often lambasted as “anti-suburban” in character – stirred a long-lasting controversy that dogged the footsteps even of Brick Row's original old proprietress,³²⁸ the quaint period-piece herself as she made her Saturday rent-collecting rounds jangling her big key ring like a latter-day medieval keeper of keys.

There are no indications the new borough was seeking to have this Brick Row rental housing complex built to meet its own suburban needs. And apparently ways and means were found to fend off similar bids by other outside developers of this kind. The developer from the county seat who built these old-fashioned housing units here may have intended them to service the nearby harness race track for that facility had a wide array of workers, trainers and other, often transient populations and personnel (as the Federal Census records show) – people always looking for accommodations. Spotting this locality as an active and fast-growing area, this Norristown developer seems to have slapped on the landscape a housing complex of the type he knew best. Families of former occupants of Brick Row have assured me, however, that this complex never did serve racetrack clientele. It was then and still is the only residential construction of its type for several miles around. Its compactness tended to attract other closely built housing immediately around it. So the obvious urban density of that nucleus of Brick Row rental properties and its reliance on a water supply drawn from a public well³²⁹ on site soon attracted a long-

³²⁷ Editor's note: Another of the author's versions of this information stated that this 37-unit brick row housing unit hooked up with water from an out-door well with all of the units having outhouses was constructed by a Norristown developer.

³²⁸ Mary L. Bower

³²⁹ The writer in c. the 1980s once interviewed Bud Hewitt, a plumber (on his way by train to teach a college class in fire safety) who said that early in his career working for an older plumber, he had the job of dismantling that outdoor Brick Row well.

running controversy about the appropriateness of such construction in an up-to-date suburban town. People who like to point finger at “blight” often eyed Brick Row critically.

Interestingly, the first true counterbalance to this row-house block appeared within the next several years in the form of three noteworthy architect-designed single Arts & Craft houses³³⁰ scattered around the town’s northside, two of those by nationally-known architects and the most imposing one (arguably the best-designed house³³¹ ever built in Narberth) located near Brick Row. These three houses were the first “bungalows” in town, and very soon set off a mania for smaller stereotyped versions locally, that reflects a relatively early response to a bungalow construction trend then starting to develop that soon swept the country. And as the trickle of Narberth modified bungalows became a flood, this created problems for the town fathers that were watched only by the highly critical things being said about the unsuitable housing density caused by Brick Row.

Two Builders – Early Twentieth Century - The Harris-Smedley Rivalry

Meanwhile, an ambitious builder/developer, William T. Harris, swept into town on Harmon coattails just in time to see the three new bungalows being admired. He settled here awhile, determined to put his stamp on small housing, something he did with a flourish entirely on the northside, stirring debate along the way. Apparently by taking Harmon’s 1880s-style marketing ideas and adapting them for his own use while ignoring the rise of the Progressive Movement in America, that local developer was able to buy empty tracts. He then sold lots with small bungalow-like houses on them. Surprising perhaps, his formula for success included marketing whole housing tracts by selling them to a socially-prominent Main Line woman³³² who then resold them at a profit individually, after completing the landscaping of the lots and planting ornamental Asian flowering trees for each. But thanks also to certain problems Harris created by his seemingly unstoppable pursuit of small-house construction in the borough, others fortunately stepped forward to counteract Harris with a community sponsored project of broad significance and national interest originally proposed by our burgess in 1914 and known then as Narberth Garden (Narbrook Park).

³³⁰ Architect T.P. Chandler’s bungalow (1909) for Margaret Mindenhall, S.W. corner Essex & Sabine Aves. by the 64-year old architect of the DuPont family network and founder of U. Penn’s architecture department. This house was dealt a heavy blow by removal of all it shutters decades ago.

³³¹ Architect D.K. Boyd’s house (1908) at N.W. corner Narberth & Woodbine Aves for Dr. O. J. Snyder, a founder of Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Now demolished, the threatened loss of this beauty stirred Narberth’s first major historic-preservation fight (1986-88) over a property known to have National Register of Historic Places potential that was being sought.

³³²Susanna H. Bodine of Berwyn

Clearly two residential builders, Harris the “irrepressible showman” and his nemesis William D. Smedley, the “insider,” dominated the diverse construction scene in Narberth (during the first quarter of the twentieth century, mostly centering their careers on work done here. Yet personally and professionally, the two rivals were a study in contrasts.

William T. Harris was the detonator who blew up the concept of Narberth as a town of large Victorian houses. His building operations were the driving force that sent the population of this community soaring from 1,790 in 1910 to 3,704 in 1930, and higher. Flamboyant and outspoken, William (the “conqueror”) Harris put an indelible stamp on the town with his extensive - and controversial - “building operations” of hundreds of small, solidly built, often modified bungalow-style houses that anticipated and satisfied a need.

William D. Smedley, on the other hand, built medium-size houses of a more individualized appeal, reflecting lessons learned from high-style trends of the day and from outstanding architects, whether or not these designers happened to be directly involved in Smedley’s own projects. Thus, Smedley's particular blend of poise, practicality, good craftsmanship and acceptable design that were implied in the expression “a Smedley-built house,” put this devout Baptist in demand to serve in an advisory capacity³³³ in construction matters for the civic association committee that soon oversaw creation of Narbrook Park - a sure sign Smedley already by 1914 was well respected in the community.

By contrast, Harris seemed to be trying to “buy” respectability even as late as 1918 when, riding the crest of a wave of financial success in Narberth housing construction, he led the list of subscribers to Narberth's wartime Third Liberty Loan drive³³⁴ - by a wide margin. In that drive, Harris gave \$30,000 compared with the next-closest subscriber's \$5,000 amount. In the previous drive, Harris also had led the field, that time with a blockbuster contribution: \$45,000, far and away higher than anyone else’s. In the Third Liberty Loan drive of 1918, he took the added step of offering to match dollar for dollar any subscriptions up to \$10,000.

Nor was housing his only interest. For Harris had filled a vacuum here in another significant way after the business failure of John B. Clothier, the developer who had built many Narberth houses and also in 1899,³³⁵ the town’s signature behemoth complex of shops (only one-third of which remains intact today) facing the railroad. By 1914, Harris owned all of that three-story Goodman & Clothier

³³³ Our Town newspaper, 15 Oct. 1914, p.1. Civic Association advisor, William D. Smedley was a trustee of Narberth Baptist Church. And when a 30-member businessmen’s bible class was organized at that church in 1923, it took the name Smedley Sunday Association to honor him (Ibid, late October 1923).

³³⁴ Ibid, 5 Oct. 1918

³³⁵ Mentioned as just finished and seeking tenants in Narberth Local News newspaper, 9 Dec. 1899, p. 1.

commercial real estate complex and had re-named it the Harris Business Block, extending it further eastward to include an arcade. Thus Harris and the established local realtor John A. Caldwell, under the name Caldwell & Harris, had built and were operating there the Arcade Theater,³³⁶ the town's first moving-picture venture. Also by 1914, Harris had modernized all of that big commercial block's first-floor storefronts, replacing the tall narrow protruding window-bays with large, flat, plate-glass windows. The Caldwell & Harris real estate office, from which Harris operated as Narberth's biggest housing developer, was located in this row. Iona Avenue's big garage also was Harris-built.

Partnership with Caldwell was a smart move for Harris. A power in Montgomery County Republican politics, John A. Caldwell was a Lancaster County farmer's son, from one of our borough's founding families that had settled in a large house in Narberth in 1894 - including his parents, John B. Caldwell and Amanda Hershey, and three of their five adult children, Charles E., John A., and Robert W. Caldwell. Like so many of Narberth's new arrivals at the turn-of-the-century from rural districts, the Caldwells had brought with them most of their own family network intact. Thus Caldwell,³³⁷ here the steady ballast beneath the iceberg's gleaming tip, acted as Harris' sales agent.

Not to be outdone, "William D. Smedley this same year, 1914, opened his own real estate and construction office in the eye-catching new log cabin he had constructed for that purpose on mainstreet a block east of the Harris Business Block. Smedley's headquarters was as modest as Harris' was imposing, for he made thrifty use of logs available from chestnut trees felled by blight in great numbers here in Narberth at that time. Each was a family man, and had a son in military service during World War I. By war's end, each firm honored its returning soldier with a partnership in the family business and made a corresponding name change.³³⁸

The Smedley/Harris rivalry reasserted itself publicly in still another way when each man built a lavish two-story, columned, front portico for his own house – Smedley's³³⁹ more of a bay with pilasters that graced 227 North Narberth Avenue (later used as a convent). By contrast, Harris' alteration was

³³⁶ Originally that arcade connected the buildings (still standing) immediately behind it, while the basement of the movie housed a poolroom with at least six pool tables. Iona Avenue's big (existing) garage also was Harris-built.

³³⁷ His obit Our Town newspaper, 3 Dec. 1927, p.1.

³³⁸ Becoming known as Wm. D. & H.T. Smedley (with son Horace T.) contracting builders, and William T. Harris & Son, real estate (with William T., Jr.).

³³⁹ After the Smedleys, when the Consul of Peru lived in the house, it was called "Peru" by neighbors. Later David Crownover, assistant director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology lived there; it became the convent of the Sisters of Mercy staffing St. Margaret's parish school until razed to construct the current school.

much more spectacular: a massive classical portico with free-standing pillars that made the house resemble neoclassical mansions of the Southern gentry.³⁴⁰

No doubt about it, Harris seemed to like classical Greece. Many of his earlier, small twin houses in Narberth likewise have a triangular pediment - one that crowns their second-story roof level, making each of these a sun-bleached Greek temple of sorts.

What precisely was William T. Harris' mission in Narberth and what did he accomplish? Harris was Narberth's savior, to hear some people tell it. Or its villain, others may have thought, considering the occasional slaps he received in the Our Town opinion columns. Of course reality is somewhere in between, and something each close observer may decide for himself, since Harris' handiwork still is so plentiful in our midst.

In reply to a couple of facetious remarks by that newspaper's "The Cub" columnist about houses by Harris going up on Ravine and Mudley³⁴¹ (Sabine and Dudley), and a barb from the same source, "Up at the junction of Harris Street³⁴² and Harris Avenue, a no-man's land on the hill... horrible roads," one staunch defender of these building operations fired back. She offered a useful (1918) perspective in a letter to the editor, suggesting that Narberth was in a decline when he came along and turned this around:

Harris came to town when big houses were a drug on the market. He saw the need for small ones, and these sold at once. He was the incentive to other builders, and it is largely to him that the town owes its present size.³⁴³

Harris constructed Narberth's "little houses" - "Harris houses," they were disparagingly called by some - for the simple and straightforward reason that he felt people should have small houses they could afford. Real estate man about town, "Doc" Howard used to say Harris built about 300 houses here. Also

³⁴⁰ Located on Montgomery Ave (between Brookhurst and Woodbine Aves near the present site of the ACME Market and close to Woodbine), the house had belonged to William McDowell. Harris and his family briefly lived there, and he remodeled it for the S. Irving Strayer family, founders of Strayer Business College, now Strayer University, with campuses in D.C. and 15 states mostly east of the Mississippi; its motto "We fit your life," Elizabeth Gilroy of Essex Ave. remembered visiting the Strayer family home for Trick or Treat on Hallowe'en one year on Montgomery Ave., but didn't say how she and her book-loving family happened to know them.

³⁴¹ Our Town, 18 Jan. 1917.

³⁴² Ibid, 2 May 1918, p. 2.

³⁴³ Letter from Mrs. Alice J. Carter, Our Town, 16 May 1918, P. 2. Also on this subject, letter from Elizabeth Smedley to the author, 15 Sept. 1996.

Harris brought over from Italy many Italians as stone masons to work for him just before World War I,³⁴⁴ as well as employing ones the late contractor Theobald Harsch had already brought over.

He also built the Harris Hotel at 46th and Chestnut Streets in West Philadelphia and eventually moved near it. However, when Harris and his large young family first moved to Narberth (Essex Avenue) in 1909, his initial contribution to the built environment was to be a big showy house with red Spanish-style tile roof - a reflection of the “California mission” design trend then sweeping the country – and designed that year for 321 North Narberth Avenue³⁴⁵ by the Wyncote architects Heacock & Hokason.

A factor in Harris’ choice of those architects to design his attention-getting house may have been that the firm lately had designed several scattered houses in Wynnewood for the well-established land developer, Walter Bassett Smith. And Harris could have decided the best way to introduce himself to the town was by emulating Smith, possibly even upstaging him. Harris’ wife would occasionally take a fancy to a particular house her husband was building, and they would move into it for a while. Thus they lived in a number of houses around town, big old houses and new ones, including the red-roofed house at 321 North Narberth, building a bungalow on each side of it for their children, I was told.³⁴⁶ Harris personally liked multiple bathrooms in a dwelling, which was uncommon in his day. Harris’ big Mission-style house survives, its pale smooth stucco walls sheathed in brownish stone veneer and minus its red-tile roof.

Meanwhile, this 321 show-piece house so impressed Horace R. Hillegas that ironically, he hired William Smedley to build him a handsome, tile-roof near-replica of it at 9 Elmwood Avenue. This always well-cared-for house eventually was owned and occupied by a cultured family from Lima, Peru - dental supply firm president Joseph A. de Garay, his wife Luzmila Perio and their three children³⁴⁷ who

³⁴⁴ Interview with Ginny Harris Gunzel, daughter of builder W. T. Harris covering many subjects relating to his work and life – “little houses,” Doc Howard, the family’s moves, mid-April 1985; construction workers, Our Town, 5 Feb. 1920, p. 2; Harris Hotel, Italian workers – interview with Mrs. Wm. Webb, 28 Oct. 1981, the carpenter’s wife.

³⁴⁵ Harris seems to have waited several years to construct this house, as it does not appear on the 1913 atlas map. Yet for certain it was already up by 1915, built on a former athletic field used by the town’s adult teams.

³⁴⁶ By Mrs. Wm. Webb; the other discussions with Ginny Harris Gunzel, who lived here the longest of her siblings. The next door “bungalow” at # __ was replaced by a new house in 2016.

³⁴⁷ After Joseph and Luzmila’s son Edward T. de Garay grew up here and settled in Lancaster County, he gave the saga of his Narberth family a sinister and surreal Hispanic twist, for it was discovered that the transfer of Iranian arms money to the Nicaraguan rebels was being officially run under a front company, Corporate Air Services Inc., of which Edward was president, and he was also paymaster for its air crews in this secret Reagan White House resupply network aimed at helping those rebels overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. On one such mission in October 1986, a loaded arms cargo plane that Edward owned was shot down over Nicaragua and its pilot Eugene V. Hasenfus captured, helping expose the Iran-contra scandal and our government’s covert action in going on despite a Congressional ban on any direct or indirect United States military aid to the contras. In the Congressional hearings that followed, the “ultra-patriotic” Ed de Garay, considered a midlevel figure in the affair that involved such people as Colonel Oliver North and retired General Richard V. Secord, was

adored the Spanish ambience of the place, and were always doing something to enhance the property. When eventually a next-door neighbor bought de Garay's Spanish house on Elmwood Avenue to raze it, this uncalled for act was viewed both by the house's original owners, the Hillegas family, and by the de Garays, as motivated by jealousy over its beauty. In any event, the Harris (?) influence on "big house" construction locally was both sporadic and very short-lived.

Quite a different sort of person than his rival, Narberth's other dominant early 20th century builder hailed from an old Quaker family³⁴⁸ that came to Pennsylvania with William Penn and settled in Chester County. William D. Smedley was born there at Lionville where he grew up on a farm. Like his older brother Nathan E. Smedley, William, when he married, took the religion of his wife - something said to have been a common practice among many Quakers at the time. She, Helen Stackhouse, happened to be Baptist, while Nathan's wife was Methodist. William and Helen at first lived in West Chester where he was a carpenter. With their move to Narberth in 1902, William became a builder and soon convinced brother Nathan to relocate here from Blackwood, New Jersey and work for him at plumbing and other tasks. William Smedley sent his children to private school and to college. A distant cousin of Quaker architect Walter Smedley prominent in this region, who designed many large houses for the nearby Wynnefield section of Philadelphia, William owned a Chester County farm besides an imposing Narberth house, and was a board member of the ill-fated Merion Title and Trust Company. In the depths of the Depression, Smedley turned his big Narberth house into three apartments and, with construction work at a complete standstill, may have lost that house. After his second marriage, Smedley moved to the Bahamas, where he died in 1961.

Perhaps the Harrises were taking their cue from builder Smedley's extended family network here when they also sought to become involved in the life of the town in every way - for both William D. and his son Horace T. Smedley were immersed in the activity of Narberth's building and loan association long before the 1929 crash, William's nephew Elwood Q. Smedley the locksmith well-known, and Elwood's father Nathan active in church work. In 1919, William Smedley built his daughter Hilda a house (D. K. Boyd, architect) at 101 Woodbine Avenue as a wedding present.³⁴⁹ Such numbers and influence were hard to beat. But Harris also brought relatives here. Supposedly, Harris' parents lived in a tiny house (still standing and perhaps Harris-built), S.E. corner Woodbine and Hampden. Well-heeled

granted immunity from prosecution in exchange for his testimony. A brother-in-law of Ed was a Washington Post editorial board member. I knew Ed's family well.

³⁴⁸ Smedley genealogy obtained through Elizabeth Smedley's correspondence of 15 September 1996 with the writer.

³⁴⁹ For Hilda, 101 Woodbine Ave. Our Town, 8 Jan. 1921, p.1. Also correspond with Hilda's daughter at the Jersey Seashore about this later.

though he was, builder Harris balked at the idea of sending any of his children to exclusive schools, even when one daughter requested it. For the Harrises, it was public schools all the way. An older daughter married into Narberth's prominent Jefferies family. And long after the Harris family moved back to West Philadelphia in the 1920s, one of their younger daughters returned to live here twenty more years.³⁵⁰ With us still are Williams and Gordon Avenues, named for Harris' sons and lined with Harris houses - little "temples."

One of the things William T. Harris did here, besides build houses was that he marketed them in ways novel for Narberth – yet in ways that mimicked Wood, Harmon & Company's sales campaign for building-lots launched nearly fifteen years earlier. Harris seems to have been prevented from buying lots in the Harmon campaign. (I can recognize only 103 Rockland Avenue as a "Harris house" for certain on the entire Southside). If so, was Harris' high-powered house-marketing a strategy to surpass the name-brand competition? Certainly. The similar approach is very evident in the full-page illustrated advertisements³⁵¹ Harris often took in Narberth's Main Line News weekly newspaper during 1914. Banner headlines proclaimed: "Buy a home on the Main Line for a dollar." And the subheading said: "Pay for it as rent; all over carrying charges apply on the purchase price." The theme: "Do not give all your money to the landlord." Thus instead of someone's paying twenty-five dollars monthly rent for a Philadelphia house and not owning a brick when he moves out after twenty years, Harris was advocating: pay a similar amount, over the same period, on our "installment rental" basis, and you can purchase one of our brand new detached houses and already have paid for it in full. The plan was to sell a house at the regular purchase price, on an installment rental basis without a dollar of down payment. Everything above the actual carrying charges Harris credited on the price of the house.

Of course, Harris had quicker ways of getting a cash return for the houses he was so rapidly building. One of the most effective was selling them singly or in large quantities to middlemen as soon as completed, while the ground was still raw earth around the construction site. Susanna H. Bodine, daughter of a prominent Main Line family, was the principal buyer of tracts of newly finished Harris houses, (See borough atlas map of 1920). These properties she groomed for individual resale³⁵² by making foundation plantings of trees and shrubbery that would enhance market value, at such locations as upper Dudley Avenue and along Montgomery Avenue. Often, she used Wohlert's Asian flowering

³⁵⁰ Interview with Ginny (Virginia) Harris Gunzel, mid-April 1985.

³⁵¹ Main Line News published in Narberth, Friday 19 June 1914, p. 4. The newspaper was made available to me by Elizabeth Gilroy

³⁵² Our Town, 30 Sept. 1915, p.2. Recent purchases by her; *ibid*, 28 March 1918, her use of Wohlert's trees.

tree specimens, as for example his Persian peach trees between Price and Narberth Avenues on Montgomery.

Harris outspokenness once landed him in hot water with the Brick Row neighborhood not to mention borough officials in an incident that is almost a swan song. For time was running out on Harris' whirlwind decade and a half of building operations here in the town. In any event, he unleashed a statement harshly criticizing what he declared were unhealthful living conditions there. Brick Row, as mentioned, built in 1901 by a Norristown developer as a row-house rental district, was during its early period serviced by well-water on the premises, instead of being hooked up to the borough distribution system. Harris certainly was targeting this primitive arrangement, then still in operation.

In a letter to borough council president W. R. D. Hall that was reprinted in Our Town, Harris, replying to an apparently routine inquiry he had received from faithful old citizen Charles E. Kreamer about inspecting an Essex Avenue house with water in the cellar (this was a house Harris recently built), gave a quick answer. Then he switched subjects abruptly, seizing an opportunity to launch a tirade:

...But such a fuss, when you consider how Brick Row is permitted to breed disease...without any effort being made on the part of the local board of health to prevent same. The whole Woodbine Avenue district is overrun with whooping cough, measles and kindred diseases of this sort in those pest houses.³⁵³

Going for the jugular, Harris further declared that he already had notified the State Board of Health about this and they, upon investigating the complaint, he said, found Brick Row conditions worse than he had stated, but that their hands were tied because such matters belong under the jurisdiction of local boards of health.

Well, the dust took some time to settle. Harris' letter-writing to Harrisburg, and his lack of candor with local officials until after a State inspector had been here and Harris received a follow-up letter from Harrisburg, had placed that builder's future relations with the borough in jeopardy. Not to mention the effect this dramatic outcry had on public health officer Charles E. Kreamer who, for thirty years previously, had been one of the town's most civic-minded men, serving in many capacities. The public clash with Harris over this matter landed like a body-blow from which Kreamer perhaps never recovered. For this noble man and his second wife, the Methodist church's organist, soon moved away and Kreamer died a short time later.

³⁵³ William T. Harris' letter to Council president Hall, published *ibid*, 3 July 1920, p. 2.

Of course, the then current owner of the Brick Row complex fired back at William T. Harris with a public statement in an Our Town letter to the editor. Mary L. Bower [as mentioned earlier] was a colorful neighborhood character in her own right, remembered for her habit of Saturday rent-collecting rounds that she made with a big key-ring dangling the many keys of her rental units. Said Mrs. Bower, sharply, and in defense of her turf:

I purchased the “Brick Row” consisting of thirty-eight houses thirteen years ago. The first five years I lived in one of them myself, during which time there was only one death (an infant). Since then ... three deaths (of one child, one old man, and twins of premature birth). I do consider this a small death rate for thirty-eight families for thirteen years. The tenants think it an outrage to have their homes so degraded by such accusations. Some have been living there since the houses were built, nineteen years ago.³⁵⁴

Actually Harris (he built much of the area immediately surrounding Brick Row including the densely constructed 300-block Woodbine Avenue) may also have been emboldened in his criticism of Brick Row by general statements recently made in quick succession by a suburban housing specialist and by a community leader, as reported in Our Town. Local architect Victor D. Abel, in a talk to Narberth Civic Association (he was substituting for the announced speaker, celebrated city planner John I. Bright) about model housing communities in this country and England during the late war He strongly emphasized the need for a locality to insist on preserving sufficient space between houses if suburban communities are to retain those healthful³⁵⁵ as well as artistic qualities for which they were originally designed.

A similar point was hammered home more forcefully a week later by the Main Line Citizens Association head Alfred M. Collins after the Main Line's biggest industry, the Autocar Company in Ardmore,³⁵⁶ which then had 1300 employees, announced its intention to build houses to accommodate its workers. As Ardmore was said to be short 300 - 350 houses in the reasonably priced range, the goal was to put up 200 rental houses during 1920 in that vicinity. Collins emphasized that everywhere on the Main Line, a movement was under way to provide housing suitable for persons of moderate means and

³⁵⁴ Mary Bower's letter to the editor in response to Harris' letter to Council president Hall, *ibid*, 31 July 1920.

³⁵⁵ Victor D. Abel's talk to Narberth Civic Assn. as reported *ibid*, 3 April 1920.

³⁵⁶ Editor's Note: from a September 2016 issue of *Milestones* “A crown jewel of Lower Merion's local industries, The Autocar Company moved from Pittsburgh to Lancaster Avenue in Ardmore in 1900. It was founded by three brothers named Clarke: Louis, John and James. For more than 50 years it employed as many [sic] a thousand men and women a day to make cars and trucks until 1911, after which date they made only trucks until it was bought by White Motors and moved to Exton, PA in 1954.”

for workingmen. All kinds of houses were described as scarce and land high-priced. And as a result, the tendency was to build the cheapest sort of development that [would] pay the biggest return. Declared Collins:

This we will combat. Rows of houses are entirely out of place, and unnecessary. We want houses that will be part of the general rural atmosphere.³⁵⁷

Collins' message seems to have gotten the attention of the newly installed president of Narberth Civic Association, Robert J. Edgar for a week later Edgar was on the horn about the need of the association to complete³⁵⁸ Narbrook Park which, even then, was as rural as the residential atmosphere gets in Narberth.

During the prewar period in Lower Merion and vicinity, the biggest year for house construction had been 1912. By that time in Narberth, Harris was already flexing his muscles by starting to build housing tracts extending immediately east and south and southwest from the "Brick Row" neighborhood like spokes of a wheel. These were at first both small and medium-size houses because, apparently, he flirted briefly with doing medium-size houses before making a total commitment, locally to the small house. Harris already had made a flying start on his Narberth "building operations" by 1914, as the plentiful early illustrations for his real estate advertisements show. Indeed, he progressed much in a year, beyond what the Pennsylvania Railroad atlas map of 1913 reveals about his early expansion efforts outward like spokes of a wheel. For that map shows Harris' name on houses newly constructed on tracts in the 200-block Hampden Avenue (east side and upper west side), and on houses newly built in tracts on both sides of the 200-block Iona Avenue, plus his tracts newly acquired but as yet undeveloped on Montgomery Avenue between Woodbine and Sabine avenues. This was followed by houses in the 200- and 300-block Conway Avenue by about 1915. Certainly 1917 and 1918 were big years for his housing developments on the definitive Dudley Avenue/Sabine Avenue axis, which shows his work to particular advantage. The 1919 railroad atlas map of the town published in 1920 gives a revealing roundup of what Harris had achieved by then in the upper reaches of the borough, which was his stronghold.

Construction industry reports early in 1920³⁵⁹ indicated that although building activity in the district was below normal, nonetheless the largest amount of such activity was going on in Merion,

³⁵⁷ Main Line Citizens Ass'n's Alfred M. Collins on new housing, *ibid* 10 April 1920, p. 1.

³⁵⁸ Robert J. Edgar urges completion of Narbrook Park, *ibid* 17 April 1920, p.1.

³⁵⁹ Housing construction reports in the township and borough currently, *ibid*. 17 April 1920.

followed by Cynwyd and Narberth and also some in Wynnewood. All of the construction under way was described as large and expensive homes, except Narberth's "building operations."

The two house-models Harris used most often here were the simplified Greek temple design which is invariably semi-detached and the bungalow derivative with the many variations he gives to it, always including an A-frame and a prominent front dormer window of some sort, the header on such dormers often recessed, turtle-like, in houses built on the busier streets. Both models, temple and bungalow, feature a front porch - the "temple" with stout round columns supporting its almost flat porch roof, and the "bungalow" with its porch tucked under the slender tip-end of the A-frame. The bungalow-derived one also has close kinship with an older bungalow with attractive fenestration and clad in dark-stained cedar shakes at 511 Brookhurst Avenue that could have stimulated Harris' interest in using modified versions of it, very likely found in catalogues. Eventually he put up "bungalows" flanking it on the same street and "temples" on nearby Gordon Avenue - 33 in all - so he had to be aware of this house.

Harris seems to have delighted in constructing straight, long stretches of dwellings - singles or twins - on Narberth's mostly straight streets. But he also occasionally built those same small houses individually, wherever an opportunity arose. He was still going at it in 1925, having just completed his Homewood Avenue houses early that year.

Interestingly, Harris did virtually all his construction on open land rather than by taking down large houses, as Smedley sometimes did. Harris lacked the "insider" status that would have afforded him easier access to obtaining such properties. By contrast, Smedley was allowed to raze the Victorian Gothic stone house of the "first family" of Price's town of Elm, Samuel and Elizabeth Richards. Probably the Justice family, who owned the house by then, would not have sold to Harris. But Smedley, who had built apartments and eventually would do construction of the local Baptist church, was putting up medium-size houses there, on what was still then a prime residential street, Narberth Avenue.

Harris' presence in the town since 1909 as an aggressive, nonstop developer of small houses must have been a very major spur to the town fathers in their decision to launch the difficult "Narberth Garden" (Narbrook Park) project featuring small and mid-size houses and open space. For that model community offered a timely, high-profile way to convince public opinion that Narberth was not just a place for vast building operations of small houses. It also helped "contain" Harris' prospects at a time when his ambition to build on every available lot was boundless. Thus, by creating Narbrook, the civic association tactfully "intervened" and let it be known that Narberth was also a place to build or look for medium-size, individualized houses.

Of course, Harris eagerly participated in the new project, but in a very limited and inconsequential way. For Harris was a small-house man to his marrow. Certainly his chief value to the Narbrook project was as an irritant – doubtless one that goaded the creation of this important civic project in the first place. For one goal Narbrook Park almost certainly was designed to accomplish was to wrest control of the local new-house market away from Harris’ monopoly of it, and give various builders of architect-designed small and moderate-size houses, starting with Smedley, a stake in the town’s future.

Certainly, with the 1890s shift to smaller housing lots and the widespread construction begun on them in the 1910s, came comparable change in the nature of the community itself. But it didn’t occur overnight. Even as late as 1899, the borough’s top item on its “wish list” for Santa was “more year-round residents.”³⁶⁰ Gradually what had been a mere cluster of summer villas, some built in support of Price’s plan by other like-minded people (mostly Quakers), became a far more densely populated “year round home town” sought in the community’s official slogan. This residue of imposing villas, hemmed in as some of these “survivors” are by subsequent construction, was the springboard, but only that, for Narberth’s residential development which continued upon mostly previously undeveloped land at a rapid rate into the early twenties, and featured the gradual consolidation of the several separate tract-house districts with the Price farmland village. Initially this occurred under the watchful eye of experienced town-builder Sam Richards and that other indispensable guiding hand, John J. Ridgway, and their carefully chosen successors.

Individual Houses

Housing grew in fits and starts in the early days of our town. So much so that the citizenry began taking action of its own to get things moving. There was even something uniquely “Narberthian” about their ready and willing response to filling a need. For many an individual among them from various walks of life had come forward to meet this challenge by having one or two modest houses built and then putting them on the market in support of the new town.

The prime exemplar of this approach was attorney Alfred H. Faber who experimented first by building two large single³⁶¹ houses. Next, he took the plunge by building twelve sizeable late-Victorian

³⁶⁰ At the top of the borough’s “wish list” for Santa. Narberth Local News newspaper 9 Dec. 1899.

³⁶¹ A Queen Anne Revival house at 212 Forrest Avenue.

brick and shingle houses with slight variations on one design. Each set of six he placed back-to-back, their fronts facing two streets – Price and Wayne Avenues. These houses appear to have weathered well.

Another noteworthy project by a single sponsor produced a cozy enclave known as Elm Terrace, consisting of closely grouped houses in pairs, off Essex Avenue.

At the corner of Iona Avenue and Meetinghouse Lane, still another enclave exists, Lantwyn Lane, featuring³⁶²

It was part of a mindset that independence came with a price tag, namely that citizens must pull together and take steps to help build up their new town suitably in a brick and mortar sense, not just in terms of community spirit. This was perhaps natural in a town started by a farmer on his own land, but such “getting involved” by individual residents nevertheless was uncommon in most new suburbs at the time. And such projects often used local architectural talent of some note, Wallace & Warner, for example.

Southside

Gradually the Southside neighborhood diversified as its population grew so that already by 1910 its makeup was changing. Also the entire Southside district remained without obvious pockets of poverty and it never had a commercial section of any kind, although one was proposed by an Upper Darby syndicate and turned down. And while the Southside can claim its share of fairly large houses (two of the largest were replaced by apartment buildings), medium-size houses are more typical on the south rather than on the northside of town, and of course some Southside houses are small. Affluence might be measured more by house size than by size of the block on the Southside.

³⁶² Editor’s note: The following pages are missing.

Chapter 4 - Progressive Narberth - The Shaping of a Community – 1895-1920s

Progressivism	198
Narberth Fire Company	199
Elm Hall.....	204
YMCA.....	204
Narberth Without its Y.....	208
Community Library.....	210
The Playground	213
Women’s Activities and Organizations	226
Child Welfare Initiatives	231
Holiday House.....	232
Children’s Public Sports Programs.....	233
Shand Athletic Field.....	235
The Year 1914.....	236
1914 Man of the Hour – George M. Henry	238
Narberth Civic Association [Second] (1914-26)	238
1914 Narberth Fete Day and Historical Pageant	241
A Newspaper – “Our Town” - 1914	243
Pastors Unite: A Revivalist Effort	247
Baseball.....	247
Davis – General Store	252
Centennial Road Murder, 1905.....	254

Progressivism

Anticipated here during the 1880s and early-1890s, Progressivism became a rather pervasive influence and Narberth's guiding spirit during the borough's first fifty years. Something about the appeal of a more direct democracy being advocated, and the attractiveness of being able to cast a vote in a self-governed suburban community as a civic act rather than a social act caught on here permanently during that time and was cherished. This chapter will examine Progressivism as a unifying theme of politics and civic life in the town. And it will discuss the Protestant middle-class view of the world, as well as the take-to-the-streets discrimination practiced locally by the KKK, and a national effort to oppose its rhetoric, launched here as the "Narberth Movement" soon took shape.

A national movement within the Republican Party, Progressivism introduced a new model of citizenship – one strongly endorsing civil service reform for job-seekers so that merit-based selection would replace political patronage at all levels, from village postmaster on up. The Progressive Era likewise sought an altogether new kind of politics that emphasized intelligent voting instead of the old-time intensive party loyalty. It also pursued efficiency and expertise in government as other effective ways of fighting entrenched "spoils system" politics.

Newspapers began covering such changes and many new national organizations and organized activities also played a part in bringing vibrancy to civic life in America at this time, with an impact clearly felt here. Backsliding went on and Progressives sometimes remedied this, but were often unable to do so. The new middle class in Narberth readily accepted the Progressive agenda, except – for some at least – when the subject was immigration, color or churches other than Protestant. With few exceptions, working-class Protestants in Narberth remained belligerent on all three issues meanwhile, and Democrats here were very much a minority.

In this period the Protestant viewpoint, traditionally linked with Progressivism, thrived and was dominant in Narberth until the mid-twentieth century, gradually diminishing in strength and giving way to diversity.

Locally the apex of influence of that Protestant attitude, during which it seemed fully to take into account Progressive ideals about community-building, occurred from 1890 to 1920. Those were the years when the residency here by a national team of clergy from the Baptist Publication Society staff made all the difference.

Yet despite what seemed like the best possible example set by those clergy, many local middle-class and working-class Protestants harbored deep prejudice toward blacks, immigrant groups and

Catholics. Such resentment caused considerable friction within the borough from time to time during those decades. And it boiled over sometimes in stark confrontations.

As for the recent immigrant groups, the Irish Catholics and Italians had their religion in common, and the German Lutherans had been used to associating with Catholics in their European homeland and they found them compatible here, even to the extent that they sometimes sent their children to Catholic schools. It was the Protestants of English background who so often found the Irish Catholics and Italians detestable here, just as they might have regarded them as less than human on their home turf.

Many or even most of the people who created the town culture here were also men and women of deep religious faith. This faith, nurtured by the Narberth churches they soon established, was also uplifted by persons of all social ranks who formed the backbone of the town's volunteer organizations always exceptionally numerous. For some, this meant assuming an active role in civic affairs. Others set out to meet the changing needs of their time by working through church channels such as lay confraternities, outreach units and youth groups. Still others, especially when the borough was new, combined both approaches. However, before 1920 in Narberth, only Protestants held leadership positions in either civic life or politics.³⁶³

Narberth Fire Company

Perhaps no single volunteer organization has done more to create and sustain a true “town feel” in Narberth than its Fire Company. Certainly, other local communities across the nation also still have comparable firefighting units. But one episode in Narberth Fire Company's early history highlights both the distinctiveness of this local unit and the enormous energy of its citizens that was just waiting to be put in harness here (along with the volunteer fire horses) in the borough's earliest years.

For the “can do” attitude of Narberth Association in overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles to establish a town sometimes was contagious — and in surprising ways. Even individuals occasionally took the hint that if you wanted to solve a town problem, you might consider undertaking and shouldering the entire responsibility by yourself. This curious rub-off factor of an indelible Narberth trait is how Narberth suddenly and **unexpectedly found itself with two fire companies that responded to every alarm instead of one**, in the late 1890s while the community was still sparsely settled.

Narberth Fire Company was the first major volunteer organization founded after independent

³⁶³ Editor's note: This paragraph was found in the author's papers and added here.

rule began here, at a time when it was widely considered an honor to belong to a group providing volunteer service of this sort. The Narberth Presbyterian Church fire [in January 1896,] was the catalyst that brought Narberth Fire Company No. 1 into existence. That shocking loss convinced people that just keeping a few fire extinguishers handy for emergencies, as Narberth had been doing, was inadequate for a newly independent town. When the old alarm of the Narberth Association had sounded late one January night in 1896 to summon citizen help, Merion Fire Company of Ardmore was called to the scene. Before those firemen arrived, a large crowd stood around helpless, as sparks from burning embers of the all-wooden church ignited roofs of nearby homes.

While nothing was left of the church but a tall chimney, spectators had some modest success afterward trying to douse house-fires by throwing mud at them, especially after some of Narberth's best baseball players joined the pitching duel. More intensive work was required, however, to save the roof of one Grayling Avenue house. A board was put out an upstairs window and a man stood on the end of it while two or three others sat on the inner end to balance it. Meanwhile, people passed buckets of water to the man on the plank, and in that way the blaze was extinguished.

That same night some citizens got together at the scene and pledged subscriptions to organize a fire department. By spring of the following year, a large tent went up at a main intersection, and an entertainment held there to mark the organization and chartering of Narberth Fire Company.³⁶⁴ Also in 1897, this fire company's first parade took place, saluting arrival of the first mobile fire apparatus. That vehicle was housed in Martha Furey Moore's Haverford Avenue stable near the present Shirley Road and they used John B. Clothier's pair of coach horses for a while.

This first horse-drawn mobile truck saw seventeen years of service. Theobald Harsch's trusty strong horses or else the C. P. Cook coal yard horses did much of the pulling of that truck. Stabled privately nearly six blocks from the firehouse, those Harsch workhorses knew the shrill sound of the town's fire alarm, and as soon as they heard it, they backed themselves into position to be hitched up to go fire-fighting.

Since the available horses were never close enough to allow a smooth and rapid response to alarms, Narberth Fire Company's first president, the rather pompous builder-developer John B. Clothier, at loggerheads with borough officials anyway, and a business partner of Narberth's first fire chief

³⁶⁴ The Fire Company's history, Our Town, November 12 and 19, 1914, page 1. See also anniversary brochure.

George O. Goodman, stirred things up further by starting a rival brigade, a Chemical Fire Company³⁶⁵ in a town that could never afford to support two volunteer fire companies and was just getting used to supporting one.

A distant relative of the Strawbridge & Clothier department store family, John B. Clothier especially built a firehouse³⁶⁶ for his Chemical Fire Engine Company at 246-248 Haverford Avenue that had a tower containing an impressive bell, later sold to an African-American Baptist church in Ardmore. Known as the “opposition” fire company, this brigade answered the same alarms as the “official” Narberth Fire Company No. 1. The rub was that this rival initially had better equipment and horses on the site, with efficient runways for swift exits from the building. The showdown came at annual election time one year. (And who can say that Narberth firemen are not snobs at heart?) Faced with a choice between two candidates for fire chiefs - a French count and John B. Clothier, Narberth’s then biggest real estate developer from old Quaker stock - they were determined to elect the new man in town, Count Tristan B. du Marais, and they did.

Meanwhile, they went on with their important task of constructing the Forrest Avenue firehouse that became a true community center and was located in Elm Hall - a structure Narberth firemen built with nearly all volunteer contributions, leasing offices in it to the borough as the seat of government. This was the period when fire halls were the center of community life in towns across America, a period that lasted up until about 1950.

Interestingly, that hall was built by an experienced local man John K. Ketcham³⁶⁷ whose experience in the construction industry predated (and would long outlast) that of the controversial John B. Clothier, from whom the brigade had been trying to distance itself as much as possible. Elm Hall’s construction was about half finished when they were able to house one of their own chemical wagons there — a matter of pride on their part too, as Clothier had surged ahead of them with his firehouse project, expecting that it would “wow” them and compel their admiration. Elm Hall domiciled the official Narberth brigade from 1899 to 1960, and the first annual supper of Fire Company No. 1 was a December 1899 dinner dance there.

Imagine the dismay of the assembled throng when that evening’s featured speaker extended the

³⁶⁵ Of a well-known Ardmore family of carpenter builders who had served in the Revolutionary war, Goodman was a descendant of Johannes Stephen Goodman who arrived from Germany in 1738 aboard the ship “Charming Nancy,” and bought a house on a hundred acres in the middle of Ardmore’s northside.

³⁶⁶ “Opposition” fire company, Our Town, October 9, 1926, page 4.

³⁶⁷ This builder of Elm Hall was profiled for his 50th wedding anniversary, Our Town, 14 February 1930, P. 1.

olive branch to Clothier, for fire company president Philip L. Jones³⁶⁸ talk confirmed and even seemed to condone the continuing existence of the town's two rival fire companies when, without suggesting the primacy of one over the other, he declared instead a need for citizens to become a member of one company or the other. On its face a conciliatory statement by a "peace-maker" trying to find common ground so as to defuse a tense situation separating Narberth's two arch-rival brigades, it was actually much more than that. For this English-born minister's focus on the broader picture enabled him to sidestep aggravation caused by rivalry and ease up on Clothier. Reverend Jones knew that the borough soon must face dire consequences from a new danger: the bank holding the mortgage of Goodman & Clothier builders, then in charge of all the major civic (and most of the major private sector) improvements being made in the town, had just gone into receivership. Jones was Clothier's immediate successor as fire company president, only the second person to hold that office. Wisely and diplomatically ignoring the fire fighters' raging dispute, he dared to urge public support for both camps³⁶⁹ at a most critical moment. A frequent banquet speaker, this clergyman often was introduced as one concerned with battling fires here and in the hereafter.

Narberth got its first motorized apparatus in 1913. And it long remained a custom here, as in other volunteer brigades, that the first man to arrive at the firehouse got to drive³⁷⁰ that firetruck. Also in 1913, the Narberth Firemen's Relief Association³⁷¹ was organized. Its purpose was to establish a fund for the relief of members injured at fires, that is, to pay for medical attention and indemnification of members for loss of time consequent to injury. This kind of protection had become a matter of serious concern, owing to the greatly increased number of buildings in the district being served, which extended considerably beyond the borough itself. Charles V. Noel was secretary of this group. In 1920, when that association had only three hundred dollars on hand, it held a band concert and dance that was very successful.

Socializing, begun early by this fire brigade, thus was not neglected as the years passed. Until about 1912, the Narberth company's main revenue source had been its annual Washington's Birthday supper. In 1916, long after the demise of the "opposition" fire company, a committee chaired by J.

³⁶⁸ This wise and diplomatic talk, as reported in *Narberth Local News*, 9 December, 1899, p. 1.

³⁶⁹ When John B. Clothier's rival fire company soon disbanded, and he went bankrupt, the wife of John's more prosperous cousin and business associate also living in Narberth, Albert E. C. Clothier, stepped in and bought most of the block. A succession of people bought the former firehouse coal-yard owner C. P. Cook, an auto-repair shop with barber shop upstairs, George Sheldon's blacksmith shop. In mid-1920s, almost got a clock in the tower.

³⁷⁰ Interview with early Narberth volunteer fireman Harry C. Hartman, 23 July, 1985.

³⁷¹ Firemen's Relief Assn. est. 1913, concert 1920. *Our Town* 3/6/1920.

Howard Wilson began a custom of sponsoring an annual Lincoln's Birthday dinner given by the citizens of Narberth to the active members of the fire company, and for a while it was the brigade's main revenue source.

As mentioned, Borough Council rented upstairs facilities in the fire house from the fire company as an office and official meeting place. This Elm Hall building remained the town hall for sixty-one years, until replaced by the current municipal building on Conway Avenue. Actually, the selection of the name "Elm Hall" for that original municipal building was very likely a play on words - a reminder not only of the town's earlier name of Elm, but also recognition that "Elm Hall" was the name of an elegant mansion with tall pillars.

Narberth's fire chief from 1898 to 1910 was a Washington-born French count, Tristan B. du Marais.³⁷² **I**f that seems unusual, actually the close association of Dr. Albert C. Barnes, one of America's leading art collectors, with Narberth Fire Company was unique. It came about, Miss Violetta de Mazia told me, through Albert H. Nulty. Nulty was Dr. and Mrs. Barnes's coachman in Overbrook, later their chauffeur, besides being a Narberth fireman. Dr. Barnes became interested in Nulty's work, attended fire company social gatherings, served on its board, and was an honorary vice president.

As the picture-hanger at Barnes Foundation, Nulty worked together with modern French master Henri Matisse installing the Matisse murals there. Dr. Barnes sent the Narberth fire chief, Nulty, to Detroit Institute of Arts for apprenticeship to a renowned German restoration expert. Afterwards Nulty became art restorer and curator at Barnes, personnel head, and, after Dr. Barnes's death, a trustee of the foundation.

A bronze plaque outside the fire house honors borough council secretary and fire chief Charles V. Noel who perished the day after Christmas in 1937 fighting a St. Charles Seminary fire. Dr. Barnes suggested that memorial, then commissioned Barnes Foundation art student Marcella Broudo to make it. In Albert Nulty's memory, Barnes Foundation gave Narberth Fire Company its first rescue truck, housed in 1958.

The fire company's district includes Merion, Penn Valley, and Wynnewood, more of its calls being made in those areas than in the borough. Worst Narberth fire occurred January 1940 in Ricklin's Hardware Store destroying a quarter-block containing seven stores, twelve apartment units, and some business offices at

³⁷² Tristan served under a French General in the First World War. He lived with his wife and son on Forrest Avenue in the shadow of St. Margaret's Catholic Church where every Sunday he served in its church choir there.

Essex and Haverford avenues, and making 42 persons homeless. An April 1981 arson fire blazed through nine brick row houses in the 200 block of Woodbine Avenue, consuming five structures and leaving twenty-one persons homeless including a newborn infant.

Elm Hall

Meanwhile the impressive house with tall columns which stood at the time on an estate that, although nearby (on Montgomery Avenue's south side in Merion just east of Merion Road), had no direct link with Narberth. This local landmark was then the home of a prominent Civil War veteran - a place with a special aura and a "plantation look" about it. Some said that the Elm Hall mansion³⁷³ resembled Mount Vernon.

So, the inventors of Elm Hall municipal building's moniker may not have been aiming at objectivity at all. As creators of an icon, they may have been focusing on a "moment" when the built environment and the identity of America came close, in the eyes of at least some local citizens. It is as if the Elm Hall name, with its reference to the architectural style of the early years of the Republic, is telling us something elusive and fundamental about "Narberth as symbol" and about workings of the symbolic imagination. Indeed the borrowed name "Elm Hall" for such a modest municipal building is that peculiar mix of classical grandeur and naive sentiment, and of the national and the regional that are at the very core of the American imagination, as it carefully records the everyday details of borough life and raises them to the level of symbols. The present town hall, as yet unnamed, perhaps should belatedly adopt the hallowed Elm Hall name - as a living legacy from our town fathers.

YMCA

Prior to that, Narberth YMCA held its first annual dinner meeting in December 1907 and constructed its Georgian Revival building by Dothard & Dothard architects with its crisp classical detailing the following year, complete with a built-in row of storefronts along Haverford Avenue. This large red brick building next to Elm Hall fire house/municipal office was an amazingly ambitious undertaking for a town the size of Narberth - some said a "white elephant." The fourth-oldest Y in Montgomery County, Narberth's was only the second Y in the county to construct its own building - doing so immediately after the leader of the pack, the Lower Merion branch, founded in 1905, built its

³⁷³ John Wainwright named his place "Elm Hall." General Wendell P. Bowman later bought it back.

own three-story building (in a dated architectural style - arcade-like upper window's, a billboard-type sign above reminiscent of storefronts in a frontier town) on Ardmore's main street in 1907.

Independent rule seemed to make the borough leaders feel invincible. Clearly they were trying to rival, perhaps surpass, the facilities offered by the Y in surrounding Lower Merion Township, the county's biggest municipality. Thus even the trendiness of the design style chosen for Narberth's Y represented a kind of comeuppance on the part of local community leaders.

Completion of the Y building proved an important stepping stone for one of two architect brothers, both Narberth residents, who apparently on the strength of it began listing their Dothard & Dothard architectural firm in the city directories in 1909. For the elder brother, Robert Joseph Dothard (1876-1949), was soon hired to head office-building construction of the rapidly expanding Pennsylvania Railroad system.

Speculation on who advocated choosing Colonial Revival style for the Narberth Y building points directly at architects Dothard & Dothard rather than the project's mentor, A. J. Loos. As they were quite close to him, he would have listened to their advice and given them the benefit of the doubt. The Y was after all to stand next door to the town hall, whose name "Elm Hall" conjured up a Mount Vernon image locally.

Besides, the Dothards were an early nineteenth century Philadelphia family of carpenter-builders with Scottish roots and a keen interest in genealogy, claiming an English-born ancestor who died at Concordville, Chester County before 1686 in their maternal line.³⁷⁴ So this sets the Dothards up as most likely to have asserted the value and appropriateness of an architectural style quite appealing for many native-born Americans, especially those who could trace their families back to colonial times and were ill at ease with a rapid influx of immigrants and the many physical and social changes happening all around them.

Surely the Dothards would have been aware - and A. J. Loos all the more so, as he grew up in Philadelphia's nearby Germantown Section - of the then strong stirrings of interest there in preservation of colonial architecture, long before the historic preservation movement got strongly under way in this country. For in Germantown, an upper-crust movement toward preservation had started with the founding in 1900 of the Site and Relic Society (now Germantown Historical Society), that romanticized the past while attempting to create an enclave of colonial "restorations" of non-colonial buildings — an

³⁷⁴ Family correspondence and charts made available by Walter I. Dothard, Jr. to the writer.

early-twentieth century phenomenon very well documented by historian David R. Contosta.³⁷⁵

A. J. Loos' forward-looking personal inclinations and the immigrant status of his very cultured late father, a German-born teacher of classical and modern languages, translator and liberal thinker who resided in Germantown at his death in 1877, undoubtedly would have distanced Augustus J. Loos from any involvement or much interest in such a project. Like his father, benevolent A. J. Loos³⁷⁶ would sooner give a helping hand to immigrants than stand aloof from them, and he was in charge of the Y project. Loos' wife, however, had a notable American colonial family tree.

The "Ys" had originated in London in 1844 to address the needs of young men during the industrial revolution and the movement reached our shores in 1851, having its greatest expansion in this country between 1873 and 1913. The national YMCA leader Luther H. Gulick believed in the social and moral value of athletics, and that training boys in this way helped assure their "social loyalty." Young men from age eighteen to twenty-five traditionally had been the targeted age group, but Narberth Y's athletic programs also included younger boys. Narberth Y was quite consistent with standard Y policy in emphasizing the professionalism of a "competent physical director" in charge of its sixty by twenty-eight-foot gym occupying one third of the building.

Offered in the Annual Announcement and Handbook of Narberth YMCA for 1911-12 were classes in indoor baseball, basketball, handball, volleyball, athletics and gymnastics. Also available were special individual lessons in wrestling and corrective exercise at twenty-five cents a session, and bowling alleys, shower baths and locker rooms. And by 1910, if not earlier, its main lobby (occupying another one-third of the building) housed a library of one thousand volumes as well as magazines and periodicals. That year the Y also had a chorus, an orchestra, a fully equipped darkroom, game rooms for men and boys, a yearly series of health talks by local physicians including specialists, and an entertainment course of six programs open to the community at large. Many organizations in the town quickly took to using the Y's meeting and committee rooms.

Ys always were and have remained nonsectarian. Yet the strong evangelical focus of the earlier period of YMCA history was retained in the focus of the Narberth Y, both by having the local Baptist church pastor as the Y director here for a time, and in the religious orientation of many of the programs offered. For the 1911-12 season, such programs included Sunday afternoon meetings offering instrumental and vocal music and a live fellowship song service, followed by a "strong address." Bible

³⁷⁵ Contosta, David R. "Philadelphia's 'Miniature Williamsburg': The Colonial Revival and Germantown's Market Square," in Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (October 1996), 283-320.

³⁷⁶ A. J. and Jenny Loos family papers made available by their grandson Walter D. Dothard, Jr.

courses were conducted for adults, high school and grammar school boys. A training course for Sunday school teachers ran through the winter. In the spring a Protestant minister delivered a series of five Bible lectures. In summer the town's Protestant churches united in Sunday evening twilight services under Y auspices. A special annual rate of five dollars entitled members to use all facilities. A two-dollar yearly membership entitled the bearer to purchase special privileges: forty cents an hour for a pool table or ten cents a game for bowling. Total attendance for the 1910-11 season was 7,539.

The first decade of its existence marked a period of tremendous growth for the Y, its building on a tiny village green in the heart of the business district serving as a virtual community center used not only by children but also by nearly every adult community group in town. Yet a lack of sustained financial support nearly closed the Y suddenly at the end of 1914. This crisis was narrowly averted by a business reorganization,³⁷⁷ and thereafter almost all references to this facility emphasized its broadened "community center" function. Activity at the YMCA, meanwhile, scarcely seemed to miss a beat. New there in 1915 was a Bureau of Events offering a clearing house calendar³⁷⁸ for local social and business meetings, and frequent "community nights."

Optimistic forecasts had been coming from local Protestant churches about the growth of their congregations. The Methodist church in a twenty-month period doubled its membership, trebled its Sunday school, and claimed the biggest men's Sunday school class on the Main Line.³⁷⁹ The Presbyterian men's Sunday school class also was showing impressive gains. Narberth's YMCA leaders must have been encouraged by this increase in the fold. But by 1919, amid rapid postwar changes and a local building boom, people talked of constructing a Memorial Hall and linking it with the Y to make a big building complex.

Meanwhile, for the first time Catholic voices were starting to be heard in Our Town. An editorial praising the work of the Knights of Columbus (Catholic counterpart of the Masons) on behalf of wayward boys must have raised Protestant eyebrows. Another unfamiliar note — this one truly alarming for some — sounded just before the YMCA began its big expansion drive that year.

An unidentified letter-writer (almost certainly John J. Cabrey) complained in Our Town that the YMCA is a "denominational thing." Consequently, the writer argued, to expand it as a kind of war memorial effort, as some were suggesting, would not fit in "a cosmopolitan community like Narberth"

³⁷⁷ Reported in Our Town, 7 January 1915, p. 1.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 4 February 1915, p. 2.

³⁷⁹ Tremendous growth in the past two years, claiming the biggest Methodist men's Sunday school class on the Main Line, Our Town, May 20, 1915.

because: “Members of churches that are not evangelical cannot consistently help to build an institution such as the Y.”³⁸⁰

Sentiment definitely was building toward a true community center: whether the YMCA officers or others managed it, the writer declared, would depend on which was more competent. A flood of verbiage followed.

By year’s end, expansion plans to add a swimming pool to the Y, as well as an auditorium, more meeting rooms and bowling alleys faltered when only just over half the targeted forty thousand dollars was raised. Its expansion thwarted, the Y organization began losing members and soon slid into the red, ceasing to function on May 1, 1920.³⁸¹ It was a crushing blow to A. J. Loos, who was the soul of this project, to see his vision for the Y smashed beyond repair. Still, he bided his time to salvage what he could for the good of the community as a whole.

Narberth Without its Y

The changing face of Narberth without its Y – what would this be like? The answer was swift in coming. All of its built-in storefronts were rented to shops and community groups. And the Narberth Community Library came into existence and began welcoming readers in the Y lobby in 1921, which brought increased traffic into the building.

Just as promptly, the town’s social center again shifted. For the next-door building, Elm Hall over the firehouse was again pressed into service as Narberth’s social center.

The era of playgrounds was dawning, meanwhile, around the nation. Big cities, by then, had been talking increasingly about slum children’s need for playgrounds ever since President Theodore Roosevelt lauded Chicago’s initiative in opening ten such recreational parks in 1905. So, once the Y building started gaining tenants, this freed people in slum-free Narberth to ponder the subject of playgrounds themselves. One possibility was to sell the Y building for commercial purposes and use the proceeds toward developing a playground. The other option was to consolidate the town’s large number of organizations, about two dozen of them, at that site. The upshot was that the Merion Title and Trust Company bought the Y in November³⁸² of that same year at a profit for the seller.

Public interest then shifted to obtaining a playground and war memorial even though there was

³⁸⁰ Letter to the Editor, *Ibid.*, 11 October, 1919, p. 2.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3 January 1920, p. 1 Announced considerably in advance, that drive had been set to begin 3 November 1919, with a goal of “at least \$40,000.” That fund campaign was announced as over on the above January date. Eighty persons had participated and 281 subscriptions been received. From the \$24,105 pledges made, \$3,665 cash was received.

³⁸² *Our Town*, Nov. 1924, p.1.

no word yet on whether the railroad could be dissuaded from building a freight yard on prime open land in Narberth. Of course, much more was envisioned than just a playground and memorial. The profit from the Y's sale was to go toward a new community center on the playground property that would replace Elm Hall and house not only the Fire Company, Council Chambers and community groups but also a library, swimming pool, auditorium and gymnasium. With added donations, the amount realized came to about \$50,000. A crucial vote was taken on whether to finance the \$100,000 still needed to complete the project with a municipal bond. This question was voted down³⁸³ by 950 to 366 in November 1924 – believed defeated mostly by the more pressing demands for money needed for street paving.

Meanwhile, the banking commission declared that Merion Title and Trust Company had no charter that would enable it to build in Narberth. So, the next year the bank built its own sizeable bank branch at 260 Haverford Avenue (former site of the “modern” log cabin) on the town’s main street but just outside the borough limits. Narberth’s Fred G. Warner in individual practice (not Wallace & Warner) was the architect. The bank was preparing to sell the Y building.

That same year, 1925, the recently established Narberth National Bank also built its red brick colonial revival building (Victor D. Abel, architect) on main street.³⁸⁴ The bank had a borough councilman as its first president and on its board was the president of borough council, and also a state senator living here. The appearance of these two new bank buildings in Narberth’s central business district in 1925 were more than anything else the concrete manifestations of the optimistic tenor of the times (the 1920s) in America as it was shown in Narberth, as were the major buildings that rose at each of the borough’s five church locations in the 1920s. Also in 1925, architects Boyd, Abel & Gugert designed a substantial row of “modern” stores³⁸⁵ with two floors of apartments above for Mr. Stanley at Haverford and Narberth Avenues’ northwest corner. In progress meanwhile was the housing construction boom of the same period, which saw more houses built than at any other time in the town’s history. But when it came to the community center project, the picture was less rosy and well defined.

³⁸³ Our Town, Nov. 1924, p.1.

³⁸⁴ Its Wynnewood branch opened August 1954.

³⁸⁵ Boyd, Abel & Gugert, architects.

Community Library

Quite high on the list of “Hints to Santa Claus” of things needed by the town for Christmas 1899³⁸⁶ had been “the free library” along with requests for two more churches, more all-the-year-round residents, a conspicuously placed town clock near the railroad station, freedom from factional squabbles at the upcoming borough election, and more attention paid to patronizing local stores. Also a local newspaper editorial³⁸⁷ called for establishment of a Narberth public library as early as 1914. But it took a while, and many more editorials.

Narberth Community Library, originally sponsored by the Women’s Community Club, was founded in 1921 by Elizabeth Knight Wood, wife of Robert Fellows Wood, the advertising manager of Autocar Company in Ardmore who served as a borough councilman between the two world wars. The library’s first official home was the lobby of the YMCA building, just after that group vacated the premises. It is usually said this library began with only an armful of books Mrs. Wood used to lend to her friends. These were books reflecting her interests as a serious collector of cacti and succulent plants, herb gardening and as a prospective keeper of a bird sanctuary at her Smedley-built stone house, 237 Forrest Avenue, that the Woods were buying in 1921 when it was a year old.

They were then a young married couple fresh from Massachusetts (he from Gardner, she a sea captain’s daughter born in his seaport of Marblehead where she had taught Latin and Greek),³⁸⁸ and living here in a rented house. That tiny book collection, described as “works of general literature” had been called the library of the Women’s Community Club, and its volumes were being rented at ten cents a week so as to purchase new books - an arrangement that continued when those books were brought from Avon Road to the Y.

Oddly, in the current histories of Narberth Community Library, these books are mentioned as the sole foundation of our library, which is a great distortion of the facts. Actually, a much larger number of volumes in the existing YMCA library were also made available to the new community library at the same time. These were books of reference and standard works of fiction, and they were offered for free circulation to the public. The YMCA board of directors continued to own them, with the women’s club responsible only for their circulation. Perhaps this outstanding resource goes unmentioned because, in

³⁸⁶ Narberth Local News December 9, 1899.

³⁸⁷ Our Town November 26, 1914

³⁸⁸ Interviews with their close friends, Dr. and Mrs. Charles R. Garver, mainly by telephone Aug. 7, 1994. See also Main Line Times, Aug. 15, 1940.

1921, these books had to be re-catalogued³⁸⁹ before going into circulation, whereas with Mrs. Wood's far fewer books, that was no problem.

So considering that the YMCA library, perhaps as early as 1908, had more than a thousand volumes which were continually being added to by the Y women's auxiliary (the group that spawned the women's club), and considering the major part Narberth Civic Association played in launching a community library, it was quite natural to assume that some use also would have been made of this already existing resource in the same building. Subsequent research confirmed this, and the fact that Narberth's first Free Library was housed in this building just as Lower Merion's first such facility was located in its Ardmore Y.

Moreover, during the first two years of its existence (1914 and 1915), Narberth Civic Association mounted a strenuous campaign to establish a community library, publishing something on the subject in almost every issue of Our Town, and conducting a "Campaign 600" book donation drive while the designated "community library" in the Narberth YMCA was being run by a civic association officer, Henry Clark Gara (the unsung hero of this project), with some fifteen hundred books and lots of Presbyterian fortitude).

Inasmuch as early initiatives had been taken to establish a community library both by the YMCA and the civic association, our women's club cannot really be considered the originator of the voluntary library that preceded the public one here, but it was the channel and chief organizer of this effort, as was so often the case in other towns and cities across the nation, where it was proving to be "the American way" for local women's clubs to play a key role³⁹⁰ in launching community libraries. Fortunately, however, the Narberth women's club, unlike so many of its sister organizations elsewhere,³⁹¹ seems to have been spared becoming embroiled in a struggle with politicians and business leaders who only minimally became involved in choosing Narberth Community Library's location - politicians (briefly) as a condition for possible Carnegie funding, and some businessmen hoping to keep the library on mainstreet to anchor the business district.

However, since A. J. Loos held the purse strings of this endeavor and Victor D. Abel became the library's architect, this was reason enough for Narberth Women's Club to act in harmony with the national trend³⁹² of women's clubs seeking library sites near their towns' best residential areas to

³⁸⁹ Our Town June 25, 1921.

³⁹⁰ Abigail A. Van Slyck, Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920 (Chicago, 1996).

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² *Ibid.*

proclaim City Beautiful aspirations to higher culture. Such strivings would have been well understood and applauded by Loos and Abel, community leaders who had already envisioned high goals of that type for Narberth when Narbrook Park was ceremoniously launched. Incidentally, the women's club around this time seemed preoccupied with the possibility of constructing a building for its own use, not at the library site.³⁹³

By contrast to the shoestring operation of the community library by the civic association, Mrs. Wood's community library (1921) began its existence with its income derived from appropriations by borough council and the then independent Narberth School Board.

A prominent visitor to Narberth Community Library when it reopened at the YMCA in June 1921 - this time with the declaration that it was under women's community club auspices - was Curtis Publishing Company editor Edward W. Bok³⁹⁴ of Merion who presented the library with an autographed copy of his new book, The Americanization of Edward Bok, an autobiography.

One of the earliest frequent users of the library at this period, Margaret Eyre, recalls being impressed by the very large supply of books the facility had. Referring to the first five-year period of abundant readership at the Y (1921 to 1926), Mrs. Wood explained³⁹⁵ that, through YMCA board president A. J. Loos, they were able to use the Y lobby for the library. Then, during Merion Title and Trust Company's ownership of the building, the gym was made available to them. Thus by the time of removal of the Community Library to the new community center building it now occupies on Windsor Avenue, the number of books had grown to five thousand.

By springtime of 1925, the growth of the Community Library during the past year alone had prompted discussion about forming a Library Association³⁹⁶ of both men and women to take over full responsibility for the library. The women's club president having formed a committee in 1924 to plan for the change saw that task rewarded by the establishment of a permanent, independent Narberth Library Association³⁹⁷ in April 1925.

The library's board of trustees was, and is, chosen from the Narberth Community Library Association Membership. This is an independent facility, not linked with the six libraries of the Lower

³⁹³ Editor's Note: For discussion about civic association hopes of obtaining a Carnegie Library and locating it in Narbrook Park, see Chapter 5.

³⁹⁴ Our Town, June 28, 1921, p.1.

³⁹⁵ Our Town May 8, 1926, p.1.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 4 April 1925, p.1; 11 April, p.1.

³⁹⁷ Our Town April 4, 11 and 25, 1925

Merion Library Association. Fiction and non-fiction books have been about seventy-five percent for adults and the rest for children.

By 1945, the library's circulation was about 30,000 volumes a year, with 2,000 persons listed as borrowers, and new books were then available on a rental basis. Summer has traditionally been the busiest time for patronage.

One of Narberth Community Library's earliest support groups was the **Fortnightly 500 Club of Narberth**.³⁹⁸ Mainly a dozen women with literary interests who met regularly at each other's homes to discuss cultural subjects, the Fortnightly Club gave its most active assistance throughout the library's first decade, the 1920s. Each year it presented to the library some valuable book of specialized interest (old china and porcelain, Oriental rugs, patchwork quilts) — items too expensive for the library to furnish out of its own limited funds. Its own (always daytime) activities featured each member in turn hosting a once-a-year luncheon meeting at her house, followed by the reading of members' specially prepared papers on various topics - a popular pursuit when so few women were employed outside the home. This group continued the work of the **Narberth Literary Society**, also known as the **Narberth Lyceum**³⁹⁹ which, starting in the 1890s, had held regular weekly meetings.

The Playground

A matter of pride among some Narberth old timers although few other people seem aware of this, Narberth may have the only community playground on the whole Main Line not built by the WPA.⁴⁰⁰ If true, this is especially impressive in a three-county region that includes several very prosperous townships including Lower Merion. For in fact, by the time numerous Main Line municipalities sought playgrounds built by the WPA, Narberth already had established its own spacious facility - the project getting off the ground through the cooperation and networking of a number of spirited local citizens.⁴⁰¹

The first inkling that a movement was under way to establish a Narberth playground came to light in September 1915 when Fletcher W. Stites served as toastmaster for a gathering of the thirty-five-member board of managers of the Narberth YMCA. That group had been mulling over its current efforts

³⁹⁸ Fortnightly 500 Club of Narberth, began 1920s. Correspondence with Bertha Redifer Miller, Nov. 11, 1983. Also see Our Town Jan. 7, 1928. And interview with club member Elizabeth Gilroy Dec. 14, 1944 told me a dozen women were members, not many more than that.

³⁹⁹ Narberth Lyceum began 1890s. And Narberth Literary Society in Narberth Local News, Sat. Dec. 9, 1899, p.1.

⁴⁰⁰ WPA – Work Projects Administration – a federal agency (1935-43) charged with instituting and administering public works in order to relieve national unemployment. Originally “Works Progress Administration.”

⁴⁰¹ Jeremiah W. Casey – conversation with Anita McGarrity in 1993; again on 12/20/1994.

to centralize and coordinate all kinds of athletics at the Y, something board members felt was in step with the town's awakened civic consciousness, and a good idea all around. Then Stites sprang the surprise of the evening by declaring that organized efforts were being made to give Narberth an athletic field adequate to provide a home-base for every branch of sport, so the various teams would no longer have to use grounds they occupied on short-term lease or just borrowed temporarily. As reported, that disclosure was unspecific as to the location of the proposed playground. Might they have been considering seriously more than one site?

Big cities, by this time, had been talking increasingly about slum children's need for playgrounds ever since President Theodore Roosevelt lauded Chicago's initiative in opening ten such recreation parks in 1905. For a small town like Narberth to be thinking about this, however, was unusual.

More typical of the period was the creation of a park adjacent to a public school. Our Town had editorialized about the subject several months earlier, calling attention to new school playgrounds being completed in Ardmore (at Lower Merion High School) and Haverford and an existing one in Bala, and recommending to our school board the immediate purchase of the vacant lot on Montgomery Avenue next to Narberth School.⁴⁰² It noted that the Trenton (or Newark) mayor was currently condemning ten to twelve acres for each new school built, and buying open land wherever possible around existing schools - the condemning of properties being both an expensive process and a confession of lack of foresight. In a public-spirited response, Alexander C. Shand made the athletic field for the use of children an assured fact by buying that Montgomery Avenue tract on the open market. He then kept it available for sports activity until such time as the people of Narberth would authorize their Narberth school board to purchase it for their requirements, Shand Athletic Field was formally opened May 12, 1916, when Narberth High School baseball team defeated Jenkintown High School team seven to two with plenty of faculty in attendance, and Alexander C. Shand threw out the first baseball.

Of course free-floating ideas about community improvements made elsewhere in the form of parks were sometimes usefully reported in Our Town for the relevance they might have for meeting eventual community needs here. One such account told of a little community park in Ohio, a "play park" considered very successful at the Harrison County seat of Cadiz, population two thousand, located on a Pennsylvania Railroad branch line. Businessmen had formed a stock company to create the park which, the article explained, "has had good effects" on the community there and, thanks to its brass band and

⁴⁰² Editorial suggesting a playground at Narberth School – June 17, 1915, p. 2. Our Town news article – Shand buys land for athletic field beside school – October 7, 1915, p.1.; dedication/opening of Shand Field – Our Town, May 18, 1916.

baseball team, was at the time self-supporting. Implied was that we had similar options here in Narberth, and might someday exercise them, while we still had open space.

A year later came a bombshell: the Pennsylvania Railroad announced plans for a large Narberth freight yard to occupy the six-acre undeveloped tract it owned between Conway and Wynnewood avenues. This proposal was understated, almost slipped into the general announcement of “Plans for Station Improvements under way,” as headlined in Our Town of August 23, 1917. Civic association representatives and the burgess had conferred with rail officials about plans for three improvements that reportedly the citizens had long wanted - an Essex Avenue roadway tunnel under the railroad, a new rail station on the inbound south side where the railroad now preferred its Main Line stations to be, and a new post office.

On the comprehensive plan drawn up by the Pennsylvania Railroad engineering department, the new rail station to accommodate inbound commuters more comfortably, was to be of the same style as Merion’s, (built in 1916 after a strenuous campaign by Merion Civic Association)⁴⁰³ but larger due to Narberth’s heavier passenger traffic. And the existing freight shed and the small freight cutoff on the southside were to be removed and relocated in a new Narberth freight yard. This new freight-yard facility, amazingly, was to have nine pairs of tracks fanning out from an entry-point at Haverford and Wynnewood Avenues and dead-ending at the backyards on Conway Avenue houses. This new freight facility would have left only a thin strip of land free of tracks along Windsor Avenue's south side between Wynnewood Avenue and Conway. Thus the northern boundary of that freight yard would have extended west from the party-line between 120 and 122 Conway Avenue. It was believed that work could begin on this “rail station project” within a few months. So Our Town was able to headline a front page article on September 13, 1917: “Council takes first official step⁴⁰⁴ toward new rail station and tunnel.” Of course the problematical duration of the war, and whether the railroad could obtain the necessary materials at such a time raised doubts about the outcome. Indeed the war, during which the Federal government took over railroads, apparently did complicate matters. For quite remarkably and without a lot of explanation, every aspect of this plan was before long scuttled. After many citizen complaints about the shabbiness of its quarters, the post office soon moved across the street into an existing building, and the other two matters were put on hold indefinitely - the tunnel idea to be talked about again seriously in the mid-1920s.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ See Our Town, Feb. 15, 1917 p.2. also Jan. 25, 1917, p.4.

⁴⁰⁴ Our Town, Sept. 13, 1917.

⁴⁰⁵ A petition being circulated for the railroad to obtain tunnel in Narberth, Our Town, Mar. 9, 1916.

Meanwhile, it was Alexander C. Shand again to the rescue, but in a quiet fashion. So quiet, in fact, that we only have his son's word for it that his railroad-man father stepped forward, paid the railroad for land and gave it to the town.⁴⁰⁶ A simple check of land deeds in Norristown revealed surprisingly little about any of the railroad transactions for that acreage (nor any for a railroad-owned piece of Narbrook Park's land) that are both known to have occurred. The intermediary apparently handling the transactions was Manor Real Estate and Trust Company. Alexander C. Shand's intervention in this important matter may have taken place immediately, or at a slightly later date, such as just after the war. In any event, his powers of persuasion with upper echelon rail officials in their eventual decision not to build that freight yard must have been crucial, more crucial than any payment he made himself. Also corroborating his close link with the "railroad aspect" of the playground story is the fact that, years later, when the playground was newly built and its community building being dedicated, it was Alexander C. Shand, Sr. who ceremonially handed over the key to the burgess.

With the war's end came a bumper crop of ideas about a memorial for the town. Naturally, Narberth's memorial committee chairman, banker Carl B. Metzger, had something to say on the subject.⁴⁰⁷ He pointed out that Merion was fortunate in having one of its citizens donate his home to be rebuilt as a memorial (now known as Merion Tribute House). Of course Ardmore had plans for a community building as a memorial. Meanwhile, Germantown had adopted a building for its memorial, and the borough of North Wales intended to turn one of its present buildings into a memorial. Metzger noted in his letter that the American Legion nationwide had already placed its stamp of approval on the idea of buildings to house the various legion posts as their idea of what a memorial should be.

One of the splashier ideas for a Narberth memorial was a clock tower,⁴⁰⁸ initially intended to stand where the old tree was, presumably the landmark oak (*quercus palustris*) on the northwest corner Forrest and Haverford avenues in the central business district where the gas station now is.⁴⁰⁹ Modifications of this proposal persisted for a while. A public library was also suggested as a memorial.⁴¹⁰ An Our Town editorial took an early stand on the subject by advancing the idea of an athletic field for such a purpose because that would decidedly not be catering to any selfish interest, but was seen as something useful and consistent with what a great many other communities were then

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with A.C. Shand, Jr. conducted by daughter at the author's request in North Carolina

⁴⁰⁷ Our Town, Jan. 3, 1920.

⁴⁰⁸ Our Town, Apr. 5, 1919.

⁴⁰⁹ The gas station, now gone, was at the corner of Forrest and Haverford Avenues. See Our Town, May 28, 1927 p.1. "Old oak dies at Forrest and Haverford" (It's also mentioned earlier, as possible clock tower site.).

⁴¹⁰ Our Town, May 17, 1919.

doing.⁴¹¹ The new memorial field in Upper Darby was cited as a good example of a facility both useful and decidedly memorial in its origin.

By late fall that year (1919) the Memorial Hall idea with attached tower came to the fore. Actually this was to be an enlarged Elm Hall with a new facade, in a Colonial Revival style congenial with the next-door YMCA, and designed by local architect Walter I. Dothard.⁴¹² The tower was to have a clock, its four faces illuminated at night, an electric fire siren, and a bronze tablet displayed with soldiers' names. Some hailed the idea that this could be made into a grand civic center complex and war memorial, joined together with the YMCA. Came the crunch: the YMCA failed in its fund-raising goal in December 1919, and ceased operation on May first the following year. So, the "grand complex" idea foundered.⁴¹³ Yet the May 15, 1920 issue of Our Town pictured the architect's drawing of his proposed transformation of Elm Hall into Memorial Hall. This much talked-about project had its ardent supporters, and some influential ones too (the architect was civic leader A. J. Loos' son-in-law). But it ran contrary to the trend that was then building toward public parks.

No question but that Narberth people were "thinking parks" at the time. Already under discussion was the possibility of creating a Great Oak Playground at South Narberth and Chestnut avenues - the name having been chosen, reportedly, to celebrate the beauty of an ancient towering black oak tree there. (Presumably this is the great white oak at 303 Chestnut Avenue). Heading up the Great Oak Playground committee was borough councilman W. R. D. Hall.⁴¹⁴ (The real estate developers seem eventually to have outwitted the environmentalists, but the stately tree still stands in a backyard, and one of its former owners told of having a contract with tree experts to feed that tree's roots in a very larger circumference every year.)

Gradually the idea of a memorial and a park combined won out over other possibilities. Yet nobody ever actually called it a memorial park. Nevertheless the writer in Our Town was right on target when he wrote:

Armistice Day 1920 should henceforth have an added significance for Narberth folk, for on that day with high resolve [was] authorized formation of a citizens' association to acquire for playground purposes the fine stretch of land between Windsor and Wynnewood avenues, about six acres, and two additional acres which are available for contribution without cost, which will

⁴¹¹ Our Town, Mar. 15, 1919.

⁴¹² New façade - Our Town, Nov. 1, 1919, p.; See also Mar. 1, 15, 29, Dec. 6, 13, 1919, also Jan. 3, 1920, p. 1-4.

⁴¹³ Our Town, Nov. 1, 1919; Nov. 15, 1919; Dec. 6, 1919; Jan. 3, 1920.

⁴¹⁴ Our Town, Apr. 17, 1920.

afford almost eight acres of centrally located ground for community recreation purposes and athletic activities.⁴¹⁵

The mention of “two additional acres” in the above context (never fully explained) seems to jibe perfectly with a story once told to me by an old-time resident, stating that citizen John J. Cabrey got wind something was happening whereby Kunkel Coal Company was about to take over ground in the (present playground) vicinity for its train-loads of coal, and have coal-cars stand on a track run-off there. So Cabrey came forward in magnanimous fashion and wrote a check of his own for that land, quickly. Then he told others about it, and people concurred with him and the ground was acquired for the recreation field we now have. Presumably that was the narrow strip bordering Windsor Avenue’s south side.

The expectation of the new group was that the entire matter would be wrapped up in every detail by December first, and that as a result the borough would have “in its grasp the last available, desirable spot for the playground facilities and village green,” The writer advised keeping in mind that no permanent expenditures were to be made, as the new association was only going to hold the ground until such time, “a year or two,” as the borough could purchase it officially, and during that time the citizens' money would be invested. The six acres was described as (still) belonging to the Pennsylvania Railroad. The reasoning was that the borough would have to wait at least a year for a bond issue to be approved by the electorate. And in that interval, it could be too late for supposedly, private factors were ready and willing to pay\$30,000 for that land. The holding company was meant to bridge the gap. Fifty-one citizens (with Dr. O. J. Snyder as their chairman) had so far subscribed \$22,500 at \$100 a share. The plan was that if the borough failed to exercise its option within three years, the association would be able to sell the property on its own account. The officers of this association were: John J. Cabrey, temporary president, Robert J. Nash, temporary secretary, and Robert J, Edgar, temporary treasurer - all newer people who had become active in the town in the past several years.

In the same issue of Our Town, an editorial praised the Armistice Day report made by the new playground committee, noting that Narberth's present indebtedness was only \$83,500, of which \$14,000 will be liquidated on or before January 1, 1922.⁴¹⁶ That very satisfactory condition was accomplished, it declared, by untiring efforts of council in the past few years. It added that: “Previously, we were in a sorry plight.” Now, however, with the borough’s credit the highest in its history, and assessments

⁴¹⁵ Our Town, Nov. 20, 1920, p.1.

⁴¹⁶ Our Town, Ibid.

quickly approaching three million dollars, the newspaper declared it “quite likely” council might go for the playground opportunity, if at all practicable.

A week later the playground association announced that the project was almost fully subscribed. It also disclosed that some outright gifts of as much as a thousand dollars had been received. Fine as that was, it admonished that this conflicted with the purpose of the enterprise.⁴¹⁷

With the playground project assured, a permanent corporation was formed, the new generation of local residents being almost prominent in it. This very diverse group was headed by John J. Cabrey, president; Dr. O. J. Snyder, vice-president; Robert J. Nash, secretary and Harry A. Jacobs, treasurer. The directors included Victor Darwin Abel, James Artman, Michael Collins, Robert C. Edgar, H. R. Hillegas, Alexander C. Shand, Jr, Anton E. Wohler and John B. Williams.⁴¹⁸

A long official silence descended on the subject of the playground. However, the voters approved a \$30,000 bond issue in November 1922 to purchase the playground tract. So, that autumn, when borough council finally got down to the task, long overdue, of making arrangements to acquire the tract of land at Windsor and Wynnewood Avenues to be used as a public playground, the time had come to organize Narberth's Recreation Board. Comprising five persons to be appointed to the Playground Commission by the burgess under the conditions and provisions of the General Borough Act, this quintet would be responsible for grading, laying out, equipping and administering that facility as soon as the borough got possession of it.⁴¹⁹

As a matter of record, the first five citizens appointed to that board (by Burgess Carl B. Metzger) were Robert G. Savill who had been the Y's athletic and games manager, a real estate co-partner C. Howard McCarter, Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce publicity head W. R. D. Hall, Robert J. Dothard who had been an architect with the railroad and was now buildings superintendent of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and businessman A. Perry Redifer.⁴²⁰ As requested for ready reference, each received a copy of the Playground Act #322 (approved July 1, 1919)⁴²¹ from the secretary of the Commonwealth. Soon under discussion was the subject of a playground bond issue and tentative locations for various projected recreational features including a running track. Preparation of specifications for grading the field began to be addressed in February 1923. But things were still on hold.⁴²²

⁴¹⁷ Our Town, Nov. 27, 1920

⁴¹⁸ Our Town, Dec. 4, 1920

⁴¹⁹ Minutes of Recreation Board of Narberth, Borough Hall – Nov. 8 1922 (See also W.R.D. Hall's bio – Our Town – Sept. 6, 1917, p.1.)

⁴²⁰ Minutes of Recreation Board Nov. 8, 1922,

⁴²¹ Playground Act – Ibid. Minutes, Nov. 8, 1922,

⁴²² Rec. Board Minutes re: track & specifications, Mar. 5, 1923.

So it seemed like patience wearing thin to read, finally, an article headlining big opportunities for civic development along the railroad in 1923, in Our Town as the year 1922 ended.⁴²³ The holding company was still holding, after two years. That year-end wrap-up could not resist suggesting that the view from the railroad at Narberth might give some people the impression that this was “Hungrytown,” “Povertyville” or the “Dumping Ground of the Main Line.” Of course, 1922 was also the year the voters had rejected by an overwhelming majority the hundred \$65,000 loan question that would have built a large school on Shand Field. But that was a different issue.

It was April 1923 before Our Town could headline a page one story: “The borough now owns playground tract.”⁴²⁴ Settlement had been made with Manor Real Estate and Trust Company, not directly with the Pennsylvania Railroad. And this came after long delays reportedly due to “election mistakes,” deed, searches and other time-consuming details. The payment made by purchasers of the bonds totaled \$31,337.25 showing a premium and interest charge of \$1,337.25. Delay resulted in additional interest charges of \$1,458. So, about \$7,000 remained to grade and fill the property, and to begin the task of converting a smoking dump into a model community center. The log jam was broken. Things suddenly began to happen.⁴²⁵ The Recreation Board met with a renewed sense of purpose. Preparations were made to advertise for bids to grade and fill. Talk was of laying a baseball diamond immediately, and a running track. Eventually there was to be a football field, swimming pool and a place for skating in winter. What about the fine old trees at the western end of the tract?

The perennial question of what to do with the YMCA cropped up again, this time monopolizing summer-long discussions in Our Town after that newspaper editorialized about the subject, observing that Narberth’s population had virtually quadrupled since the Y was built.⁴²⁶ And now that its rental units in the sprawling complex have proven fairly profitable, some were saying: continue the Y, while others advocated selling it. The newspaper encouraged a forum of public opinion on the matter, and advised that we not give up the community center that in a way we still have (referring to the Y), until assured a new one.

First things first led one letter-writer to declare it was more important that Narberth have a community center than that the YMCA be found to have good commercial use. Anton E. Wohlert’s

⁴²³ Our Town, Dec. 30, 1922,

⁴²⁴ Our Town – Apr. 21, 1923, p.1.

⁴²⁵ Not sure of footnote: Our Town – Apr. 21, 1923, p.5.

⁴²⁶ Our Town – July 14, 1923, editorial, p. 2, opinion

letter advocated selling the Y and building a new playground - the simplest solution being to turn the Y into stores.⁴²⁷

A valuable perspective was provided by a letter from mainstreet landlord and former coal dealer C. P. Cook.⁴²⁸ He told of regretting that he had not supported Burgess George Henry when he "asked, begged" Cook to buy one or two lots at Narbrook Park. Then came the playground scheme, and Cook expressed his admiration for the way John J. Cabrey had managed the "political" end of the matter, also praising his mighty accomplishments with the pen, and pronouncing him a worthy successor of the burgess. Then he lauded A. E. Wohlert's spirited intervention when the playground work came to a sudden halt due to lack of money (apparently when the bids from contractors on grading and filling came in too high at the end of May). Wohlert's response: this experienced landscape engineer jumped in and, using money currently available, saw to it that the playground is now "about two-thirds graded and ready for use, having accomplished wonders at small cost to the public who must ever associate his name and fame with that of Messrs. Henry and Cabrey." Cook said he corroborated Wohlert's view that the present generation, having provided the land, the necessary grading and running track, etc., will have done its part well, and improvements from then on may in justice be left to that generation's successors.

Sentiment had been building, meanwhile, about selling the Y building for commercial purposes and using the proceeds toward developing a playground - most especially one that would have a community building. As a result, Merion Title and Trust Company bought the Y in November for \$60,000, which meant a profit of \$33,000 for the sellers.⁴²⁹ Merion Title intended to establish its Narberth branch there. By then, all eyes were focused on the unfolding of the playground story. For as the town paper's editorial correctly appraised it: The people of Narberth are waiting for a plan to have their community center. They did not have much longer to wait.

The news breaking story was proclaimed with a banner headline: "Plans laid for Narberth's greatest civic project," announcing that the sale of the YMCA was now paving the way for a new community building - for the board of directors of the extinct YMCA, with the ever faithful Augustus J. Loos as its president, had drawn up a formal resolution stating that it had placed the equity from the sale of its building, about \$33,000, plus a \$5,000 gift from the Merion Title and Trust Company, in a new community building fund.

⁴²⁷ July 21, 1923, Wohlert – August 4.

⁴²⁸ Our Town, Oct. 27, 1923

⁴²⁹ Our Town – Nov. 17, 1923.

The project as it was envisioned had considerable magnitude, for under discussion was not just a home for the twenty-four civic organizations then active in the borough. But it was believed that the municipal buildings might be located at the site as well. A February 28 conference on the projected new community center was planned to thrash out these various questions, with all twenty-four civic organizations participating. A special committee was formed to take responsibility for all matters concerning plans for the new community center, and this important group came to be known as the Committee of Ten. The members of this committee were architect Victor D. Abel, John J. Cabrey, Henry A. Frye, E. O. Griswold, C. Howard McCarter, Carl B. Metzger, Robert J. Nash, Mrs. A. B. Ross, William D. Smedley, and with T. Noel Butler, secretary of the YMCA trustees, serving as chairman.

The community center report was presented together with architects' plans by the Committee of Ten in April. They had determined that the logical site for the building complex was the eastern end of the playground. For the memorial to be placed at this site they proposed a Memorial Fountain or granite shaft containing tablets, for the center of a circle in front of the community building which would be set back a hundred feet. Since the architect on this committee was Victor D. Abel, it is quite probable that he designed the grand scheme for this complex and that he did so under the name of his architectural firm, Boyd, Abel & Gugert (as he is known to have done the same year, 1924, for Narberth's new Baptist Church, with William D. Smedley as builder). No drawings have come to light so far for this large scheme, which featured quarters housing all Narberth organizations as well as an auditorium large enough for local events, and presumably could have included a new borough hall and firehouse.

In June, the Committee of Ten sent questionnaires to local civic organizations asking the opinion of each on the project. And all the replies were favorable. The idea was to raise sufficient money, by contributions and a bond issue, to erect a \$150,000 building complex. The committee next proposed that the borough float a bond issue of \$100,000. Committee chairman Butler shortly afterward wrote a long presentation published like an editorial in Our Town on the topic: is a community building a luxury or a necessity? He made the strong point, of course, that it is the latter. (The cornerstone to be of Ardmore's new township building was to be laid in February 1925).

Came the autumn 1924 election, and the \$100,000 bond issue for the community building was defeated by an overwhelming majority, partly due to the fact that the \$75,000 street-paving bond issue (a subject much on people's minds) was brought up at the same election. Upon the defeat of the plan for a large community building, the YMCA board of directors spent a part of its community building fund to improve the playground tract, and they used the remainder to erect the three-organization building that continues to serve the public today. (William D. Smedley and Horace T. Smedley were the builders, and

presumably Victor D. Abel stayed the course serving as architect, but this is unverified.) This building, which has been altered since, started out with three identical-sized rooms, each thirty by sixty feet, with the library's unit set lengthwise, and the other two sections placed in the form of wings. When completed, the building was to be under control of the Playground Commission, composed of council members, school board and one private citizen. The grading and improvement of the playground itself were completed In July 1925, shortly before construction of the community center building began.

Dedication⁴³⁰ of the community took place on May 1, 1926, with Alexander C. Shand, Sr. for the YMCA directors, turning over the keys to Burgess Henry A. Frye who in turn gave them to the three organizations⁴³¹ going to make their homes in the scaled-down building. Initially too, the structure was accepted by the Recreation Board, to take charge of its administration.

Memorial Day 1926 saw the dedication of Narberth's war memorial in front of the community building.⁴³² It consisted of a bronze tablet prepared by Bailey, Banks & Biddle, Philadelphia, affixed to granite blocks from the Tennis Association grounds (instead of attached to a giant bolder, as planned originally). A smaller tablet on the back of the base, containing a brief history of the granite blocks from the roadbed of the Columbia Railroad, was to be placed there later by the Pennsylvania "Railroad Company. Preparation of this memorial had been entrusted to the memorial committee elected in 1919 by the Narberth Home Guard. The unveiling of it, however, was carried out by the local American Legion post. This war memorial was relocated to its own-reserved area on the southeast corner Windsor and Wynnewood Avenues and rededicated in 1937.

The shadow of a giant in civic virtue loomed over, energized and gave continuity to the playground project from start to finish. The same individual who had been the lynchpin of the Narbrook Park project, that "giant" was Augustus J. Loos,⁴³³ a modest and unassuming man never elected to any borough office. Yet his influence on the public life of the town was enormous - probably greater than that of any other individual during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The way his contemporaries put it, Loos was the chief architect of Narberth's moral and intellectual structure. Arriving here at "Greystone" in 1905 just after independent rule began, Loos had a firm hand in shaping the way our community developed.

⁴³⁰ Our Town – Apr. 24, 1926.

⁴³¹ Library, American Legion, Girl Scouts

⁴³² War Memorial to be dedicated – Our Town – May 15, 1926, p.1.

⁴³³ Statement on Alexander Loos Aug. 14, 1923, courtesy of Walter I. Dothard, Jr.

And his own background was unusual. Loos' father, a well-educated Lutheran born in Silesia, Germany (and married to a Pole) had liberal views in religion and politics and was a follower of Carl Schurz's liberal movement. Eventually Loos fled the repressive Prussian rule and settled in Germantown, taught classical and modern languages, was a translator for Lippincott publishers and a friend of Samuel Longfellow, the poet's brother. Loos' traits of devotion to cultural pursuits and high ideals rubbed off on his American-born second son Augustus. Young Augustus J. Loos was in the first graduating class at Cornell University (1877),⁴³⁴ which voted him its most popular man. His classmates there included his future bride Jenny Bell Beaty and M. Carey Thomas, later a distinguished president of Bryn Mawr College. After working as a reporter for the New York Herald Tribune and using some of Jenny's inheritance from her family's Civil War privateering interests, Loos founded the petroleum importing firm Loos & Dilworth, still in existence.⁴³⁵ Besides being a violinist and a founder and vice-president of the Main Line Symphony, Loos was also a dedicated gardener credited with being the reason why Narberth was a town of magnificent home-gardening of vegetables during the scarcities of World War I - a conflict in which he and Jenny lost a son, Henry. (Their other son and two daughters continued to live in Narberth as adults.)

As for A. J. Loos' singular community spirit, it was said that the YMCA became a tragic failure because borough residents could never quite attain to Loos' own municipal generosity and usefulness. He was also a strong promoter of excellence in the public schools and of fervent church life, and remained a Narberth Presbyterian Church trustee throughout his life here. Certainly A. J. Loos and A. C. Shand, Sr. were the standard-bearers of a strong tide of enlightened Presbyterian leadership that swept Narberth to prominence as a Main Line town during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and that saw successive smaller waves of such civic leadership emerge from that same Narberth congregation - a trend that had started with the first president of borough council Richard H. Wallace being a Presbyterian, and that did not really begin to subside until considerably after World War II.

And although Loos' very sizeable contributions to the community were usually overlooked due to his modesty, that very same gentleness was seen as a chief factor in making Narberth the really unusual community it became at the start of the twentieth century. Loos was revered as a man who always gave his time and talents out of the fullness of his heart, expecting nothing in return and never "trading favors."⁴³⁶ As one man put it: "There are a great many good things in Narberth because A. J.

⁴³⁴ Cornell U. Record of Class of 1877, Ithaca, 1923, p. 56-58.

⁴³⁵ Founding of L&D firm (Jenny). Interview with Walter I. Dothard, Jr., their grandson, Feb. 25, 1995.

⁴³⁶ Our Town - Feb. 20, 1926 by E.A. Muschamp.

Loos lived in it.”⁴³⁷ Besides his involvement from the start in the YMCA, the civic association of 1914 (as its next president, after George Henry), and supportive of Our Town, there was the playground.

Narberth's Recreation Board, in acknowledging his death, said that although ill at the time and desiring to cut back on his activities, A. J. Loos accepted the presidency of that board in March 1925 for the specific purpose of seeing to it that the grading of the playground was completed and a suitable community building put up there to house the library and other civic needs. The board declared that mainly through Loos' efforts this work was accomplished, adding that: “Such was his last public service.”⁴³⁸ Thus when the new community building on Windsor Avenue was paid for with Y funds, Loos' work was done. He died before the keys were handed over to the burgess.

Working on various aspects of Narberth's early development seems to have given A. J. Loos the opportunity to extend his musical sensitivity further. For like a good listener capable of distinguishing among the tonalities within chamber music, Loos took this a step further, bringing the same discrimination to orchestrating various spoken voices of townspeople in discussions about Narberth. More like an orchestra leader wielding a baton than like the first violinist he was, Loos brought the various “instrumental sounds” of citizens' voices together into a kind of richly textured conversation in which personalities and groups emerged then submerged, went loud and then soft, now at times asserted themselves over another speaker or ruminated alone. For the interplay and overall shape of events Loos quietly but effectively “orchestrated” in Narberth recalls the structure of music.

Moreover, considering A. J. Loos' love of gardening, it was fitting that Anton E. Wohlert soon planted several hundred trees on the playground property as his own gift, most notably a hundred-plus Asian flowering crabapple trees in more than twenty varieties (the stock was seven years old). He placed two pink-flowering trees in front of the community building, plus a group planting of those ornamental trees at the western end of the field. His gift included a hundred twenty-five silver maples of ten to twelve years' growth along the Windsor and Wynnewood Avenues sides of the playground, some of these tied in with the grove of older trees at the location of the children's play apparatus. Also fifty-plus Lombardy poplars were closely set along the property's eastern boundary, fronted with a row of flowering crabs.⁴³⁹ Wohlert had proposed this gift to councilman Robert F. Wood while they were attending the Fourth of July 1926 festivities at the playground together, and they noticed that everything was in order except that the borders of the playground were bare. Approval took time. Eventually the

⁴³⁷ Howard A. Banks – An Appreciation, Our Town – Feb. 20, 1926. P.2.

⁴³⁸ Recreation Board Tribute, Our Town – Mar. 27, 1926, p.5.

⁴³⁹ Wohlert's gift of trees, Our Town – Dec. 31, 1927.

borough did the hole-digging and Wohlert's men completed the planting task in December 1927. That was a year after Wohlert supplied and planted fifteen hundred similar ornamental Asian trees in Fairmount Park for the Government of Japan's gift to Philadelphia to mark the Sesquicentennial observance.

Pennsylvania Railroad officials acknowledged that the improvement of the playground and its transformation from a dump to a park on that site was the greatest civic step taken on the Main Line. Our Town suggested further:

As the years pass and the planting becomes a great grove, travelers may well point to the playground and its improvements as the finest thing to be seen from the passing trains.⁴⁴⁰

But the highest praise came from Howard Strong, director of Regional Planning Federation, whose comments were double-barreled.⁴⁴¹ On the one hand, he declared that no time should be lost in providing for the systematic expansion of our local community which he anticipated would add another nearly one thousand residents in the next dozen years, that is, by 1940. (He proved right about that figure.) And on the other hand, his words about that recent trifecta of Narberth achievements - the playground, the new community building on the playground, and Narbrook Park - merit close attention, as they also ring true:

Narberth has the finest playground in the Tri-State region. It has taken a long step forward in providing a Community House through public subscription. It has [referring to Narbrook Park] one of the finest residential park developments in the East. Narberth is noted for its community celebrations which are held each year. Nowhere is the community spirit more predominant.

Women's Activities and Organizations

Narberth was the ready recipient of an uncommon flurry of business by women and professional activity directed to it by women in the early period. Philadelphia's foremost nineteenth-century woman architect, Minerva Parker Nichols⁴⁴², built here (at Elm) the only sizeable cluster of houses of her career, in ca.1888, the most distinguished example being for a Quaker manufacturer, F. Millwood Justice.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Our Town, an interview with H. Strong. Sat. Jan. 7, 1928.

⁴⁴² Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930, by Tatum and Moss, the Athenaeum, Philadelphia. Boston, 1985. M. P. Nichols, pp. 573-575.

⁴⁴³ Editor's Note: further information from the author: Minerva Parker Nichols (1863-1949), the best-known woman architect working in 19th and early 20th century Philadelphia. Chicago born, an architect's granddaughter, she won an international

[Also, as indicated in an earlier chapter, t]hree other women were successful developers of Narberth housing before World War I: venturesome widow S. Almira Vance in 1890-1892, astute suburban socialite Susanna Bodine, and public-spirited heiress Mary K. Gibson - Gibson having social welfare in mind more so than straight business proposition the other two investors favored. And this was before women got the vote in 1920.

The earliest civic activity of women living in the town was by wives and widows active in the improvement group known as the **Narberth Association**⁴⁴⁴ that took the lead in paving the way here for independent rule. These women included head-of-household homeowners, and all the other women of the community who - on the second try - successfully petitioned for Narberth's independence.

Another "civic" activity by Narberth women was the charity work they did through the **Needlework Guild of America's large and active Narberth chapter**, founded in 1904.

Still another useful quasi-civic arm for local Protestant women - theirs being the dominant religious affiliation of Narberth women during the borough's first fifty years - was the conspicuously active **Auxiliary of the Narberth YMCA**, founded 1907, which sought to surpass the Ardmore Y in the opportunities it offered to women, though its typical fare may sound conventional to us today; suppers, socials, "book receptions," donation of funds to buy books for the Y library, and a piano. This early local group also launched (in 1915) a very durable town organization still flourishing today, the **Women's Community Club of Narberth**, the auxiliary having taken in March of that year the transitional name: Women's Community Club of the YMCA and Community Center. Thus the new club came into existence with 75 charter members (including the automatic carry-overs from the older club), and it was federated in 1916. In the first five years of its existence, the women's club became immersed in war activities - kitchen canning, war gardens, curb markets for surplus vegetables grown, Red Cross work, the adoption of a French orphan, a soup kitchen during the 1918 influenza epidemic, and supporting Liberty Loan drives. The year 1920 saw a large collection taken up for Near East Relief, and foundation of a **Junior Women's Community Club**.

When the Y closed that year (1920), the time was ripe to do something about the existing large library there, and those women seized the opportunity, following a clear trail blazed earlier for them by Narberth Civic Association initiatives. And so it often has been said - but this is true only in a limited sense - that Narberth Community Library began as a reading circle of the **Narberth Senior Women's**

competition for the Queen Isabella Pavilion for a Chicago exposition. She made residential architecture a specialty and designed at least four houses in Narberth in 1888 and 1889.

⁴⁴⁴ Editor's Note: What can be considered the "first" Narberth Civic Association.

Club in the newly recycled YMCA building while Mrs. E. C. Batchelor was president.

Perhaps it was to be expected that the lively **Narberth Branch of the Woman Suffrage League** predated the existence of the Women's Community Club of Narberth. Its active members including mothers and daughters seem to have come from a broad range of backgrounds without much overlap with other Community groups which, even at an early date, were remarkably numerous in the town. The fact that this unit included a sizeable nucleus of birthright Quakers (as lifelong Friends are called) is not surprising, since Quakers throughout their history have taken women's issues very seriously.⁴⁴⁵

And certainly Narberth suffragettes did not advocate going about with long faces due to the high mindedness of their lofty mission. Quite the contrary. One much-applauded activity of this local Woman Suffrage branch was its sponsorship in May 1914 of a humorous play "How the Vote Was Won,"⁴⁴⁶ about a harried husband and father who opposed women's getting the vote but whose fifteen closest female relatives took matters into their own hands and "depended" on him just too much, so that by play's end he favored universal suffrage. That play was put on by the Home Talent theater group at Elm Hall before a large audience, amid lots of laughter.

Much later this suffrage unit also sponsored a long-remembered suffragette parade through the town. Narberth women⁴⁴⁷ who marched in the big suffrage parade May 1, 1915 in Philadelphia came from rather cultured backgrounds, which accurately reflected a national trend of support for this Progressive cause. They included Mrs. Walter Dothard, and Marion Meade Loos whose Narberth mother Jenny Beaty Loos, a Cornell graduate, belonged to America's first generation of college-educated women. Also the irrepressible civic activist Mrs. Edwin C. Town gearing up for a fight, and two lively young singles, Mildred Justice and Marjorie Jefferies whose teachers at Narberth High School included several Bryn Mawr College graduates, strong advocates of women's suffrage. And others in autos. Before the vote was finally won in 1920, Our Town presented much pro and con discussion of the subject, and the local climate of opinion about universal suffrage here in the suburbs seemed more tolerant of the idea than that of New Englanders - again, probably due to Quaker influence. Of 909 Narberth women and 920 Narberth men registered to vote in the November 1920 general election, some

⁴⁴⁵ Lucretia Mott, a Philadelphia Quaker, in 1848 became our nation's most powerful voice addressing women's rights and sharply denouncing slavery. Following through on this message slightly later was South Jersey's Alice Paul, a distant William Penn relative and Quaker. And it's official. It was announced in 2016 that both Mott and Paul will be pictured on the back of the new ten-dollar bill. Meanwhile, the courageous Harriet Tubman, the escaped slave who helped others and found safety with Germantown, PA Quakers, will truly strike it rich. Her image will replace that of Andrew Jackson on the front of the twenty-dollar bill. These three women, Tubman, Mott and Paul, are true heroines of the later phases of our nation's major seventy-five-year human rights struggle.

⁴⁴⁶ Main Line News (of Narberth), 8 May 1914.

⁴⁴⁷ Our Town, 29 April 1915, p. 1.

509 women actually voted.

With the vote won, the work of the suffragettes was carried forward into modern times by the League of Women Voters, organized locally and by state across the nation. Leagues like that serving Lower Merion and Narberth began playing a key role in each community by educating people in their rights and responsibilities as full citizens and by encouraging the study of important government issues of the day... by active participation in local, state and federal government and by influencing public policy. In these and other ways the local Leagues became a driving force for the improvement of community life.

The **Lower Merion/Narberth League of Women Voters** has long had the largest membership of any of the Leagues in our Commonwealth. The borough's most prominent member of this organization to date was Mrs. Robert P. Wetherald, a southside resident and civic activist in the town who in 1947, while serving as the first vice-president of the local League, won election as president of the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters. Active Narberth members more recently have included Bette Ann Binstead and Kathleen Sheehan Tarquinio. During the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration in 1995 of the August twenty-sixth date that the Nineteenth Amendment took effect, fifty-four percent of the nation's registered voters were women.

Founded in 1921 by Elizabeth Lentz Shope (Mrs. Samuel Z. Shope) of 108 Iona Avenue, the **Doctor Benjamin Rush Chapter⁴⁴⁸ of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution of Narberth** began with twenty-three charter members and had an active membership roll of sixty in 1945. Named for a Revolutionary War patriot and supervisor of military hospitals who was also a professor and practitioner of medicine in Philadelphia, a public figure, who rendered eminent services to humanity during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, that chapter gave awards and medals to Narberth Public School students and made contributions to various charitable organizations. Reflecting on the fact that the Narberth chapter recently lacked the high-profile visibility the metropolitan area DAR enjoyed around the turn of the century when the then new Merion chapter (founded 1895) ceremoniously presented the stone marker⁴⁴⁹ commemorating the September 1777 Narberth encampment of Washington's Army on what was at the time Edward Price's large Montgomery Avenue

⁴⁴⁸ Members of the Narberth DAR chapter were very likely unaware that John Jacob Ridgway, the man who named Narberth and was one of the town's founders, was a close relative of Phoebe Ridgway, wife of Dr. James Rush who was a prominent physician and son of D. Benjamin Rush and his wife Julia. James Rush was the seventh of their thirteen children. This Ridgway-Rush link is confirmed by Library Company of Philadelphia records. Benjamin Franklin founded that library.

⁴⁴⁹ Originally placed at northeast corner Montgomery and Woodbine Avenues, since moved to the Meetinghouse Lane corner.

farm, Jean Reid Goldsborough of Narberth, the Rush chapter regent declared, “The D.A.R. chapter here does not have the young membership it should have, I’m sorry to say.”⁴⁵⁰ But that shortage was only temporary.⁴⁵¹

Meanwhile, in 1925, the **Kings Daughters**, who regarded themselves as pioneers of Christian unity and also had a **Junior Kings Daughters branch** involved in the work here, held their State-wide convention in Narberth. They chose that occasion to announce the closing of Holiday House⁴⁵² in 1926 because the rapid pace of Narberth’s development had made the community a less desirable place than it formerly was for summer outings of inner-city children, who had stayed there in groups of thirty at a time. Narberth continued to provide leadership to the Kings Daughters, a borough woman (Mrs. Fred E. Derby)⁴⁵³ serving as state president of this organization in 1932, at which time the most active local members were clustered in Narberth, around Bryn Mawr and Philadelphia.

As for Mary K. Gibson, she remained a staunch ally of child welfare programs and a crusader on behalf of betterment of slum-housing conditions. One refugee of the German air-raids over Britain who was among several English school children Miss Gibson “adopted” at her Maybrook mansion during World War II (he eventually became a teacher at Lower Merion High School) recalled:

“Aunt” May as always willing to help those less fortunate — sometimes with unexpected results. She was shocked that many of the poor districts in Philadelphia did not have plumbing. She decided to film the out-houses to show her friends how poor conditions were. Unfortunately she took the pictures in color and her friends thought the out-houses with morning glories or roses growing on them were lovely.⁴⁵⁴

As the Women’s Community Club of Narberth advanced into its second decade, this group⁴⁵⁵ showed its continuing ability to create spinoffs. It established the **Narberth Parent-Teacher Association** in 1926, which became an independent organization by year’s end. Another useful

⁴⁵⁰ Correspondence with Jean Reid Goldsborough of Narberth, July 11, 1983.

⁴⁵¹ In about 1992, this Narberth DAR chapter, its membership greatly reduced, merged with the Merion chapter to form the Merion-Dr. Rush chapter, there being, as a result, twenty-two DAR chapters in the Philadelphia area, with plenty of new young members joining the ranks, ready to offer the required proof of being a descendant of a man or woman who played an active role in the Revolution. Coincidentally, John J. Ridgway, the man who named Narberth and was one of its founders, was close kin of Phoebe Ridgway who married Dr. Benjamin Rush’s son, Dr. James Rush.

⁴⁵² Editor’s note: discussed in a later section of this chapter.

⁴⁵³ Main Line Daily Times May 17, 1932

⁴⁵⁴ Correspondence of the writer with Brian B. Barlow in Maine, September 2, 1991.

⁴⁵⁵ Mrs. Mildred Ayars, long-time president of the Women’s Community Club of Narberth gave this writer extensive interviews about this club’s history. Also extensive clippings were shown by her and by Eleanor (Mrs. John M.) Lucas. Also Main Line Times October 24, 1940, p.5.

Women's Community Club initiative involving children was the Narberth Child Health Center launched in 1930 under the long-time chairmanship of Mrs. C. Arley Farmer. It provided preventive care for an average of fifteen to twenty pre-school children each week with a physician and nurse in attendance, and club members doing much of the volunteer work involved. For example, in the summer of 1940, club members took twenty-eight Narberth children to dental clinics in Philadelphia. Funding came from a project committee of the club, while borough council, through its Board of Health, also made regular appropriations toward the support of this center. The facility closed in 1959, long after it had served its last patient.

Narberth Players, a theater group begun between the two world wars, had its origins in a play put on by this women's club. Typically, the club each year made cash donations to nine social service agencies, sent local children to summer camps, delivered plants and fruit baskets to Narberth shut-ins at Christmas, and sewed for both the Red Cross and the Needlework Guild's Narberth chapter. By 1938, when the Salvation Army drive that a club committee ran surpassed its goal, senior women's club membership had risen above two hundred. Around that time, this group also was said to have planted the first dogwood on the George Washington trail at Valley Forge.

Many of these clubwomen entered the 1940s already experienced in the ways of assisting a war effort cooperatively – and assist they soon did, again. In August 1940, this club, working together with the Bala Cynwyd Women's Club, was finalizing plans to take war refugee children, due to arrive in a few weeks, for a year's stay here. Women's organizations throughout the Main Line were responding to this need. Sponsorship of the town's War Bond Booth was another patriotic activity of the Women's Community Club during World War II.

Child Welfare Initiatives

Expressions of concern for child welfare took several forms locally at the turn of the century, a clear signal that the Progressive Movement was becoming firmly rooted in the town, where it remained a force for change throughout that national movement's twenty-year peak period to 1920, and continuing considerably beyond this into the World War II era. One of the central issues nationwide in that movement, made up of middle-class moderates battling to deal with the economic and social effects of recent enormous industrial expansion and growth of the cities, was finding ways to obtain greater opportunities for recreation and games for children. Their previous organized activity had mimicked adult occupations—locally, for example, the Narberth Boys' Brigade ("boy soldiers") gave exhibition

drills.⁴⁵⁶

Also, in independent Narberth, citizens were still taking a long hard look at deficiencies in municipal services and gaining skill at providing their own solutions for problems. Here at the time social action on the subject of play was channeled mainly in three directions: planning a large Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) building with both gymnastics and indoor team sports, upgrading Narberth public school sports programs, and thirdly, providing a haven for slum children, because one group of reformers soon chose the town as a suitable destination for many years of supervised vacations by underprivileged children.

Holiday House

Moreover, in 1912, and lasting fourteen years, Narberth was the setting for Holiday House,⁴⁵⁷ a facility that hosted sojourns for children from the city slums through a combination of one local woman's generosity and the stewardship of a state-wide charity, Kings Daughters, an offshoot of a national interdenominational group founded in New York City in 1886, that made the Narberth project the principal focus of its activity in the State. The initial benefactor, Mary K. Gibson, an heiress of the Gibson whiskey fortune, built and donated an imposing house for this purpose. A "citified" style was chosen for this building, according to one neighbor⁴⁵⁸ who remembers the facility in operation, because lots of city people at that time were "scared to death of the country." The purpose of Holiday House as that observer saw it was to give a rest to tired mothers by taking small children off their hands.

The timing was perfect. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the number of settlement houses in America had quadrupled and their influence spread along with their facilities.

Holiday House can be considered one of their quasi-facilities because various settlement houses in Philadelphia most notably Octavia Hill referred children to it. One slum-child vacationer there, and later a long-time security guard⁴⁵⁹ at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania front desk, recalled happy times at Holiday House playing outdoor games and listening to Bible stories told by a dour Baptist clergyman. The needy boy's mother had incurred her family's wrath by marrying "down" and into poverty. She gladly brought her son out and dropped him off for extended stays there.

⁴⁵⁶ Narberth Local News, 9 December 1899, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁷ Still standing at 20 Sabine Avenue, although the fairly recent re-stuccoing of the front wall has lost the zest of its original pebble-dash texture. Twelve membership "circles" were active in Montgomery County in 1914 (Our Town, 22 Oct. 1914) And an illustrated 20-page booklet was published 1916; *ibid.*, 19 Jan. 1924; *ibid.*, 17 May 1925.

⁴⁵⁸ Telephone interview with Mrs. Richard H. Pough, 6 June 1985.

⁴⁵⁹ Interviewed by the writer at the HSP front desk twice about this in the mid-1970s-'80s.

Another initiative reflecting the then widespread preoccupation with child welfare was the launching of an active **Narberth Child Life** chapter⁴⁶⁰ in February 1915. Its organizers were local members of the American Institute of Child Life. Some thirty members were enrolled initially with Mrs. Frederick H. Harjes, Jr., a broker's wife, elected first chapter president.

Meanwhile, starting before World War I, the Misses Zentmayer, two unmarried sisters of the town's only eye doctor (a specialist of some note also in the city), conducted Pre-Kindergarten in the third story of the Zentmayer family residence, 125 Windsor. Even in this egalitarian community, the existence of this facility soon created a social distinction⁴⁶¹ among children in the town as to whether they had attended it or not, regardless of whether they went on to public or private school.

Doctor William Zentmayer is listed in Who's Who in America, 1926-27. Amazing when you think of it. Narberth had very popular Pre-K training nearly a century before its wide acceptance today. In 2016, nearby Friends' Central had Pre-K and St. Margaret's Catholic Church had Pre-K for from seven Catholic parishes combined.

Children's Public Sports Programs

Educational reform in the "Progressive Era - including increased opportunities to play sports - was successfully used by municipal governments as a battering ram against child labor abuses. In American schools at the turn of the century, physical education consisted mostly of bodybuilding along European lines, and school athletic team activity, if any, was barely under the school's control. But the picture changed after the Public Schools Athletic League was founded in New York City in 1903. Not surprisingly a national Y leader, Luther Gulick, headed up the new movement. Soon both public elementary and high school students were playing on organized teams under scholastic auspices.

And this marked the true turning point toward very organized school-age competitive sports under adult supervision such as we know it today. By this time, supervising adults were also encouraging the *average boy*, but were also seeing "star athletes" emerge as a natural outcome of competition. Eligibility rules came into the picture for the first time, and considerable nationalism. As the Progressive Era continued, the notion that the playing of sports had educational value won very wide acceptance both inside and outside the classroom. By 1920, athletics and the old-time gym training began to merge in the schools - at Narberth High School and grade school, as well as all over the

⁴⁶⁰ Our Town, 11 February 1915, p. 1.

⁴⁶¹ Elizabeth Smedley made the writer aware of this 6 January 1995 in correspondence.

country.

As if to demonstrate this, a Philadelphia metropolitan area newspaper reported in 1915 that:

Every person in Narberth with a drop of sporting blood is keenly interested in the rivalry between two girls' basketball teams recently organized.

One team, the Girls' Athletic Club, was linked with the YMCA community center. That in itself was unusual; the Ardmore Y did not talk about women's participation in its Y activities until 1925. The other local team consisted of girls from Narberth High School, and they already had clashed once by that time, the high schoolers winning the first game by a narrow margin.

Meanwhile, the Narberth Athletic Association was already in existence by 1914, but despite no longer having any ties with either the Y or the public school, did not become a high-profile organization until after World War II.

One particular event that had long-lasting effects locally was the formation in April 1904 of a new organization to be known as the Philadelphia Amateur Association.⁴⁶² As it was envisioned, this group sought to govern all kinds of sports, and was the great hope of some observers to usurp and practically take over the role of the Amateur Athletic Union.⁴⁶³ Meetings to launch this new metropolitan area athletic association took place at the city's Central YMCA, and involved representatives of public high schools, elite prep schools and a number of colleges (Temple College, for example). Upstaged by this initiative, the AAU quickly responded with a plan of its own to foster pure athletics in the schools.

Initiatives like this were necessary to keep mercenary forces at bay. The town baseball team certainly benefited from this high-minded approach while it was being managed by the Narberth YMCA.⁴⁶⁴

And these same amateur ideals also clung to this baseball club in the thirties, forties and early-fifties as well - commercialism never catching up with it. No wonder. Its manager all those years, Gene Davis, was steeped as much in the Y sporting tradition as anyone ever could be from early childhood - at Narberth.

⁴⁶² PAA Sunday sports page, Public Ledger, Philadelphia, 10 April 1904, p. 31, column 2.

⁴⁶³ AAU. *Ibid.*, 28 April 1904, p. 10.

⁴⁶⁴ A new Narberth baseball team known as the YMCA baseball club was organized 5 January 1915 and that year became the town team, managed by Fred Walzer and playing under the direct supervision of the YMCA. Our Town, 7 Jan. & 24 June 1915, p. 4 and Philadelphia North American 20 June 1915.

Shand Athletic Field

An act of personal largesse by a railroad man to benefit school children gave us the small public park, Shand Athletic Field, at Sabine and Montgomery Avenues — a bit of greenery that we had come near to losing for development in 1916, and that a citizens' battle saved from a similar fate as recently as 1989. The project in 1916 sounded the first wake-up call locally about the vigorous growth of the nationwide Playground Movement. The Shand Athletic Field⁴⁶⁵ formally opened May twelfth 1916 when, as a sendoff, Scottish-born Alexander C. Shand, chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad, threw out the first ball in a baseball game between the Narberth High School team and the Jenkintown High School team. Narberth won that contest 7-2 before a sizeable crowd that included lots of teachers.

The previous autumn [1915], Shand had come forward of his own accord and in a public-spirited action gave assurance that this ground would be made available for the use of the school children as an athletic field. Shand's declaration came two months before Lower Merion High School opened a new \$65,000 athletic field. His well-received terms were that, after buying the 2.78-acre tract, he would see to it that the children had the use of this playground until such time as the people of Narberth would authorize the school board to purchase it for their requirements. At the time, this land was for sale on the open market. And another nearby lot on North Narberth Avenue that had been used for baseball by the semi-pros and high schoolers had been gobbled up for housing development.

While Shand owned the Sabine Avenue field named by the school in his honor, the Narberth Baseball team was also given permission to use it, with the clear understanding that the athletic organization (a member of the Main Line League and highly competitive) should provide additional safeguards to protect surrounding property owners and passersby against damage from foul balls, and to assure Shand against the danger of possible damage suits. The town team was particularly hard-pressed for a playing field at this point also because of the pressure it was feeling from the activity of the southside's Elmwood Field Club,⁴⁶⁶ "Narberth's second home team," which had played nineteen baseball games at the "Rockland and Essex Avenues field in 1915.

Finally, Narberth school board took possession of the Sabine Avenue playground in October 1920 - at the same price Shand had paid for it, plus taxes - and interest. This put an end to that playing

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 18 May 1916. Shand's action in acquiring that land for his intended purpose is also reported *ibid.*, 7 October 1915, p. 1.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 16 September 1915, p. 3.

field's use by the town team.⁴⁶⁷ While this recreational field served the school, its grounds were enhanced by plantings by students on Arbor Day⁴⁶⁸ of Wohlert's Asian flowering trees such as Persian peach. Use of this playground continued after the closing of the public school more than a half-century later. But the origins and given name of this park were lost in the mists of time, until recently.

The Year 1914

The year 1914 was a crucial time in the evolution of Narberth. The borough's population had tripled in a decade, and new people were taking over the reins. They made their move to revitalize the town in a manner sympathetic with their aims. That year under new burgess George M. Henry's leadership and spurred by efforts of four Narberth residents, R. H. Durbin, R. E. Clark, H. C. Gara, and by idea-man W. Arthur Cole who later became general manager of the Nation magazine, three significant events took place. Narberth Civic Association (motto: "Promotion, Conservation, Correction") was formed and staged an historical pageant. It also began publishing a community newspaper, Our Town, which buttressed Narberth's influence and counted as its principal new-ideas forum in the period leading up to world War II. The association also spearheaded a campaign to transform a swampy fourteen-acre eyesore into a Frederick Law Olmsted-inspired parkland and model community with interesting vistas, a stepping-stone brook, and houses clustered around a green.

This project, called Narbrook Park Gardens and designed in 1914 by landscape architect Robert Anderson Pope, was accomplished in 1915 after a group of citizens purchased parcels of land and put them together. Inspired by larger Forest Hills Gardens (laid out at Forest Hills, New York by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., son of the "father of American landscape architecture"), Narbrook Park, like that major Olmsted project, is a rare pre-World War I example of a barren site developed in accord with modern town-planning methods. Narbrook humanizes nature to make it richer. Pope had studied under F. L. Olmsted, Jr. in his trailblazing landscape architecture course at Harvard, then worked for him on Forest Hills Gardens a short time before doing Narbrook. D. Knickerbocker Boyd, a friend of Pope's and later a Forest Hills Gardens consultant, was supervising architect for Narbrook's houses with his partner Victor Darwin Abel.

Enhancing our enjoyment today of Narbrook Park's open land with its natural incline toward Indian Creek that flows through it, is our recollection that this very same "tract or parcel of meadow"

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 30 July 1921, p. 2. A long letter from the secretary of the school board about the town team being prohibited from using Shand Field. Also a complaint about same from town-team manager Fred Walzer

⁴⁶⁸ Fireside column about Arbor Day, *ibid.*, 28 March 1918, p. 3.

was sought after for pastoral use as early as November 16, 1695 (“sixteenth day of the Ninth Month in the Seventh Year of the Reign of the late King William the Third over England,” the Welsh said). On that date Robert Owen obtained a deed purchasing seven acres from his next-door neighbor Hugh Roberts.⁴⁶⁹ This meadow, used as a watering hole for Owen’s cows and sheep, stuck out from the main body of his plantation like the Florida peninsula, a contour it kept until Owen descendants sold it to create the major portion of Narbrook Park – a rare example of unbroken American family land ownership from 1695 to 1915.

Another project that took root in 1914 with the help of Our Town coverage was the successful drive to celebrate the Japanese cherry blossom as Narberth’s town tree. It was planted on main thoroughfares, at station circle, Narbrook Park, Penn Valley (Fairview), and by homeowners, encouraged by Danish-born Narberth nurseryman Anton Emil Wohlert. Wohlert gained renown as the popularizer of Japanese flowering trees in this country and for doing all the original planting of them in Anacostia Park, Washington, D.C. This community’s enthusiasm for Japanese flowering specimens was nurtured to the point where Narberth set out to become a “cherry blossom town” famous for its trees. It was editorialized as such in the Philadelphia Telegraph, May 5, 1916. Firmly established in the borough by war’s end was an unrelated custom honoring local military serviceman by planting trees in Narbrook Park and at church sites here. In 1916 this tradition reportedly received press coverage in Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Richmond, and in the London Daily Mail.

When localite Alexander C. Shand, in charge of electrifying the Pennsylvania Railroad’s Main Line in 1915, arranged a lecture for the men of Narberth on its forthcoming benefits, the speaker got a standing ovation. Other news that year was removal of Montgomery Avenue’s toll. A mainspring of recreational life from 1908 to 1920 was the YMCA, handsomely housed on main street. Narberth acquired its first bank, a Merion Title and Trust Company branch, and the Women’s Community Club was founded, both in 1915. The Junior Women’s Community Club dates from 1920. Narberth Community Library from 1921, as does the Dr. Rush Chapter DAR, the Boy Scouts from about 1918. One of Narberth’s finest houses (Boyd and Able, architects) was built for a nationally-known osteopathic physician, Kentucky-born D. O. J. Snyder, at 302 North Narberth Avenue at this time, and admired by architect Robert Venturi in the fifties and sixties.

⁴⁶⁹ See Deed Book E4 volume 7, pages 40-2, 1707-8, City Archives of Philadelphia.

1914 Man of the Hour – George M. Henry

There was magic about the year 1914 in Narberth. It had been the great turning point for change here. And the man of the hour was George M. Henry, Narberth's outstanding Progressive Era elected official. He began his first term in office as burgess (mayor) that year by taking on a major project – he launched a civic association in 1914 with himself in charge and that immediately staged our huge significant historical pageant. That same year he also determined that the civic association would soon undertake a Garden-City construction project of housing and open space.

Henry, a U. Penn-trained lawyer, around this same time started “partnering” with Miss Helena Devereux as she began her ground-breaking work in nearby Devon determined to create a family-type setting in which special needs children and teens could receive care and grow as individuals while dealing with behavioral issues.

Her Devereux Schools has become Devereux Foundation, with now eleven locations around the nation. George M. Henry stepped down from his post at Devereux as its vice president in 1928.

To have achieved genuine progress in both kinds of challenging working life goals he set out to engage in was indeed exceptional – pointing to him as one of Narberth's most effective progressive leaders along with Sam Richards, J. J. Ridgway and A. J. Loos.

Narberth Civic Association [Second] (1914-26)

The period of the foundation of the Narberth Civic Association in 1914 was a very energized time here, colorfully reflecting the spirit of the Progressive Era. The most ambitious undertaking by that civic group was its sponsorship of creating a “Garden City” model community within the borough - an effort begun on paper early that year (see Chapter 5). It was a serious attempt to seek a Progressive “solution” to deal with the problem of the heavy deluge of cookie-cutter houses by a local developer. A brief summary of Narberth Civic Association achievements during its first year of existence (Our Town April 1, 1915) is the most informative account we have of the emergence of this most remarkable, power-house organization. Like every other subsequent civic association established in Narberth, this intrepid pre-World War I group was founded mainly to address one overriding concern, though it took on many other challenges.

The groundswell started when a small group of public-minded citizens several times met together to discuss their feeling that Narberth and its immediate surrounding area needed an agency that would work actively for the social and civic upbuilding of this community. In the next move, Burgess

George M. Henry, who had just taken office, wrote an open letter to his fellow citizens that appeared in the Main Line News, published here on mainstreet, in its March sixth, 1914 issue. Henry's exhortation ended with:

Why then, should we not concentrate our efforts and make a determined stand, having in view the single purpose of making Narberth an ideal home town in every respect?

His rallying cry drew an immediately favorable response. Some fifteen to twenty persons swiftly gathered at the YMCA to discuss how best to organize in order to meet the need that was felt. As their vehicle, they chose to start a civic association and quickly issued a mailing to invite all residents to join the movement and attend a March fourteenth organizational meeting at Elm Hall. Sent to every house, that letter stated the goal of a civic association as follows:

To improve and beautify the borough and vicinity and assist and cooperate with the authorities in enforcing laws and ordinances relating thereto; to promote any project having for its purpose the betterment of the community as a whole; to provide means of acquiring and disseminating information on any subject of general interest; and to foster and maintain a fraternal spirit among the people of our community.

Although the borough was barely a generation old and still very sparsely settled, the first public meeting of the new group attracted about a hundred twenty-five persons. We have some inkling what careful preparation must have gone into setting up this meeting when we consider that the guest speaker that evening was George Burdett Ford of New York City, a prominent city planner and lecturer on civics and town planning, and the civic association was about to hire him to work on its garden-city plan. Ford reportedly gave listeners “many helpful suggestions and the encouragement to push forward this new movement for the betterment of Narberth.” For it had become abundantly clear that the new civic association, had been founded principally to launch a “garden-city” project in a swampy unsettled part of town.

Within a year, paid-up members of the new civic association rose from eleven signed up that first evening (at a dollar a year), to two hundred-four. The first anniversary report also noted that the “Narberth Park Plan” was inaugurated April 21, 1914: ...with nothing more tangible than a big, broad-
visioned idea behind it. Yet, it declared proudly, it is happening. It is becoming a reality.

And thus, with the civic association already looking ahead to the next phase of the Park project-house-building under its auspices, it invited as speaker for its first annual meeting (1915) D. Knickerbacker Boyd, the newly named supervising architect of the Park project, whose topic was

“Building Restrictions.”⁴⁷⁰ And while the civic association considered the planning of Narbrook Park the crowning achievement of its first year (saying so in a speech at the groundbreaking ceremony), it also took pride in having started a “community library” at the YMCA (by enlarging the Y’s existing library and stepping in to operate it like a public facility), as well as launching a cleanup endeavor in the town, and a brass band. It might have added: founding Our Town newspaper.

Narberth Civic Association early in 1915 affiliated with the newly formed Suburban Association.⁴⁷¹ Composed of civic associations in Lower Merion and adjoining townships, this organization included such other local associations as Merion’s (Edward Bok, president), Ardmore's, the Main Line Citizens’ Association (Bryn Mawr), and the Neighborhood Club (Bala-Cynwyd). That summer a new civic association on the Main Line between Radnor and Paoli, the Neighborhood League, had formed. So Our Town could editorialize:

The spirit of real “boosting” and community interest is permeating the whole Main Line.⁴⁷²

Narberth was regarded as a pacesetter for much of this activity, since its new civic association had generated more publicity for Narberth than any other Main Line town had received in the previous year. Moving to catch up, Ardmore and Bryn Mawr civic associations each started booster campaigns of their own by June 1915. Their parent organization, the Suburban Federation of Civic Associations (formerly the Suburban Association),⁴⁷³ meeting as it usually did in the offices of Edward Bok in the Curtis Building, Philadelphia, in early November, took steps to free Montgomery Avenue from toll - one side effect expected to be an increase of traffic on Narberth's Haverford Avenue. While Narberth's first civic association gave independent rule to our town, this, our second such group, built a model community and did much else.

An index of the healthy condition of this organization in 1918 was the zestful program its annual meeting that year featuring two speakers, our prestigious neighbor from Merion, Edward Bok, maestro of the friendly civic-virtue rivalry that existed between our two communities at that period, and Narberth's council president W. R. D. Hall. It was the latter's talk that captured the Our Town reporter's attention, and for a good reason. For Hall's topic was the relations that should exist between the civic association and borough council. Very favorably received, Hall’s comments prompted the

⁴⁷⁰ A. J. Loos - master of ceremonies’ speech – Our Town, June 3, 1915, p.1, col.5.

⁴⁷¹ Our Town, May 6, 1915, p.2.

⁴⁷² Our Town, June 24, 1915, p.2.

⁴⁷³ Our Town (?), Nov. 14, 1915, p.2.

observation that it was both a novel and a pleasing sensation to have the head of our governing body address a civic association meeting and express a desire for friendly cooperation between the two groups.⁴⁷⁴

Yet by 1924 when Ralph S. Dunne was elected its president, this association had run out of steam, its membership down to zero. His first year in office, the charismatic Dunne raised that figure to 153. His goal for his second term was one thousand members by the end of 1925.⁴⁷⁵ The association sprang to life again after Dunne vigorously approached Narberth merchants and borough council to obtain new lighting for Haverford Avenue, had an artist's rendering of new signs to be erected at the various approaches to the town, began compiling a Narberth yearbook to be useful to new residents, and boosted such already familiar ideas as a new rail station, a new community building, and a rail tunnel. An "event" not just a formality, Our Town called his reelection, because Dunne's 1925 candidacy faced stiff opposition from the Old Guard, particularly two unnamed brothers (possibly the Cabreys?) who felt the association was beginning to depart from the aims of its founders. With Dunne at the helm and A. J. Loos as first vice-president, the association seemed again off to a flying start. But for once, support was not there.

Thus a decision to close the affairs of the association was reached at a public meeting in November 1926, while Dunne was still in charge and faithful old A. J. Loos had died. At the final meeting, the group voted unanimously to sell Our Town to Phil Livingston, the then still current editor who was expected to continue the established policy of the newspaper without change. The association also turned over thirteen hundred dollars it had on hand for civic work and distributed it. With the growth in the work of other town organizations, the active duties of this group had become less and less. Even Ralph Dunne could not stem that tide. Thus the civic association expired. Even so, this closure was not a "done deal." Ralph S. Dunne would try to re-start the organization fourteen years later. In the meantime, his attention was drawn to the unprecedented way Narberth merchants were coming together, as if they were ready to form some kind of permanent association.⁴⁷⁶

1914 Narberth Fete Day and Historical Pageant

Another Progressive-friendly project having more immediate results was its staging of a two-day summertime Narberth Fete Day and Historical Pageant that involved the participation of nearly every

⁴⁷⁴ Our Town, March 28, 1918, p.1.

⁴⁷⁵ Our Town, April 25, 1925, p.6., p.1, p.2. (editorial); also April 18, 1925.

⁴⁷⁶ Our Town, Nov. 13 and 20, 1926, both on p. 1.

man, woman and child in the town. The event received extensive pictorial coverage in Philadelphia metropolitan newspapers. And local stimuli for this event were numerous. Back in 1896, community leaders of the borough - then only a year old - had “front-row” seats for a major patriotic celebration when the Merion chapter/Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated its commemorative granite marker⁴⁷⁷ honoring a September 1777 encampment of George Washington’s Army along both sides of Narberth’s “front street” on what had been the Edward Price farm [mentioned earlier in this chapter]. Such an impressive observance sent a clear signal that that particular hereditary society was quite strong in the surrounding township.

Yet when Narberth sponsored a major historical pageant in 1914, it seemed to take its cues from the Progressive era rather than from any hereditary organizations, even though such volunteer groups were known to support America’s then new historical pageantry movement. Thus looking to their own resources, the townspeople found another proven source of advocacy for such projects in progressive educators who, in turn, joined forces with organizers Narberth Civic Association. In charge of that linked effort, and personifying it, was civic leader/educator Eugenia Blackall who originated the idea for this pageant, while the “pageant master” and author of its “Book of Words” was the experienced writer, L. Eastwood Seibold.⁴⁷⁸ Working through committees, they presented a pageant featuring participation by people throughout Narberth in a symbolic activity marking the borough’s forthcoming twentieth anniversary. The event aimed to build up the new town’s identity as a community by firmly joining the past and the present, although admittedly its focus was more on episodes from early local history than anything recent.

The inspiration for Narberth’s 1914 pageant can be traced to the Renaissance-style community historical pageants that had been serving as a new form of civic celebration in England since 1905, and were an offshoot of the Arts and Crafts movement. Such events were about the reawakening of civic pride and enthusiasm. Philadelphia had been the first city in this country to stage one of those English-style pageants as part of a major city-wide celebration in 1908. Again in 1912, an elaborate Philadelphia historical pageant took place in Fairmount Park on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the U. S. Constitution.⁴⁷⁹ So Narberth’s response to these nearby events was rapid, placing it considerably ahead of the curve of nationwide interest in and grassroots sponsorship of historical pageantry that was created

⁴⁷⁷ Dora Harvey Develin, Historic Lower Merion and Blockley (Bala, PA, 1927), pp. 59-61.

⁴⁷⁸ L. Eastwood Seibold, a pageant master of particular distinction from New York, who published his “Book of Words” about Narberth’s pageant 1914.

⁴⁷⁹ Glassberg, David. American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early 20th Century (Chapel Hill, NC., 1990), pp. 16-17. 21-23.

around 1920.⁴⁸⁰

That English formula called for a leveling of all social distinctions in the pageant roles. However, in Narberth, cast in the role of Lady Narberth, queen of the pageant, was the wife of a public figure then wearing two hats - that of the civic association's founding president and the elected burgess. Lady Narberth⁴⁸¹ was regally attired, had pages, twelve ladies-in-waiting and twenty-four flower girls carrying long garlands. Portrayed also were episodes involving the colonial Dutch as well as local settlements of Swedes and of Welsh Quakers, plus a peaceful Indian village. William Penn was played by a member of one of the borough's founding families that had been headed by a Civil War hero⁴⁸², a major who might have been persuaded to settle here by J. J. Ridgway and the Simpsons.

Narberth's historical pageant proved to be a powerful form of "civic advertising" that brought inquiries from distant civic groups and spurred hundreds of articles to be written in the popular press. It also served as a useful tool in the town's hoped-for social transformation based upon progressive ideals, now that the first wave of very small houses was growing into a torrent in the town. Besides - and very important - its can-do spirit provided a necessary shot in the arm for the launching of the town's ambitious "Garden City" project announced earlier that same year. That pageant also paved the way for a civic association-sponsored two-day "Patriotic Fete" to aid the war effort in 1918.

A Newspaper – "Our Town" - 1914

Another important civic association initiative in 1914 was the founding of a weekly newspaper, Our Town. And it is worth noting that Narberth, always a place where journalists have lived, also in the Progressive Era was a lively center for small newspaper publishing.⁴⁸³ For Our Town was Narberth's best-known paper of any period, certainly. But it was by no means the first newspaper published in this community.⁴⁸⁴ Yet Our Town was in every sense the best - and very unusual that a complete run of this

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. For a discussion of the origin and history of the movement, see pp. 43-52; 112-113, 117, 136.

⁴⁸¹ Believed to be a daughter of Borough Councilor F. Millwood Justice and his wife Mary Syng Letchwood Justice. Mary had an awesome genealogy that seemed to qualify her daughter for this role.

⁴⁸² Jeremiah W. Fritz. Interestingly, like J. J. Ridgway and two of the Simpsons, Fritz had early ties with the Philadelphia sheriff's department, having served as its deputy sheriff in 1870, before moving to Elm. Ridgeway's brief appointment as sheriff there was doubtless meant to shake things up and encourage political reform.

⁴⁸³ As for comparison, see "Newspapers," Jean Barth Toll (ed.), Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years (Norristown, 1983), v. 2, p. 1384; Glenora B. Rossell (ed.), Pennsylvania Newspapers (Pittsburgh, 1978) 2^d ed.

⁴⁸⁴ Other Narberth newspapers of the early period are said to have included: Citizen 1893-c.1897; Merion Journal 1893; Local News 1899-c.1901; and Enterprise 1904-c.1905. Compared with other towns in Montgomery County, this is an unusually high number of newspapers to have originated in one small community – suggesting an uncommon cohesiveness even at that early date. Editions of any of these papers may sometimes turn up in dealers' inventories as far away as Canada, just as old Narberth postcards. Do.

publication lasting more than three decades should have survived and is on file at Narberth Community Library.⁴⁸⁵

Actually, a local newsheet, the Evening News, existed as early as 1890 at Elm, and is referred to in the records of the Narberth Park Association when, at that quasi-civic association's July 1890 meeting, it was directed that a notice be placed in the Evening News publication about stagnant water as a health hazard. No copies of that newspaper, probably our first, have come to light yet.

Furthermore, the year 1914 was auspicious for locally produced newspapers - two in succession making their appearance that year. The first of these was the Main Line News, published every Friday by the Main Line News Company, J. Emerson Knieriemen manager, in the town's Arcade Building on Narberth's main street. The News made its debut in January 1914 and was filled almost entirely with Narberth news although originally it was intended gradually to broaden its coverage area for its stated purpose (May 8, 1914 issue) was to "inform the readers accurately and briefly of the happenings along the Main Line," making use likewise of items of interest solicited from readers. Meanwhile, listed in the masthead was its targeted coverage area: "Overbrook, Merion, Narberth, Wynnewood, Ardmore, Haverford, Bryn Mawr, Berwyn, Wayne, Paoli." This paper probably expired by year's end, but it set an important precedent for a new generation of Reform Era residents here who began taking over the reins of community leadership that year. It also served to confirm the public perception that tiny Narberth was the place to expect to see both hometown and Main Line newspapers originate, not yet a much bigger community such as Ardmore (the township seat), which several decades later took over leadership in that sphere.

Thus on October 15, 1914, the Our Town newspaper (free the first forty-one weeks) was launched by the newly founded Narberth Civic Association as "an experiment in cooperative journalism,"⁴⁸⁶ which meant that it was for many years run by unsalaried people, the first editor being southside resident Eugenia Blackall,⁴⁸⁷ young third wife of the nationally prominent Baptist minister and former Civil War physician Christopher R. Blackall, a Baptist Publication Society editor with New England roots. Promotion of civic improvements and circulation of news about the townspeople and local organizations were the paper's main concerns. No question that Our Town proved to be a powerful instrument to aid the civic association's overall aim of building a closely-knit community. And the Blackall participation during the start-up of this paper showed once again the positive influence that

⁴⁸⁵ Kept under wraps; meanwhile; citations can be searched at Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd.

⁴⁸⁶ A newspaper run by a civic association

⁴⁸⁷ Eugenia Hitchcock McClure, born 1830, in Albany, NY.

resident (Baptist) clergy and their close kin were having on civic development here. As an experienced editor, Reverend Blackall was also readily available to offer professional advice, as needed. Narberth's Burgess George M. Henry publicly stated his views on starting the newspaper.⁴⁸⁸

As for journalism in Narberth, a group of professional men had started the Our Town paper, with its original woman editor. But soon they all became busy, so the newspaper relied on a pool of five editors who rotated the job among themselves each year, several smart advertising men also then being involved in this project. Sometimes one editor said to another: "You do it this week."⁴⁸⁹ Eventually, they became aware of a certain student at Narberth High School, Phil Livingston, who had just recognized in himself a talent as a phenomenal proof-reader (a trait he proudly displayed all his life). One night early in 1921, lanky Phil, arriving home from his freshman classes at the University of Pennsylvania, tripped over a wooden box on his front porch at 415 North Narberth Avenue and let out a stream of cuss words. Limping inside, he was greeted by his mother who admonished him for cursing, but said also: "What box?" They went out and looked. There was an attached note that read: "Phil, You are the editor. Harry [Jacobs]."⁴⁹⁰

And so a career was born. The five until-then rotating editors each chipped in a dollar a week for Phil's five-dollar salary, and thus paid his way through Penn.

Livingston, by graduation, had opened his office in a modern-day log cabin that stood on the southeast corner Haverford and Narberth Avenues, making this quaint structure the headquarters⁴⁹¹ of a small newspaper the News of Bala-Cynwyd which he owned, and of Our Town. This location was on main-street in the business district directly opposite the Ku Klux Klan recruitment booth.⁴⁹² Such an in-your-face location may have made the local Klangle (that is, the local KKK authority figure) a little nervous in view of the unflattering lead article "Hooded gatherings are condemned" about the third of July 1924 Klan melee and shooting in Haverford that had just appeared in Our Town⁴⁹³ a week or so earlier, Narberth's Legion Post having officially denounced the incident and been quoted. Not to mention the Lower Merion police's new "shoot on sight" order in effect targeting hooded Klansman. All things considered, the annual Lower Merion/Narberth KKK picnic⁴⁹⁴ in Penn Valley on the old Sunday School grounds cannot have been very well attended that summer.

⁴⁸⁸ Our Town, 15 October 1914, p. 1.

⁴⁸⁹ Lengthy interview of the writer with Philip A. Livingston.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*

⁴⁹³ Lead article front page, July 12, 1924.

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with Harry Berry.

Also, the summer of 1924 brought some changes to Our Town newspaper — the first step in a plan to make the weekly publication larger and more influential. It switched printers for one thing, doing its printing at Wayne, and having the “metal” of its forms set or linotyped in the Philadelphia Record newspaper’s composing room. For another, Narberth Civic Association re-started its relationship to this publication which it had founded. While retaining actual ownership, the civic association announced that it was turning over the entire management of it to Philip Atlee Livingston, who thereby assumed the authority of publisher of the paper. This was intended to have no effect on the civic character and cooperative management of Our Town, while permitting reorganization of the business branch and priming the pump for a larger paper in the fall. The newspaper soon expanded from eight to twenty-four pages, which it remained, this enlargement serving additionally Lower Merion Township.

With the experience he gained during those first four years of editing that paper while he was a college student, Phil launched a lifelong career in publishing that for a time featured a chain of five small newspapers (including the Main Liner, an Ardmore weekly founded and published by Louis R. Winter Jr. and sold⁴⁹⁵ to Livingston in 1925, and Penn Valley News) and eventually a successful book-publishing firm, Livingston Publishing Company, for many years located here in the town. Phil Livingston’s publishing house did college yearbooks (for Bryn Mawr, Vassar and Rosemont colleges), later specialized in bird books and natural history subjects, and long published the American Forestry Association magazine, as well as producing many Delaware County Republican Party publications.

Robert M. Cameron, a recent Yale graduate, was the newspaper’s editor from 1928 to 1936 (under publisher Livingston), and Cameron eventually served on the town council. By the 1930s, prominent businessman John Cabrey was another Our Towner who took his volunteer scrivener job seriously and enjoyed the platform his opinion-writing column, “The Spectator,” gave him. In 1938, more than a decade after this newspaper tripled its size for an expanded coverage area, it introduced a new name, Town and Township. When this publication did not long survive World War II, Narberth ceased being any longer a newspaper-publishing hub. After a half-century of virtual dominance of the neighborhood weekly market, it was succeeded by commercial interests in the nearby larger town of Ardmore that seized the initiative in community journalism locally. Some say Cameron’s mistake was that he had filled the paper with Catholic news. In any event, a new day had dawned. Growth was everywhere, and Narberth people were looking to Ardmore – to the Main Line Times and Main Line Chronicle. Many more years would pass before Philadelphia began its comprehensive suburban

⁴⁹⁵ Our Town, 25 April 1925, p. 1; about Wayne and the Record acquired by him, see *ibid.*, 27 November 1926, p. 1.

coverage in zoned sections known as “Neighbors.” Besides this and the ongoing coverage in the Main Line Times, Narberth in the mid-1990s received regular coverage in the (now defunct) Main Line Welcomat’s weekly “19072” feature, and still does in the newest area suburban newspaper, Main Line Life, launched in 1995.

Pastors Unite: A Revivalist Effort

In an apparently unprecedented instance of early solidarity, the pastors of Narberth’s four churches (including the Catholic rector) got together to take a large advertisement in the May 8, 1914 issue of the town paper, the Main Line News, about the importance of religion in daily life. Its rather wordy (seven-paragraph) testimony under the banner headline “As a Traveler Sees It!” represented the viewpoint of an unnamed man who had circled the globe twice. The thrust of the message was that “To attend church is to stand by the world’s greatest civilizing agency.” This promotional notice ended by saying that in case of illness, death or other trouble, any of these ministers would be glad to help. This early group effort represented a foreshadowing of the Narberth council of churches that took shape at a much later date.

Cooperation of another sort was achieved early in 1917 when the local Protestant churches – Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian – ambitiously sponsored a large-scale revivalist meeting, believed the first of its kind on the Main Line, that aimed to reach out and stir up religious fervor in the Narberth vicinity, months after Billy Sunday conducted a successful crusade in Philadelphia. Elaborate preparations included construction of a steel-frame wooden building measuring sixty by ninety feet and seating one thousand one hundred persons who were kept warm by six large stoves. Called Doefer Tabernacle in honor of the presiding evangelist, this structure had four main aisles and a sawdust floor, its construction supervised by Nathan E. Smedley of Narberth. It stood on the south side of Haverford Avenue just east of Narberth Avenue on the Anthwyn Farms tract next to the “Tea House,” and was under protection of Narberth Fire Company. During its four-week period of use, some 11,743 people attended gatherings there – men’s and women’s meetings being held separately. Four years later the local Presbyterian church re-lived this experience by sponsoring a revivalist session of its own.

During this same period, the Main Line Federation of Churches had its office at the Narberth YMCA – a cachet in the local Protestant community.

Baseball

Narberth is believed to have had its “match games” as early as 1890, the first organized sports

activity in the town occurring in 1896 or earlier. The Narberth Field Club at that time launched a baseball team with a northside clubhouse, and its field just south of the railroad tracks. Without league ties, this free-range club played church congregations in the region, athletic clubs of small nearby cities and Philadelphia public high schools. The motivation was by then strong to begin launching town teams here and across the country. Philadelphia could claim several baseball “firsts.” For example, the organization in the city of the Olympic Ballclub in 1833 predated the reported creation of the game of baseball in Cooperstown, New York. And in 1883, the Philadelphia Athletics won the nation’s first major league pennant as a member of the then new American Association.

Creation in 1908 of Philadelphia’s suburban Main Line Baseball League with Narberth as a founding member was doubtless spurred by the construction in the city that year of Shibe Park (later called Connie Mack Stadium) for the Athletics. A palatial building by standards of that day, it was the first baseball stadium in the country made of steel and concrete, so it was later considered baseball’s first modern park. And it opened in 1909, the same year as Pittsburgh’s Forbes Field, and a year before Narberth won its first Main Line League championship. That league is said to have been one of the oldest semi-professional diamond loops in the nation. And at the outset, some of its members were traveling teams that had no playing field of their own.

Narberth dominated this sport throughout the existence of the league, showing the kind of chemistry that made this town of churches the seat of a flourishing baseball club and box scores. The team was known as the “scourge of the Main Line League” for forty years, from 1910 through 1950, during which time it won twenty or twenty-one of the championships. No other competing club came even close to that record. Tennis, croquet and horse-racing also caught on early with the townspeople. But no other sport so much as baseball, even more than basketball, harmonized both with Narberth’s aspirations over many years and with the profound experience of a way of life here, not just a lifestyle. For me this perfect “fit” of the game and the town is best illustrated by the saga of one of several Dickie brothers (close kin of Narberth’s first burgess) and of another man, both of whom played on this team considerably before World War II. From the grandstands Dickie’s mother, who always attended the games, would shout at her sons and their friends what to do. When that Dickie brother died, his request was granted to have his ashes scattered on the baseball diamond at Narberth Playground. The other Narberth athlete, active in the same period, Richard Blessing, Sr., had his ashes⁴⁹⁶ buried at home plate.

Today we speak of various major league professional baseball teams as “clubs,” but that is a

⁴⁹⁶ Interview of the writer with Dick Blessing, Jr. about his father’s ashes, July 1, 1995.

misnomer when it involves players who rotate on and off a roster or corporations operating a franchise. A true baseball club is an emotional entity, a fraternal group of devoted amateurs - a lot like a volunteer fire company. With such a team as Narberth had, the relationship between players and fans existed on a much more personal level than in the major league games at Philadelphia's old Shibe Park.

Metropolitan area newspapers commented on the "high tension" of baseball interest on the Main Line as the 1907 summer season drew to a close, the Philadelphia Public Ledger noting that "the Main Line teams are playing baseball of a high order, ranking next to the big-league contests." That summer the Bryn Mawr Wanderers had bested the Narberth Collegians and the other teams— Bryn Mawr refusing to play anything else except other Main Line clubs. So, the formation of the Main Line League was an obvious next step, with the pacesetter able to speak out and have its demands heard.

Though never to the total exclusion of power hitting even at that time, the widespread scientific baseball game of the 1910s was played in Narberth, the focus being to score one run at a time. By this method, batters choked up on the bat trying to gain sufficient control to nudge the ball over the infielders' heads. During this period Narberth chalked up a respectable number of stolen bases and orchestrated double plays. This was the decade the team's strongest asset proved to be State senator-to-be Fletcher (Flick) W. Stites, who pitched all Narberth's victorious games that title-winning year of 1910 - in a single decisive game striking out eleven and issuing no bases on balls. Such feats earned that Narberth resident the moniker "Iron Man of the Main Line." The Narberth team very quickly thereafter became the backbone of the league, with Stites remaining aboard. During this period, Labor Day games continued to mark the close of what was still a short season in this league.

Local interest was such that, in 1914, Narberth had two baseball teams - the Collegians and the short-lived Elmwood Field Club. Coached by Harry Jacobs, Elmwood chalked up a strong winning streak that year, playing to a crowded grandstand of southsiders on its Elmwood Avenue field, "Jacob's Ball Field" near the railroad tunnel on Saturday afternoons, opponents including the J. E. Caldwell team. Everything else had been done separately by the town's southside— it began with its own waterworks and sewage system, had tried to hold onto the town name of Elm longer. So, a separate baseball team? It is not too surprising. The college athletes and other players, some from large families, were still all local residents at this period.

Two championships under its belt, the Narberth baseball club started its 1915 season as league pacesetter, and with a Narberth man (Frederick L. Rose) reelected as president of the Main Line Baseball League. By a unanimous decision the league had discontinued "traveling" teams (those without their own playing grounds) and approved a circuit of four home clubs. By winning its third pennant that

year (a league “first”), Narberth took permanent possession of the Croft cup. At the time this team, captained by power-hitting leftfielder Vernon Fleck, was under the direct supervision of Narberth’s YMCA. Very briefly (1917) the town team flirted, incongruously, with taking a commercial sponsor, and even adopted that sponsor’s name (R. G. Dun & Company) mercantile agents located in central Philadelphia).

The extensive coverage that activities of both the city and suburban semi-pro baseball leagues received in Philadelphia’s many metropolitan area daily newspapers at this time is surprising by today’s standards. Before a crucial game, for example, cartoon characterization drawings of the individual Narberth players appeared in one Philadelphia daily (North American, Sunday, June 13, 1915), accompanied by a detailed commentary. Thus Gene Davis, who also played on Philadelphia’s Central High School team, was covering first base, the account said, “in major league fashion,” while promising second-baseman Bill Humphries reminded fans of his father “Big Bill,” for many years the Main Line League’s leading hitter—both youths representing the second generation of their family to wear the Narberth uniform. This was the kind of kinship that counted far more in Narberth than social prestige. For three generations the Davises presided over their Narberth general store, and for the same length of time the Humphries family operated a taxi company here at the rail station.

Starting around this period and for many years thereafter the Main Line Baseball League was divided into two halves, the first ten-game unit finishing up the Fourth of July and the second half ending on Labor Day. The winners in each half played off a title series to decide the season’s championship. At the half-way point, the names of players were handed in on a list by the various team managers at a special meeting, and in this way several new players often were added to a team for the remaining half of the season. By the late teens, the league made the decision to use two umpires for each game. Narberth was then still playing its home games at what was called Shand Park or at the High School grounds at North Narberth Avenue above Woodbine on Saturday afternoons at three-fifteen. When that field soon had to be abandoned due to a housing subdivision on the site, the team relocated southward just below Rockland Avenue, during which time the old Ardmore-Narberth rivalry heated up, Ardmore having been the 1911 and 1912 champion.

Already apparent at the outset of the league was an intense and long-lasting rivalry and sometimes animosity that would characterize the baseball contests between the Narberth and Ardmore baseball clubs. It can be seen as a vest-pocket variation of the classic rivalry between the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants baseball teams and their fans. But it was also an Orange and Green struggle. The hurling of insults and name-calling and what the Philadelphia Public Ledger (9/1/1912)

called “a wild crowd of rooters” in “the best game in the league this season” made for an especially charged atmosphere whenever either club visited the other’s home field. And when they played each other, the whole town turned out. In contests “down in the field” at Rockland Avenue, Ardmore which earlier had dubbed Narberth “Hungrytown,” switched to calling it “Frog Hollow,” while Narberth continued to retaliate with “Fish Town.” Later at the present-day baseball diamond, the old-style epithet resumed: “Hungrytown” versus Fish Town,” Hungrytown being suggested by the unusually large number of grocery stores on the town’s main street, and also by the sizeable number of lunch - pail - toting railroad workers living here.

The “Frog Hollow” reference was plausible as that particular field was in a hollow, and the leftfielder would sometimes disappear into the creek while chasing a flyball and become lost for a while. That field had a wire backstop, one small grandstand on the first-base line, and the rest of the people stood on a stream bank.

These two Main Line towns are less than two miles apart, yet their populations were quite different at the time, and the name-calling accurately reflected the perceptions that these two communities then had of each other. Narberth, all residential and the smaller of the two localities, was, besides being independently governed, a staunchly Protestant town in a largely Protestant suburban area. So any references to religious ties were discreetly veiled by the breadbasket reference. Whereas Narberth made no bones about identifying Ardmore as home to one of the Main Line’s oldest and largest Irish Catholic settlements.

Ardmore’s or, more accurately, Havertown’s Church of Saint Denis (1825) is one of the oldest Catholic parishes in the near Philadelphia suburbs, its earliest congregation having been Irish mill hands and a scattering of farmers. By the time Ardmore had won two pennants before World War I, Saint Denis parish had two active baseball teams that were “feeder” clubs providing players to the Ardmore club in the Main Line League - notably Saint Denis’ Irish Catholic Benevolent Union team (its star being Jimmy Dykes in 1914) in a Catholic league, and also to some extent the same parish’s Temperance Society team, a club of teetotalers that played only Temperance League teams.

Fishtown is also a nickname for the part of Philadelphia’s old Kensington district where the Native American Party’s “Know Nothing” riots aimed at pressuring Congress to restrict the Naturalization Laws had broken out in 1844 in a heavily Irish neighborhood. The Catholic church there and most of Kensington’s Catholic district were set afire and some fatalities occurred. Thousands of persons roamed the city streets and they next torched what was then Philadelphia’s largest Catholic church, Saint Augustine’s, mother church of the Augustinian Fathers in the United States which was

also the mother church of Havertown's Saint Denis, both these churches, like Villanova University on the Main Line, operated by the Augustinian Fathers. Many members of Saint Augustine's heavily Irish congregation, without a church and in fear for their lives, fled with their belongings to camp sites at Saint Denis out of harm's way.

Thus, in the folk culture of baseball as played by the town teams of that era, a team of players from South Ardmore and neighboring Havertown known as the Ardmore club became the "Fish Town" of Philadelphia's Main Line suburbs. Meanwhile, in Philadelphia's Fishtown more so than in any other neighborhood of the city, the old war between the Orange and Green persisted (the Battle of the Boyne being symbolically waged in costume on the anniversary of that historic struggle up until modern times). In some sense, too, the Narberth/Ardmore rivalry was an Orange and Green battle transferred to the suburbs, at least until newly arrived Italian immigrants settled the area in large numbers after World War I. Even the name "Ardmore" is of Irish origin, in contrast to other Main Line towns, so many of which have Welsh names. If Narberth's first big sports rivalry - with Ardmore - had ethnic/religious roots, and the two sparred with each other over them, a more natural rivalry - natural because it was a more straight-up baseball rivalry - grew a generation later between Narberth and Manoa. A semi-pro team often evenly matched with the borough club entered the Main Line League in 1938.

Davis – General Store

In the years when there was nothing so American as baseball, Eugene Howard Davis (1896-1981) of an old local family, was the most celebrated manager of the Narberth semi-pro team. The mere mention of baseball on the Main Line during his heyday as skipper immediately brought the conversation around to Narberth and Davis and his general store long-known as a hot-stove center for athletes and their friends.

A Narberth institution of considerably more than a half-century's duration founded at 224-226 Haverford Avenue by Charles Davis in 1897 and purchased by his brother "Pop" Davis in 1908, this "oldest continuously operating general store on the Main Line" displayed the team's trophies in the store window and the team met there.

Not only was Gene Davis an all-round athlete who had played basketball and baseball with Narberth's old YMCA teams, he had been in the backfield of Narberth football teams, and was a heavy hitter and first baseman for many seasons in Narberth but also with Jersey shore teams. Athletic blood ran in his veins.

His father, Gladwyne-born Howard E. (Pop) Davis (1870-1954) got his start delivering

newspapers in Lower Merion Township, picking these up at the Conshohocken rail station and walking about twenty-one miles to deliver them. Next he started a milk route in Merion, Narberth and Penn Valley, before acquiring his general store in Narberth (where the sign still says “oldest store in Narberth,” but it is now Mapes),⁴⁹⁷ and was an outstanding outfielder on Narberth’s early town team. Gene’s dentist brother, Dr. Lawrence (Lardie) Davis became All-American basketball center at the University of Pennsylvania where he later coached, and Lardie, Jr. starred on Lower Merion High’s basketball team that competed in the finals of the State tournament. The only child of manager Gene Davis and his school-teacher wife Belle was Gene, Jr., an all-round athlete at Episcopal Academy and the number one blocking back, expert place kicker and captain of the University of Pennsylvania’s 1941 varsity football team during one of its best years in the glory days of Penn football that extended into the early 1950s before the formation of the Ivy League.

That meant young Davis was part of the longest-running history in college football, for to this day no other college football team in our nation has played as many games as Penn. Stepping from the comparative obscurity of the blocking back’s role, chunky Gene, Jr., nicknamed Stinky after a popular cartoon character of the day, became the first backfield captain under legendary Penn coach George Munger, also (for a while) a borough resident. In Munger’s heyday as head coach (1938-53), only Ohio State drew more spectators than Penn with its sixty thousand to eighty thousand fans at Franklin Field games. That was an era when Penn was rated as having one of the nation’s best big-time football programs.

Gene Davis, Sr.,⁴⁹⁸ a borough councilman partial to Florida fishing trips in the off season, managed the Narberth baseball team for twenty- two years starting in 1930. In 1950 Narberth won its twenty-first Main Line League championship, the twelfth under skipper Gene Davis (some accounts say manager Davis captured the crown a career-total of sixteen times for the town team, but that figure seems high). He had kept things lively here throughout the Depression, the team winning championships in 1930, 1932, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937 and 1939, during which decade it swept the series three times at season’s end. When Davis gave up his manager’s post after the 1952 season, the team ceased to exist in its familiar format bringing to a close what one sports writer characterized as:

Three generations of hospitality unmatched amid surroundings Norman Rockwell should preserve on canvas.

⁴⁹⁷ Editor’s note: Mapes store closed in 2016.

⁴⁹⁸ Correspondence with Gene Davis, Sr.

For the semi-pro town team tradition was dead in Narberth, and on the Main Line. Problems became strikingly evident in 1951, the year Narberth marched to victory as an independent. Our town team was “independent” because the Main Line Baseball League had decided to disband for that season after Narberth withdrew. Davis had fielded a young club that seemed to augur well for the boroughites when the league would get back into action the next year. In a way it seemed like business as usual when the Davismen’s sparkling centerfielder, who ranked third in hitting with a .364 average was offered a contract by the Philadelphia Phillies but turned it down “temporarily” to finish his education at Penn State University. And rugged outfielder Bob Tabor, who was beginning to be heard from in another capacity (see basketball) on the playing fields of Narberth, was tops in the home-run department.

But the end of an era for town teams had arrived by 1951. The finger pointed to television, the championship Phillies, and bus service to and from major-league Shibe Park as the reason for the poor attendance at semi-pro baseball games on the Main Line. No sooner had Davis retired from the active baseball scene, than the Main Line Baseball League in early 1953 announced its unravelment after teetering on the brink for several years. Not enough players had turned out for the league to field sufficient teams.

The only place the Davismen were to be seen that summer season was at their general store on mainstreet, where four generations of them hung out at the time - “Pop” Davis, then eighty-four, ex-manager Gene, fifty-seven, Gene, Jr. who was thirty-two, and his son Howie, age three. Gene Davis had dropped his post as skipper of the town team “to start relaxin’ a little bit.” His job, he explained, plus baseball, “got to be too much.”

With his departure from the sport the baseball-playing that took its place was of a different kind than formerly, reflecting different crowd expectations, now that kids have taken over the sport on the Main Line and here. Distant thunder is heard though, as reports filter in that adult teams are being formed of men in their thirties in some out-of-the-way suburbs, suggesting that sandlot and semi-pro baseball may yet stage a comeback. Perhaps in the twenty-first century?

In baseball, when you are forty years old, you are ancient. But it is a different matter when you have a baseball tradition older than the borough - you scramble to keep it alive.

Centennial Road Murder, 1905

Heat prostration seemed a bigger threat than foul play for a pedestrian along the loneliest stretch of Penn Valley’s Centennial Road (some still called it Holliday’s Road) near Percival Roberts, Jr.’s

palatial new mansion “Penshurst” on that steamy Monday afternoon. The thermometer registered a sizzling ninety-six degrees breaking a record of Philadelphia’s warmest July 17 ever. The year was 1905. Along trudged an industrious traveling mender of watches and clocks heading home in an easterly direction on the far side of Conshohocken State Road. His name was William Crossley, 54, of Germantown and he also sold jewelry. A kit of tools swung from his shoulder. His derby hat was tilted back from his brow and neighboring farmers Anthony Hoehler and his wife had just given him a refreshing drink of cold water at their house, though he was known to prefer a nip. Moments later on the hill leading to the deep ravine along Centennial Road Crossley was felled by a blow to the back of the head with a blunt instrument. It was a great spot for a sneak attack, there on the roadway leading to the ravine for it was thick with brush. Trees and bushes hid the road from a long distance. If you walked as this wayfarer did with his back to Narberth, trouble could lurk up ahead yet nothing would be visible on the road until you passed just over the hill and began descending it. That is where double-trouble awaited the clock-mender. Crossley may have given strong resistance for his nose was broken, his eye gouged out and he received a gunshot through the mouth at close range. Not only was his head a bloody pulp, but he was also shot through the back after he had fallen, the bullet piercing his heart.

A Manayunk physician en route from visiting a patient was driving by when his horses shied at a bundled object lying half out of a roadside ditch. Dr. William R. Devitt leaped down for a look, found the body still warm and notified the police of both Lower Merion and Manayunk Station, as well as the Hoehlers. Farmers and laborers joined the posse searching for clues. Police soon learned that Crossley had stopped at Hoehlers’ just up the road and showed them his wares, including watches he was to repair and others to sell, as well as jewelry. The Hoehlers had noticed two well-dressed men about five-foot-seven-inches tall, one with a straw hat and the other in black derby and black suit precede Crossley down the road as he resumed walking.

Next thing Andrew Hoehler knew he heard two gunshots ring out and saw the same two well-dressed men come running over the hill from the ravine via the woods toward Narberth, this time badly frightened and looking over their shoulder as if being followed. No sooner was Hoehler home telling his wife about the episode than Dr. Devitt arrived with news of a man lying dead in a ditch two hundred yards up the road. He said the man died only a few minutes before he arrived. He also asserted that the noise made by his team of horses crossing a wooden bridge had frightened off the killers before they had time to search Crossley’s clothing for valuables (the body still had five dollars and a gold watch in the pockets when found). But the assailants did not leave empty handed. Crossley’s rifled and broken tool case and bloody hat were found in the nearby woods. Missing from the case was an estimated two

thousand dollars' worth of items including fifteen gold watches, six silver watches and various breast pins, watch chains, locket and other ornaments.

No murder weapon was found at the scene. Crossley himself had a horror of guns and never carried one. He was heading home along his preferred route: via Centennial Road, Leedom Lane, River Road and Manayunk to his wife, four daughters and son in Germantown when accosted. Well-known throughout Lower Merion's towns and Narberth, Crossley had made his last call here in the borough earlier that same day at the turreted Victorian house at the southeast corner Dudley and Windsor Avenues built for a family with sophisticated tastes in jewelry, the Dubosqs. His customer there was Mrs. Francis P. Dubosq, and he received one dollar for mending her clock. The heat wave was broken by rain on July 20, the same day the coroner's jury at Norristown rendered a verdict of murder at the hands of persons unknown. Now it was the turn of the law enforcement agencies of the township and county to begin feeling the heat.

Five days later the worried and frustrated neighborhoods of West Manayunk (now Belmont Hills) and Gladwyne founded a "vigilance" committee to combat "rampant crime," noting that within the past three weeks five persons had been robbed, two seriously injured, Crossley was dead and the area was becoming a haven for Philadelphia criminals who felt scot free upon crossing over city limits – there being only one policeman on (night) duty thereabouts. The message was that no citizen any longer ventured out after dark unarmed. Meanwhile, the committee circulated a petition for presentation at Norristown to obtain better police protection, but voiced doubts that any help would be forthcoming. The committee did not yet take the new Lower Merion Police seriously. To this day bafflement still surrounds the notorious unsolved mystery of the coldblooded killing on Centennial Road of a harmless itinerant clock-mender with no known enemies.

Chapter 5 - Narbrook Park – “Garden City Experiment”⁴⁹⁹

Narbrook Park – A Frederick Law Olmsted Inspired Park	258
Narbrook Park - Overview.....	258
Narberth Plans to Build “Garden City”	260
George McClellan Henry	262
Other Leaders	263
Park Development Committee.....	264
Assembling the Property	265
A “Non-Centered” American Design	265
Staking out the Ground	266
Drawing of Lots	269
Ground-Breaking	270
House Design and Construction.....	272
No Carnegie Library	275
Japanese Flowering Cherry Trees	276
Formal Dedication of Narbrook Park	277
Houses—the country house model	279
Japonisme: in the landscape	281
The Artists’ Colony Aspect	288
Narbrook Park Improvement Association	288
Living Together.....	289
Block parties, other traditions	290
Narbrook Park-its meaning, including as a civic association-sponsored effort	291

⁴⁹⁹ Editor’s Note – The reader is referred to [Narbrook Park: A Garden City Experiment](#) (ISBN: 978-0-692-73661-6), written by the Narbrook Park Centennial Committee to commemorate the establishment of Narbrook Park in 1914-1915. Victoria Donohoe was the principal author of this work. Copies are available at the Narberth Bookstore.

Narbrook Park – A Frederick Law Olmsted Inspired Park⁵⁰⁰

In size, 14-acre Narbrook Park is only a speck compared with the 840 acres in Central Park in New York City. And yet, what is often called Frederick Law Olmsted's greatest accomplishment at Central Park – his making a Park that's a playground, and doing it without letting the play aspect interfere with the park or the park interfere with play – is likewise Anderson Pope's greatest accomplishment at Narbrook Park.

Any such favorable comparison is especially astonishing too, inasmuch as both parks were designed originally to serve a “whole town” – Olmsted's for huge Manhattan against considerable opposition to his design as it was being developed because it was thought to be insufficiently unified - and Pope's design for a miniscule town, yet in certain ways like Central Park's design in avoiding artificiality, choosing variety and a non-centered American design. It works wonderfully for its resident families year-round - including sledding and tobogganing in winter. Very American is the fact that in neither park are any areas restricted to be used for “play only” or “park only” as they would be, for example, in Paris, both at the Luxembourg Gardens and finding even more limited recreational activities at the Bois de Boulogne.

This chapter tells the story of Narberth's “Garden City” initiative – the causes, the influences, the launching, and how come a civic association was founded to undertake such a big effort and managed to bring it to a successful conclusion on a low budget.

Narbrook Park - Overview

In 1914, the Borough of Narberth was alive with civic activities. The newly elected Burgess, lawyer George M. Henry, founded the Narberth Civic Association which started a newspaper, a town band, and other public-spirited projects. Perhaps the most ambitious project, attributed to lawyer Henry himself, was the plan to develop an unattractive tract of land into a public park “for the enjoyment of the citizens of Narberth and vicinity.”

This project was to be financed from the profits from the sale of building lots surrounding the park area. A nationally known landscape architect, Robert Anderson Pope, made the plans. A group of leading citizens agreed to be subscribers without knowing which lots they would acquire.

⁵⁰⁰ Narbrook Park was included on the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District in 2003.

On March 16, 1915 a drawing was held in the lobby of the YMCA (then located in the building which still stands on the northeast corner of Forest and Haverford Avenues). The subscribers chose their lots in the sequence in which they drew their names from a hat. Of the 43 original lots, a 1915 map shows 32 taken by 19 subscribers (some chose more than one). The prices varied from \$1100 to \$1600.

On May 29, 1915 the new band, the school children, and the citizenry turned out for the ground breaking ceremonies at the site. Mayor Blankenberg of Philadelphia gave the principal address. The general contractor, A.C. Shand, was to start grading, road building, and stream emplacement immediately. Also, many subscribers planned to build houses, under deed restrictions to cost at least \$5000, without delay.

The new community took shape, delayed no doubt by the upheaval of World War I. However, the Borough of Narberth never accepted ownership of the roads and commons. The householders found that they were on their own for maintenance of the Park, and at a meeting called by A. E. Wohlert at his home on November 5, 1920, they organized themselves as the Narbrook Park Improvement Association. In due course, by-laws were adopted and dues assessed to maintain and improve the Park, although ownership of the common areas still rested in the “original trustees” of the Narberth Civic Association, which was by now almost defunct.

As the result of a dispute over property rights with a neighboring developer, it was decided that the Association would have to incorporate so that it could assume ownership of the Park. George Henry, who had long since removed to Devon, was retained to draw up and file the incorporation papers. These were approved by decree of the Court of Common Pleas of Montgomery County on December 27, 1926, and by February 1927, the “surviving Trustees” had deeded the park property to the Narbrook Park Improvement Association.

By 1914 and 1915, Narbrook Park [had become] a focus of the successful drive to celebrate the Japanese cherry blossom as Narberth’s town tree. Many such trees were planted in the new park, as the borough set out to become a “cherry blossom town” famous for its trees, being editorialized as such in the Philadelphia Telegraph of May 5, 1916. The landscape architect and nurseryman A. E. Wohlert, popularizer of the cherry blossom tree in America, carried out Pope’s scheme of plantings on both the Narbrook Park common and on its individual properties, Wohlert was one of the original subscribers who drew lots, built a house here and lived in it.⁵⁰¹ Albert Hay Malotte, famous for setting “The Lord’s Prayer” to music, also lived in Narbrook Park. The anthropologist Ashley Montagu wrote two of his

⁵⁰¹ Editor’s note: Wohlert’s property was a “double lot” - #s 26 and 28.

books here and, now a Princeton resident, remembers the place fondly. In 1918, local military servicemen were honored by tree-plantings in Narbrook Park and at church sites in the borough. This tradition (unrelated to that of the cherry blossoms) received press coverage in Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Richmond and in the London Daily Mail that year.

Narbrook Park's plantings and grounds were under A. E. Wohlert close supervision for decades. During that time and since, they have also been looked after by our residents' group, Narbrook Park Improvement Association, founded in 1920. The banks of the East Branch of Indian Creek (it flows through our park to Cobbs Creek) were rebuilt by W.P.A. workers in 1938 and 1939 as part of a program of improving Narberth storm water drainage facilities after a comprehensive survey was made to define the borough's exact requirements. A major Narberth Public School historical pageant, "A Nation Rises," was held in Narbrook Park for the Constitution's hundred-fiftieth anniversary (1938).

Since the W.P.A. program, stabilization of the stream and tree-planting has been carried out by committees of the residents' association and by task forces of willing residents. Nearby real estate subdivisions to the northwest, west and north have brought clusters of tract houses around new roads: in 1952 (Country Lane), in c. 1961 (Narwyn Lane) and in 1979-80 (the new "Hansen Estate" homes). These developments have caused changes in our stream and are making the management of it more difficult. Another real estate subdivision has been contemplated bordering our park.⁵⁰² It was the new "Hansen Estate" homes that destroyed the Spring House of the "Ancient Indian Spring" which is the source of the East Branch of Indian Creek and for a time disrupted the water channel of that spring, flooding the basements of very old homes very close to it that never had water problems before. At that time, work-parties of Narbrook Park residents built groins at several points in the banks of our creek to help stabilize it against increasingly severe erosion.⁵⁰³

Narberth Plans to Build "Garden City"

Under the headline "Narberth Plans to Build Garden City," the May 6, 1914 edition of the weekly Main Line News carried the first published account of the civic improvement of a swampy, unsightly area destined to become one of our nation's very few pre-World War I "Garden City" projects. Narberth's chief executive, burgess George M. Henry, evolved the scheme and the other members of the

⁵⁰² Editor's note: The author may have been referring to a development, accomplished after the author's death, in 2019, of nine luxury townhouses undertaken to the north of the park just a little upstream of Narbrook Park on Price Avenue. This development has resulted in significant flooding of the stream that runs through the park.

⁵⁰³ Editor's note: Since that time at least two major streambank restoration projects have been undertaken by the Narbrook Park residents – in 2010 and in 2016, the latter with funding from the William Penn Foundation.

Narberth Civic Association enthusiastically joined in on it, starting their active campaign for subscriptions on May 8, the article said.

Besides “sufficient space for thirty-one modern detached homes,” Burgess Henry was quoted as saying,

There will be plenty of garden space, and we aim to make this park the beginning of a real town beautiful; one of those towns that you often see storied and pictured in architects' magazines and which sound very attractive, but which are rarely accomplished. We will make the park the center of a broad extension of town improvement.

The secretary of the Philadelphia Suburban Planning Association earlier gave the scheme his endorsement when the civic association directors had him as their guest to explain their plan to him and he inspected the proposed site. As a result of that conference, the civic group made its move to take the project up with the park planning expert Robert Anderson Pope, so said another article in that same issue of Main Line News.

A Massachusetts native, Pope had studied in Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.'s trailblazing landscape architecture class at Harvard University. Pope afterward worked for F. L. Olmsted, Jr. (son of the “father of American landscape architecture”) on a major project of his, Forest Hills Gardens (started in 1908) in Long Island, New York. The influence of Olmsted's Forest Hills Gardens is strongly felt in the design of Narberth's fourteen-acre parkland and model community. Even the two engineers who laid out our Pope plan had worked on Forest Hills Gardens. And there were other links between the two projects.

Chief among these were two things. Narberth Civic Association retained internationally-known Harvard-trained town planner George Burdett Ford of New York as consultant for this project. He came and lectured to borough residents about the benefits of our projected “Garden City.” Ford was a consultant to the Russell Sage Foundation which created and owned Forest Hills Gardens. The other link was D. Knickerbocker Boyd, supervising architect for Narberth's scheme, who was an eventual adviser to the Russell Sage Foundation. More will be said of Boyd shortly.

A close associate of Pope's, David Knickerbocker Boyd of Wayne designed with his partner Victor Darwin Abel many of the houses for Narberth's new community, including Abel's own home in which his widow still lives.⁵⁰⁴ Boyd & Abel had final say on each individual house to be built at Narbrook. Public-spirited citizens from Narberth and Wynnewood drew lots to determine which

⁵⁰⁴ Editor's note: Victor Abel's widow lived in the house until her death.

property each one would buy and develop as part of this community project. Thus, thirty-five homes were built, all by about 1921, except one home constructed during the 1930s. Most of the houses are architect-designed.

George McClellan Henry

On the strength of launching this project, George McClellan Henry, the burgess, can be considered one of the most original public officials in the first generation of modern politicians in Narberth--perhaps the most original. A 1904 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and its law school, he was an early exponent of the Garden Cities movement. And always, in Henry's case, he was very close to the Progressive Era, which was his abiding subject as a public servant.

What makes him seem so enlightened or unusual, in retrospect, is that Henry swept into office in January 1914 while advancing activity on two fronts. He undertook the regular routine of burgess (a post which may appear to have had more varied duties in those days, but in fact simply gave the burgess more flexibility in choosing what tasks to take on before the growth of the town necessitated establishment of a borough manager).

Chief among the ideas the new burgess championed for the town as part of the ambitious Progressive Era agenda ready for action was what he called a Garden City project to be paid for on a non-profit basis. This project's two New York planners, George Burdett Ford and Robert Anderson Pope appear to have been chosen tentatively by then, and young architect Victor Darwin Abel was this venture's most likely lightning rod, and somehow quietly a key player in all of this.

And Henry established a civic association and gave it an unusually large mandate at the outset. For in early May of that same year, 1914, the new civic association undertook sponsorship of its active campaign for subscriptions toward this garden-city project.

Thus on Burgess Henry's initiative, that civic association proclaimed a bold, outreaching program of land development, Narbrook Park, that incorporated the most advanced ideas in open-space thinking. Conceived as a civic improvement that would remove a nuisance and enhance the town, Narbrook was also committed to being a place for the people, despite the fact that it was never intended to be financed through any sort of bond issue. In a world in which society was destroying or letting go of old frameworks, the people of Narberth built a new one by acting through their new civic group with the full backing and encouragement of the burgess. (Originally Henry had envisioned public tennis courts to be included in the common areas of Narbrook.)

And that Narbrook project seemed to reflect a momentum and solidarity that were unique for this town of distinct neighborhoods loosely woven together and lived in then by almost two thousand persons, most of whom were still occupying fairly large single houses, as smaller dwellings had only just started being built.

Other Leaders

If the chief innovator of this progressive program was the burgess wearing two hats, the project certainly had the guidance and support of persons in the town representing the conservative, monied establishment and in some cases prosperous individuals of an inventive turn of mind, such as **Alexander Capie Shand**, named chief engineer of the whole system of the Pennsylvania Railroad soon after his arrival in Narberth. Scottish-born Alexander Shand was a rich man as a result of his having invented a gadget - called "Mrs. Shand's pie plates" by members of his family - referring to what he initially used in order to develop and patent a small device⁵⁰⁵ for holding rails steady on railroad ties. As he was in the Pennsylvania Railroad's employ, it had use of these.

Lots of things began to happen in the town, growth-wise, soon after Shand moved into the former Belfield residence and renamed it Douglas Garden for his birthplace and after **Augustus J. Loos** (Cornell University class of 1877), principal in the Loos & Dilworth lubricating oil import firm and treasurer of the Philadelphia Oil Trade Association, moved into another big house.⁵⁰⁶ Loos, the Narbrook Park Development Committee chairman, was a man of culture interested in both music and the arts. Partly it was the timing that led to alliances between those two families, the Shands and the Looses. And the town came alive in the nexus of their combined community outreach activity. Narbrook became the zenith of their achievement as a team.

Surely it was not just these two very remarkable individuals that made such a difference. Yes, Loos was highly regarded by the Pew family, and Shand was a hero⁵⁰⁷ in the public eye. And both the Shand and Loos families arrived here with marriageable children. A Shand daughter soon married a Loos son, and a Loos daughter married an architect **Walter I. Dothard** who with his **brother Robert J. Jr.** (as Dothard & Dothard) was a board member at the time and its chief proponent). Narberth's new Y building was the clear favorite over the stodgy-looking Y that opened around the same time on

⁵⁰⁵ Other railroads worldwide including Russia's were required to pay royalties to Shand for as long as his patent lasted. Income from that source thus benefited his family for generations.

⁵⁰⁶ This one built for Mrs. Furey's daughter Martha.

⁵⁰⁷ Like the time he lectured to the men's group of Narberth Presbyterian Church about how he had just, for the first time, electrified the rail route between New York and Philadelphia. Everybody stood up and cheered.

Ardmore's mainstreet. And those same two brothers, one or both living here, as Dothard & Dothard designed in 1917 an expansive Elm Hall municipal building for a major renovation and virtual replacement (which A. J. Loos had a finger in, but it was never built).

Paul R. Loos and **Walter I. Dothard** (as Loos & Dothard) in 1914 to 1917 had a contractor's firm building houses often of Victor Abel's design on land A. J. Loos had made available on Shirley Road. And it's believed Robert J. Dothard, Jr. was involved in the design of a very large Pennsylvania Railroad office building still standing at 30th Street Station, or that he was its superintendent. And that suggests Alexander C. Shand's involvement.

Certainly the launching of Narbrook Park did give the **youthful son of Mr. Shand** a timely and appropriate sendoff in his building business. Young Shand had been pressed into service when money was tight. And after that the civic association began making some of its payments to him in Narbrook's still empty building lots. As he had little success in selling them, he became a builder. Certainly at this time in Narberth, house construction was big business.

Park Development Committee

Initially the burgess invited all borough residents to attend the founding of a civic association that would oversee the Narberth Garden project as it was then called and hear Ford speak on Narberth's betterment. After the venture's official April 21, 1914 adoption, discussions with Ford and Pope continued all summer, and pledges to buy lots began. The burgess chaired the project until October 1914, a seven-member Park Development Committee of borough residents⁵⁰⁸ was named by the civic association to take general charge of all phases of this garden-city venture. That committee's word was law, subject only to approval by the civic association directors. And it was in this project's early stages that design became most obviously a team effort at Narbrook, involving both planners and architects. Seemingly the process would have been identical had the development been either large or small. But just as much attention was given to an orderly progression of steps in creating Narbrook as if a community of thousands were being sketched on the drawing boards. For setting an example that could be followed was all-important to these organizers.

⁵⁰⁸ This prominent array of citizens consisted of three persons – Chilton Publishing Company founder James Artman, oil company, head A. J. Loos, and Curtis Publishing Company executive John B. Williams - elected by the building-lot subscribers. Three other members - builder William D. Smedley, state senator-to-be Fletcher W. Stites, and Burgess George M. Henry - were chosen by the civic association board of directors. Those six committeemen then, in turn, selected the seventh member, Dr. J. Berg Esenwein, a short-story writer and correspondence school official. Our Town, October 22, 1914, p.1.

Thus, for a November committee meeting, prominent town planner George Burdett Ford of New York who had been retained to work on the project's general plan was present. His attention would have been directed to overall considerations about the site - things to be thought of first, before any work got started. Ford and town planner/landscape architect Robert Anderson Pope were at the time preparing a more detailed plan - Ford a facilities study and Pope the actual Narberth Garden design plan - to submit to the committee. Next they would begin a final plan, upon which bids were to be secured.⁵⁰⁹ Apparently as a direct result of those November discussions on location here with Ford, the committee recommended to its board that, for the proper development of the project as a whole, the area of development be increased somewhat.⁵¹⁰

Assembling the Property

Meanwhile, the 14-acre site was being cobbled together tediously from at least six tracts including a strip purchased from the Pennsylvania Railroad real estate department and another from a John Bartram grandson. The key unit was an eight-acre meadow for which a November 16, 1695 deed existed, according to a 1707-08 document I discovered at City Archives of Philadelphia. In that 1695 land transaction between two prominent Merion Welshmen, state assemblyman Robert Owen obtained the meadow (described as seven acres) from his next-door neighbor and brother-in-law Hugh Roberts who was active in public life and a minister among the Friends. Owen used Narbrook's meadow as a watering hole for his cows and sheep. This meadow and his inventory of farm animals are mentioned in Owen's will. The meadow was owned by Robert Owen's descendants until the land was purchased in 1915 to create Narbrook Park.

A "Non-Centered" American Design

For Narbrook Park, Anderson Pope made what can be called a non-centered American design. A centered design would have been too European and too unified. Of course, he also totally avoided a straight street with trees and houses lining it end to end. Pope's main parkland is centered following the southerly course of a stream and has three outcroppings of various sizes. These nodules, rounded as if symbolizing organic growth, serve as a loose cluster or galaxy of small centers. The largest of these

⁵⁰⁹ Our Town Nov. 5, 1914, p.2.

⁵¹⁰ Namely, by purchase of the Pennsylvania Railroad tract on Windsor Avenue's north side, by purchasing a strip off the east end of John B. Williams' tract, and by accepting an offer from Smedley & Haws home-builders to give the civic association a piece of undeveloped ground they owned in exchange for park frontage to be gained for the remainder of their land.

offshoots is the open graded horseshoe shape suggesting an outdoor amphitheater, and still used occasionally for that purpose informally. That amphitheater and the two smaller horseshoes accessible along winding roads each give an experience of being in a center cul de sac - thus highlighting the distinctively American character of Pope's non-centered design. Several old oak trees were undoubtedly helpful in establishing the main axis line of the park.⁵¹¹

Also at the outset, Pope's design and the accepted advice Ford gave about adding small acreage to Narbrook's upper westerly corner and lower edge (especially the former) tended to maximize the handsome views to be had from within Narbrook looking westward toward the towering woodlands of tulip poplar, oak, beech and at the turn of the century by chestnuts that stood along portions of its western edge just outside it in 1915. Undiminished for the next 50 to 60 years, these awesome stands⁵¹² of trees subsequently have been thinned out considerably by housing subdivisions yonder and a tornado. At the outset in 1915, however, Narbrook's street trees (mostly London planes alternating with silver maples 12) newly planted that year along curving roads, made scalloped edgings skirting that marvelous density.

Staking out the Ground

By early January 1915, the final plan and specifications were in preparation. Thus Pope had arrived from New York with several men including his assistant engineer W. A. Enegess, and they were staking out the ground⁵¹³ in accord with the plans and under Pope's direct supervision to give a general view of the layout. Negotiations were also proceeding with utility companies so laying of pipes and conduits could be done while the park work was going on, instead of later which would disrupt new roads. Overhead wires were vetoed because they would mar the beauty of the development, and artistic lampposts were on the agenda instead of utility poles. By the time the engineers were nearly ready to ask for bids, building-lot subscriptions had already been available for a year, and subscribers were to receive

⁵¹¹ Editor's note: This sentence is taken from another of the author's writings on Narbrook Park entitled "Some Considerations about Narbrook Park."

⁵¹² Now expired are most silver maples having a fine tracery to the shape of their leaves (a variety supplied by A.E. Wohlert, who preferred it to the commoner, coarser-leafed variety once plentiful on local farms, singly or in a row either to mark a property line or along a roadside). Several big old silver maples stayed on Narbrook park's grounds at the outset, along with big oaks. Other types of trees have replaced the silver maples as street trees along Narbrook's curving roads, while London planes planted in 1915 have survived. We lost some in a row along upper Conway Avenue from #34 to #38, where rows of willows had disappeared mostly by the 1930s. At Narbrook's front entrance, a 1915 London plane remains, and a Liberty elm was planted in 2006; Liberty elms soon after were planted at the curbs of #9 and #44. Still another Liberty elm was planted by the tall steps on Montgomery Avenue where Sabine Avenue meets it.

⁵¹³ Our Town Jan. 7, 1915, p.1; Jan 14.

guidance in choosing lots at the time the drawings were held at the YMCA, all having an opportunity to determine beforehand their preference as to size, location and price. By late February, “a few” lots were reportedly still left for subscribers. The individual lots meanwhile were being surveyed and their boundary lines marked (with sunken terracotta and cement cylinder posts).

As a warm-up for the building-lot drawing at the YMCA, Our Town went to great lengths to trumpet the advantages of this project and attempted to clear up a number of misconceptions the public had on the subject. Reminding citizens that Narberth is their home and that every improvement started in it concerns them, it got down to cases:

Remember...that the railroad approach to a town is like the front drive leading to a country estate. ...Think about...the general condition and appearance of the vacant land lying along the stream and extending from Windsor to Price Avenue; remember the high railroad bank from which thousands of people daily obtain a view of the whole tract. Think of the importance to the town of having this property developed in such a way as to make the most of its natural advantages - and you have the origin and basis of the park idea.⁵¹⁴

It carried this thought further:

The object... was: not only to acquire a piece of land which would always afford an open breathing space, free from encroachment of a rapid development which may be expected to follow the electrification of the Main Line, but also to remove a condition which has been the source of unwarranted but popular belief, especially among non-residents, that Narberth is built on low land, and place in its stead something which will favorably impress the many thousands of people who daily pass through our town, and thus tend to attract the class of house-seekers who make the best citizens. This is the beginning of a series of improvements which it is hoped will result in making Narberth an ideal home town in every respect.⁵¹⁵

That last comment, about the beginning of a series of improvements, is a reaffirmation of a statement Burgess Henry had made a year earlier when he was first announcing the garden-city project.

Our Town in the 1915 adulatory article went onto explain that Narberth Garden was not going to affect the tax rate nor the revenues available for street improvements as some people worried that it might. If anything, it might increase those funds. It drove home the point further:

⁵¹⁴ Our Town, Feb. 25, 1915, p.1.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

In plain words, this is one of the few occasions when you will get something for nothing.⁵¹⁶

The unnamed writer explained that about half the ground will be nicely laid out with drives, walks, trees, plants and even a lake and a forum with natural stage settings for outdoor plays and pageants. According to the idea at the time, when this park was completed it was to be handed over to the people of Narberth, but with one condition - that it be taken care of. The crucial point was that the funds to pay for this project would come, not from public funds, but from the sale of lots encircling the park. And it was pointed out that the houses around the park perimeter will be subject to building restrictions so that they stay in harmony with the other improvements. Our Town concluded by stating six principal advantages to be derived from this improvement, while acknowledging that many others might be suggested, but it wished to leave something to the imagination of readers. Its list:

- 1) Placing of the 'Year Round Home Town' ahead of other suburbs for energy and progressiveness along the line of civic improvement;
- 2) the inauguration of a real estate development policy which, when its advantages have been demonstrated, will, it is hoped, strongly influence, future developments in our community;
- 3) the acquisition of a fully improved park without cost to the borough;
- 4) the elimination of the source of much unfavorable criticism from those not aware that the ground which they think is so low is in fact two hundred fifty-seven feet above sea level at its lowest part;
- 5) a general increase of real estate values due to the improvement and the increased demands for homes in a community which shows such a progressive and fraternal spirit;
- and 6) the opening to immediate development of an extremely attractive territory which will result in an increase of borough revenues.⁵¹⁷

An editorial note in the same newspaper a week later observed:

Four great enterprises Narberth is planning: the Park, the Public Library, the Flower Show and the Station Garden. Let us all push.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ From Huntington, Long Island came one inquiry for complete information on what Narberth's civic organization has been doing, especially in promoting the park improvement. They were said to be contemplating "work along similar lines." Also, the editors of the Civic Club Bulletin of Philadelphia had asked for an article about the promotional plan that made the park idea possible for Narberth on a self-supporting basis. And this had been published in the December 1914 issue. Two recent requests for information about the civic association-sponsored pageant had also been addressed – one from Ridley Park which wanted to do something similar, the other from The Survey magazine (New York), which subsequently published an illustrated article on Narberth's pageant, some twenty-four thousand copies of that article having been circulated to all parts of the United States and abroad among social and philanthropic workers and students.

Word was beginning to get around that Narberth was building a garden-city. Under the small heading “Narberth’s fame spreads,” the town newspaper reported in an editorial⁵¹⁸ that several requests had been received by civic association officers for details of what it called the “Narberth Plan of Community Service” - referring to the Narberth garden idea.

Drawing of Lots

The drawing⁵¹⁹ for Narberth’s garden-city building lots in mid-March brought out the area’s elite. Until then, those nineteen individuals had pledged to buy a piece of land for the good of the town as a whole, aware only of a price range of \$1100-\$1600 per lot. No subscriber knew the lots’ location, size or actual cost until a slip of paper with his or her name on it was drawn out of a hat. Whereupon subscribers made their choice in the order in which their names were pulled from the hat, with the civic association secretary, W. Arthur Cole, officiating. Park development moved more swiftly after that evening

Next the subject of building restrictions was aired, the Park committee announcing a provision was being inserted in deeds for Park lots requiring approval in advance of house plans and specifications, with a view to keeping the appearance of the development as a whole as attractive as possible. This was not meant to discourage people from hiring their own architect, but merely to prod their designers to consult with supervising architect D. Knickerbacker Boyd as a housing specialist and with “landscape engineer” R. Anderson Pope. The Park’s restrictions were to remain in force until January first, 1950.⁵²⁰ And there is little doubt that some clients took a shortcut to the approval of their plans by hiring Boyd to design their house from the outset.

Our Town coverage of the creation of Narbrook was often chatty, and provided occasional career updates on principal figures involved in the work such as D. K Boyd,⁵²¹ George B. Ford, R. A. Pope or included reprints of articles they wrote such as Pope’s article on gardening that had lately appeared in

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. Our Town, Feb. 25, 1915, p.1.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid. First pick went to James Artman who bought three lots (#s 5, 7 and 9), second choice to John B. Williams who picked #s33 and 35, followed by Mary K. Gibson #s11 and 13, Alexander C. Shand Sr. #15, Mrs. Renee Barrie #21, Parker Shortridge Williams (nephew of N. Parker Shortridge, a director of an finance committee chairman of the Pennsylvania Railroad) #25, Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Wohlert #26 and 28, the Arctic explorer Stephen Paschall Morris Tasker #31 (the only buyer with old family ties to this immediate area), Dr. O. J. Snyder #37, William Selfridge #3, and so on. Of the above-mentioned lot-buyers, only the Wohlerts intended living in the house they would soon build in the model community.

⁵²⁰ Editor’s note: One of the restrictions prohibited property owners from keeping or maintaining any livestock on their property – pigs, chickens, animals or fowls of any kind whatsoever.

⁵²¹ Although Boyd and Pope reportedly were working together at this time on a plan to construct the proposed development of Baldwin Locomotive Works’ Eddystone plant, another firm eventually got the job.

Gustav Stickley's The Craftsman magazine, chief organ of the Arts and Crafts movement in America. Narbrook's designers all had direct ties with current leaders in their respective fields.

The contract for laying out of the Park was awarded to a young graduate engineer⁵²² with the stipulation he was to finish the work in seventy working days, and R. A. Pope would supervise every detail as progress was made. That young man's first big job since he lately became contractor included everything from dredging out a stream bed to draining the marshy areas and using work-horses with the heaviest feet he could find to pull the equipment, to laying out the curving drives and finishing their surface, which was not macadam.

Meanwhile, after considering fifteen to twenty names for the Park that had provisionally been called "Narberth Garden," the civic association's executive committee chose "Narbrook Park."

Ground-Breaking

The first spade went into Narbrook Park turf on May 29, 1915 with much ceremony, starting with a parade from the YMCA of public-school children, each carrying a small American flag, accompanied by Principal Melchior and led by Philadelphia's Reform Era mayor Rudolph Blankenburg in formal attire (cutaway coat and looking like an Edwardian plutocrat). The town's new brass band, making its first appearance, played national songs. Narberth merchants and residents had been asked to decorate with flags and bunting jointly for the Park celebration and Memorial Day.

Mayor Blankenburg the main speaker, inveighed against "indifference" to civic virtue and suggested the Narbrook project reminded him of "a similar work" done in the recent development of West Philadelphia's Kirkbride Asylum where difficulties were also surmounted in the face of many varied obstacles. Other addresses followed by the president of the Lower Merion township commissioners, by an official of the Suburban Metropolitan Planning Commission, and by the Ridley Park Civic Association president. Representatives of five other neighboring suburban civic associations also were among the invited guests.

In his remarks Burgess Henry⁵²³ expressed hope that our "Narberth Cooperative Plan" would point the way for other localities desiring to promote model communities or cooperative improvements. Admitting that not everyone had understood what the civic association was trying to do, the burgess explained that one irate citizen wanted to know how we could afford to improve parks when we could

⁵²² Alexander C. Shand, Jr., a young Lehigh University graduate, had pursued further engineering studies at U. Penn.

⁵²³ Our Town, June 3, 1915, p.1.

not afford to pave all our streets. Another declared the tax rate was already too high. Someone else said we should build a new school house first. Still another claimed a park in a suburban town was a fool idea anyhow. Henry went on to explain the actual objectives of the project.

Aside from the burgess, probably no one else had been working harder on this project than ground-breaking day's master of ceremonies, Augustus J. Loos. Yet proud as he was of the construction project kicking off that day, Loos declared:

The development of a civic consciousness in rendering public service from unselfish motives in training citizens to cooperate in work for the common good and in developing all the other qualities that make for good citizenship – these are of much greater benefit to the community than any material improvement.⁵²⁴

According to Loos, the planning of Narbrook was unquestionably the civic association's crowning achievement of its first year.

By mid-summer, settlement had been made for the last part of Narbrook's many separate tracts, and deeds were being prepared for the lot owners. A crucial milestone was reached when borough council took action on a new Narbrook sewer in August. The presentation A. J. Loos made to council on that important matter proposed that the sewer be built in advance of actual building operations. One reason was that due to the unusual character of the landscape and street development, this would be more economical and less disruptive than if done after the improvements were completed. Another point was that the people of Narberth already had a vested interest in the property, which made it a public enterprise. And the association was ready to guarantee that at least ten houses shall be erected at Narbrook before payment (for a sewer) need be made by the borough. The idea was that the civic association would construct the sewer, and then be reimbursed by the borough after the construction of ten houses - a number that demonstrated a need for a sewer.

Loos asked that this civic association-sponsored project not be placed in the same category with work of a private developer, but to:

keep always in mind that the success of this enterprise will place Narberth in the forefront of enlightened and progressive communities, and enhance the value of every property within its limits.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

What he was asking was for the borough to depart from its usual procedure of not providing sewer facilities in advance of the start of actual building operations. He explained that the circumstances under which this project was proceeding were quite different from those of a commercial operation. And the civic association had a fixed sum for carrying on the work and must stick to it. After further discussion, Loos asked Council to consider this proposition in the same spirit that activated the original Narbrook subscribers when they invested \$50,000 in an untried enterprise. With one abstention (that of a builder owning several lots in Narbrook) Council unanimously agreed to this proposal, except that it set the number of houses at twelve to be completed, not ten, before a refund would be made to the Park Development Committee.

House Design and Construction

Nearly a month later, about a dozen lot-owners participated in an enthusiastic two-hour September meeting (1915) called by James Artman of the Park Development Committee to consider preparations for an active start in the erecting of houses at Narbrook. For the occasion, the supervising architect D. K. Boyd and his assistant V. D. Abel displayed sketches for different types of houses singly and also arranged in groups around the walls according to Pope's plan of the Park. Samples of roofing and other building materials were shown as well and discussed. Also presented for inspection and well-received were Boyd's working drawings for Smedley & Haws (owners of four lots).

In response, builder William T. Harris was the first of several persons present who authorized Boyd to prepare working drawings immediately, Harris having selected promptly at that meeting the style of house he wanted at #2 Narbrook Park. Thus Harris who owned four lots at Narbrook built this project's first house. Substantial progress was soon acknowledged as well on designs for four more Park houses for various clients, and discussions were going forward with Boyd on several additional ones as well - still quite a few houses shy of the construction figure of a dozen houses required to complete the sewer agreement with the borough.

That autumn, London plane trees alternating with silver maples common to the area were planted along a wide grassy curbside in front of the houses and facing Narbrook's large meadow.⁵²⁶ The purpose of that grassy strip, Pope explained, was to give the appearance that the meadow extended beyond its

⁵²⁶ At this time also, plantings at the Roland Park (Maryland) residential community were being held up as an ideal for our civic association to promote here.

actual limits up to the fronts of the houses, while the indented curb-cuts for parking would hopefully discourage people from parking a solid row of cars there that would block the landscape view.⁵²⁷

By December, construction began on two houses of picturesque character for two clients who had originally drawn numbers from a hat to pick their preferred lots and were now following through by building a house on speculation as a way to participate in the project. Each man lived in a much larger Late Victorian house elsewhere in the town. Publisher James Artman built the red tile-roofed house a #9 and railroad man Alexander C. Shand Sr. built the slate-roofed house at #15, both of these architect residences designed by D. Knickerbocker Boyd⁵²⁸ on steeply sloping terrain. These clients were Narberth civic association officers at the time, and William D. Smedley was their builder.

Curtis Publishing executive John B. Williams, also a civic association officer, hired architect Boyd to design, another red-tile roofed house of the picturesque variety, styled fairly close to Artman's model, for Williams' lot #33⁵²⁹. Curtis Publishing's chief engineer Michael Collins was persuaded to buy this house, finished in 1916 after Artman's and Shand's. The two red-roofed houses possess in some degree a signature trait of many of D. K. Boyd's best picturesque and Arts & Crafts houses, namely sash windows with many small panes of glass, and occasionally large corner windows with this feature, usually on the northside. Narbrook's second-in-command architect Victor D. Abel moved his young family into a picturesque Arts and Crafts house of his own design at #18 that has had fewer changes than any other dwelling in this model community while Abel's family long occupied it.

It was becoming apparent that Narbrook houses mostly were being designed to include a "suitable" garage⁵³⁰ of an "up-to-date" character, something that would remain uncommon in America until the 1930s. [These garages], then still uncommon in the town, were beginning to make their appearance on the rear service lanes specially designed for them and for trash collecting. Virtually all

⁵²⁷ Editor's note: See the following excerpt from the author's application for National Register status of Narbrook Park: "Narbrook Park's greatest distinction from a Community Planning/Development standpoint is the unusually early attention it gave to "taming" the motor car predating the auto age. Such foresight is associated with the Garden City Movement's astute accommodation of the motor car at the time...By assigning the auto places to park in designed landscape otherwise devoted to houses, greenery and open space, Narbrook Park became the first middle-class auto-centered neighborhood in Philadelphia's suburbs and as such, was a harbinger of vast lifestyle change in America regarding transportation."

⁵²⁸ Our Town, March 10, 1916. Two picturesque Boyd houses being built by Smedley.

⁵²⁹ Our Town, March 30, 1916, p.1. Williams chooses a Boyd-designed house he will convey to Collins.

⁵³⁰ Our Town, January 27, 1916, p.1.

these garages are original to the houses and 20 of Narbrook's houses currently have them. (Eighteen garage buildings serve 20 houses, and two other houses have internal garages.)

Narbrook Park's domestic architecture, closely set and well positioned in its informal arrangement, is one of its strengths. Good materials and good design help blend an array of housing styles, as do generous tree plantings, and that all its houses were built with porches. Pre-World War I standouts are fair-size picturesque Arts and Crafts dwellings #18 with outdoor inglenook, red-roofed #9 and #33, also #15, each with medieval-derived detailing, picturesque massing, lively roof lines, short on artificiality. Arts and Crafts architecture's postwar popularity continued strong, especially in our region; #40, #34 and #5 reveal what architects were then still doing with it. Meanwhile, Dutch Colonial Revival appeared repeatedly, balanced American Colonial Revival used only twice; and Bungalow used once by an architect, twice from pattern books. Not dominant but interesting, as showing strenuous paces the supervising architect and his partner Abel were putting small-house design through to get fresh inexpensive results, are informal American Colonial Revival houses—some tilted toward Arts and Crafts, others to Garden City ideas. The latter often has long living room, flight of stairs directly into it, window in front door, very small bath, and a feature advocated by sunlight-fresh air crusaders Parker/Unwin, a "sleeping balcony" (very popular at Letchworth, one-third of Narbrook houses were built with them).

Spring 1916 brought a blossoming of house construction and the first season of bloom for what became, as intended, one of the focal plantings in Narberth of Asian trees, the Japanese cherry blossom having been chosen as the official "town tree" in 1915.

Our Town, meanwhile, had been remarking on the vast changes⁵³¹ going on at Narbrook. It had been only a short time since the croaking frogs, whistling bob-white and the whipper-will's sweet call made the place resound with ringing echoes, and the fireflies filled the night air. And now the woods had been cleared away and the place was being transformed into a picturesque park and the town's "garden spot." One early-autumn Sunday that newspaper's writer counted eighty-two persons taking a stroll⁵³² at Narbrook along its grass-edged walks, while the grading of the park's central open space was progressing and various lot-owners were enhancing their properties with plantings.

⁵³¹ Our Town, Dec. 9, 1915, p.2.

⁵³² Our Town, October 5, 1916.

No Carnegie Library

A civic association meeting was called in 1916 to consider the subject of a Carnegie library⁵³³ and whether Narberth was likely to obtain one in the general distribution of Carnegie largesse then going on. A canvass of the directors of Narberth Civic Association revealed a very decided opposition to a plan of locating such a library, if obtained, in Narbrook Park. Their view was that insufficient space had been reserved there for public use, and that placing the library there would not be sanctioned under terms of the agreement with the purchasers of Narbrook lots.

Thus when Carroll Downes, a director of the school board and soon-to-be burgess, returned from researching the library matter in New York and made his formal report to council about obtaining a fully-equipped Carnegie library building, the possibility of locating the facility within Narbrook Park did not even come up, as it had been ruled out.⁵³⁴

At year's end, great satisfaction was expressed by the Narbrook Park committee at the successful completion of a year's work by the landscape engineer E. R. Dunn,⁵³⁵ in charge of the Narbrook development and a local resident during that time. Dunn had been hired to finish R. Anderson Pope's work after the latter's lawsuit about slow payment of fees. Before coming to Narberth, Dunn had been connected with the "development at Forest Hills, Long Island" (a clear reference to Forest Hills Gardens, for the report went on to say "he has therefore had considerable experience in this particular line of work"). Meanwhile, it would be almost another year before the court in Norristown rendered a verdict⁵³⁶ in favor of the civic association in Pope's lawsuit against it.

What Narberth had done by creating Narbrook Park clearly pointed the way to a new leadership role⁵³⁷ our civic association could play in another matter - this time akin to Merion Civic Association's initiative in getting the Pennsylvania Railroad to build a new rail station and a post office into the

⁵³³ Our Town, July 6, 1916, p.4 and July 13, p.1. One suggestion was that it would be best to secure the lot adjoining the YMCA where the stable then was, and connect the library directly with the Y. That way, a long-desired swimming pool could be located in the library's basement.

⁵³⁴ Editor's addition from the author's notes: Narberth's supervising architect, D. K. Boyd designed a Carnegie Library, c. 1911, as the Free Library's Southwark Branch Library [renamed Charles Santore Branch in 2004 at Broad & Ellsworth Streets, Philadelphia when converted to a community center]. Boyd's brother, L. V. Boyd, designed a Carnegie Library, 1909, as the Free Library's Manayunk Branch [Stephens Memorial Library], Fleming & Dupont Streets, Philadelphia.

⁵³⁵ Our Town, Dec. 14, 1916. Following a Christmas Holidays visit to his parents at Richmond Hill, Long Island, Dunn reportedly was planning to return here to take charge of contracting work for A. C. Shand, Jr. – Shand's projects being focused mainly in Narbrook Park, Shirley Road, Stepney Place, adjacent portions of Essex Avenue, and eventually Wynnedale Road for the next several years before moving further afield in the regional housing market after getting his start here.

⁵³⁶ Our Town, September 6, & 13, 1917, p.1 & 2.

⁵³⁷ Our Town, January 25, 1917. Narberth's new leadership role cited in an open letter to the editor, p. 4.

bargain. Rising to the occasion, Burgess George M. Henry⁵³⁸ was quick to remind people that part of Narbrook Park had been created on land purchased from the Pennsylvania Railroad's real estate department. Whereupon a Philadelphia Evening Bulletin editorial took up the subject of the two neighboring communities in relation to improvements of railroad property, declaring:

A brisk rivalry in fields of higher aestheticism that is now agitating Merion and Narberth, the desire of each community to make itself a jewel among suburbs, represents the more cheerful human reactions that persist in these rambling times of war.⁵³⁹

It added:

Merion improved itself so thoroughly that the Pennsylvania Railroad hurried along and saved its own face with a new railroad station of dashing architecture, with post office attached, the latter comment doubtless ratcheting upward the ambitions of Narberth's growing ranks of people agitating for rail-station improvement.

Individual citizen comments on Narbrook's progress were mainly favorable as well. Like one letter-writer⁵⁴⁰ who declared himself for a long time puzzled by reading Isaiah, he had wondered just what particular spot did the prophet have in mind whose waste places were comforted, whose wilderness had become like Eden and whose deserts were like a garden? But upon visiting Narberth after a three-year absence, the writer saw clearly that Isaiah was talking about Narberth and he meant the park lately built upon "that unsightly swampy no-man's-land north of the Pennsy tracks." The writer praised this reflection of a civic pride combined with a far-sighted policy.

Japanese Flowering Cherry Trees

Some twenty-five Japanese flowering cherry trees⁵⁴¹ planted at Narbrook that autumn as the gift of Wohlert's Garden Nurseries were by no means the first. A number had been planted there in 1915, and Mrs. Eugenia Blackall gave three such flowering trees the following autumn, when only five houses had been completed on the site. Those Asian flowering species planted so bountifully around town singly or in groups of ten or more in 1915 that were doing the best, had been fertilized consistently – the

⁵³⁸ Our Town, February 15, 1917, p. 3.

⁵³⁹ Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, February 20, 1917. Editorial.

⁵⁴⁰ Our Town, September 16, 1917, p.5. signed "C. K. Imbria."

⁵⁴¹ Our Town, September 27, 1917.

twenty-five on J. B. Williams' grounds for instance. One owner of thirteen houses in Narberth was placing a double cherry on each property.⁵⁴²

With war clouds darkening the sky, Wohlert edited his script a bit and began advocating, no longer Japanese plantings (for a while at least) but Persian peach trees." (Might this idea have come from Anderson Pope?) Wohlert suggested if these were planted along Conway, Dudley, Price and Montgomery avenues: "It would be a perfect Maxwell Parrish picture, a dream in colors..." Quick to take the hint was Susanna H. Bodine, the developer who arranged a complete planting of such trees on her Montgomery Avenue properties extending from Narberth to Price avenues. Also the public school pupils got busy and planted lots more of the Persian peach trees on Arbor Day lining Montgomery Avenue to Narberth Avenue all the way along the run of Shand Athletic Field.

Meanwhile, the plantings of various kinds at the houses in the Baltimore garden suburb of Roland Park (laid out in 1891 by George E. Kessler, its much-admired romantic aspects provided by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., and the very satisfactory attention to detail accomplished by Edward H. Bouton) had been receiving considerable favorable public attention both from civic leaders as "a high grade of civic achievement" (so said the president of the American Civic Association after a visit there in 1910), and in the popular press shortly before World War I. Thus it is not surprising to discover that Roland Park, one of its salient features being hillsides with reserved creek valleys serving as common park land (a Narbrook feature), was proposed as an ideal for Narberth Civic Association to promote. Consequently an article on Roland Park and its planting of trees and shrubbery was reprinted in Our Town.⁵⁴³ Yet Roland Park eventually was regarded as an aloof and snobbish upper middle-class neighborhood which Narbrook never was - one indication of Narbrook Park's democratic spirit being that it has produced three of this town's borough council presidents and one of its mayors.

By late 1916, enough families were moving into Narbrook for the Narbrook Boys' Club to be organized, surprisingly, at that early date. Real estate assessments in the park were rising sharply at this time. Nevertheless by 1918 the grading and care of individual lots at Narbrook was a concern.

Formal Dedication of Narbrook Park

This [1918] was also the year a big celebration was planned as a dedication for Narbrook, as well as to present a bazaar at which Narberth-grown vegetables and autumn flowers could be exhibited. And

⁵⁴² Our Town, March 9, 1916, p. 1.

⁵⁴³ Our Town, Nov. 16, 1916, p. 2.

it was to serve as a “harvest home” to welcome townspeople who had been away for the summer or on their vacations. But most importantly, the event was intended to make the civic association and its newspaper better known to new citizens and remind the old-timers of these things and, above all, to call attention to the war and its winning, with every booth and activity making a point of this. Every organization in town of course was to participate. And a formal dedication of Narbrook Park would also be part of the festivities of this “Patriotic Fete” This observance was a vast and remarkable production as its elaborately detailed program suggests. The day that an end to the war was declared saw the entire student body of the Narberth School, young children and high schoolers alike, spontaneously troop down to Narbrook where, on the high horseshoe hill they sang patriotic songs.

No sooner was the war over than the idea of tree plantings as memorials to soldiers and war heroes, especially in Narbrook Park, was given wide coverage in newspapers in Philadelphia, Washington Baltimore, Richmond and in the London Daily Mail. Some plantings of this sort at the time were called “peace trees.”

[Finally, by] no means isolated from other activity in our region, Narbrook’s supervising architect D. K. Boyd and his younger partner Victor Abel were always ready for outreach. If a builder active in another part of town or a neighboring community showed interest in one of Narbrook’s under-construction small architect-designed houses, he could negotiate use of its blueprint with on-site architect Abel. That was a boon because Narbrook possessed more small and medium-size architect-designed new houses than virtually any other part of town, and many nearby neighborhoods were still forming at that time. Both Victor Abel and architect D. K. Boyd were deeply interested in the design of small houses and Boyd thought them more difficult and challenging to design well than large houses of which he, by then, had already done many.

These men weren’t trying to do “exclusive” housing at Narbrook, so much as they were aiming to improve design quality of homes in the town as a whole. Snobbery and sharp class distinctions never really caught on here while housing/planning diversity was avidly being pursued. In that regard, the Progressive Era movement seemed fully active in the town.

Several architect-designed single houses that immediately spring to mind and that were built for Narbrook Park⁵⁴⁴ are also to be seen on Avon Road in Lower Merion where Victor Abel’s house designs are especially numerous starting with #14, also on Stepney Place, Shirley Road, the north end of Grayling Avenue and Iona Avenue’s southernmost block. A walking tour in this vicinity helps us

⁵⁴⁴ #4, #6, #10, #34, #40, and #39.

visualize the benefits to a house's location in a park-like setting versus a more conventional address on a grid of streets. Interestingly several stucco-clad houses in the civic association's tightly budgeted Narbrook Park, when built elsewhere, use other materials. A striking example is Narbrook's #34, all of stucco, that turns up both at #21 Shirley Road and at #5 Iona in Lower Merion Township, each with a front façade entirely of fieldstone but similar otherwise to #34. Another compelling example of outsourcing of housing ideas from Narbrook Park that turn up in another part of town with noteworthy changes involves two of the earliest Narbrook houses, #4 and #6. These reappear side-by-side not once but twice on one block – at #310 and #312 Grayling Avenue and again at #318 and #320 Grayling. Ah, but there are differences. All four of these Grayling units have stone construction on the first floor (a late-19th century tradition in Narberth) and some chimneys. Narbrook Park's #4 likewise has that. But Narbrook's #6 and its #2 facing Windsor Avenue, the first house built, both are stucco-clad, a reminder of the slender budgeting considerations of Narbrook's sponsor, the Narberth Civic Association. Yet two other early Narbrook houses have red tile roofs like those in Forest Hills Gardens, and all the others except one⁵⁴⁵ were built with slate roofs.⁵⁴⁶

Houses—the country house model

By involving D. K. Boyd in Narberth's garden-city experiment, its sponsors were fortunate to hire an architect keenly aware of the latest advances in domestic architecture - the kind of advances needed at Narbrook.

Lately there had been a sharp change in the type of house considered desirable for towns. Around 1905, the country house had become the main prototype for architects designing new houses for built-up areas. Spurred by this change, and helping it along, numerous architects became close observers of the styles and construction methods of old dwellings in country places. Wilson Eyre was very active in this way. So was D. K. Boyd, and John J. Dull was another. At the time, careful traditional craftsmanship still went into construction of new houses. In that turn-of-the-century period, the thinking

⁵⁴⁵ The one exception, Narbrook's #30, a 1923 stone house, started out roofed in synthetic red-and-gray shingle and its curving path from the front door originally was of red brick. The earlier architect-designed red tile roof houses (#9, #33) were exempt from standard belt-tightening because two civic association board members had them built to be offered for sale, and those red tile roofs still proclaim their link to Forest Hills Gardens. By contract, #30's reddish shingles and red brick path gave simply a friendly nod in that direction. The four Grayling Avenue houses outsourced from Narbrook Park were most likely undertaken by Narberth's "unstoppable" developer anxious to play a part in the town fathers' campaign for housing diversity

⁵⁴⁶ Editor's note: The several principal persons involved in the creation of Narbrook Park were: A.E. Wohlert, R.A. Pope, D.K. Boyd, V.D. Abel, Geo. M. Henry, A. J. Loos, John J. Dull, Wallace & Warner. The principal builders were: Smedley, Wm. T. Harris, Atherholt, Alex Shand, Jr.

was not so much about suburbs yet as it was about how to improve cities, something the name “garden-city” itself suggests. Especially in the case of Narberth, as at other places here and in Europe, it was about doing something to interrupt the sameness and regularity of block after block of houses. Another solution to this same problem of monotony being explored elsewhere on a larger scale was to create satellite towns in the form of garden-cities.

By then outmoded both here and in Europe was a type of nineteenth-century house-design that featured servants' quarters in the basement and therefore required a high-level first floor, which interfered with direct and natural access back and forth to any garden the house might have. Yet some new suburban houses were being built in the pre-World War I era using that outmoded high-basement formula, as we shall see.

By contrast, when the country-house idea was adopted for towns, one of the most attractive features of its best examples was having the ground floor of the house at street level. Any number of Narbrook's houses on the flatter, even-numbered (right-hand) side when approached from Windsor Avenue, show this feature. A prime example is #18, designed, picturesquely for his own four-member family by Victor D. Abel of the Boyd firm, and still lived in by Abel's older daughter.⁵⁴⁷ With only three steps up to the front door, this house was built to include a certain type of cellar drain most of these residences do not have, and with a four-hundred foot pipe from cellar to creek. It has no sump pump, and has never had water in the basement. Its attractive position directly on the ground is obvious at a glance. This is made more so by comparing the siting of Abel's house with the placement of the next-door house, at #20.

By an unknown architect obviously unaware of this new country-house style design trend, #20 has a high basement on built-up soil, and the early photographs show that it originally had two severely straight up flights of eight concrete steps to its front door, like many city houses of the period that happened to be on high ground. Victor D. Abel is known to have been strongly opposed to the way its designers built this house to sit up unnaturally high on its perch. Evidently D. K. Boyd's skills as supervising architect were sorely put to the test in this instance, and the home-builder got his own way.

Another thing about this house, one of the earliest to be built at Narbrook, that cuts off easy access to a garden, is the severe “walled-in” look of its L-shaped porch which has six massive rectangular piers supporting its roof and a solid wall rising straight up from the ground level to porch-rail height. Interestingly, its first owner to settle down here after a couple of rapid deed transfers, was a

⁵⁴⁷ Editor's note: Virginia Abel Walsh lived in #18 until 2004.

family of German ancestry, and this house has German mediaeval characteristics front and rear that echo an 1890s renewal movement in Germany for popular art and preservation of regional cultural traditions that was a reaction to the industrial revolution. Except for its porch, which turn-of-the-century German houses seldom had, and its old-fashioned, fairly high basement, the #20 house seems tuned into provincial Southern German attributes such as whitewash, overhanging slate roofs and feudal-period detailing.

Japonisme: in the landscape

For four decades after the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition which had sounded a clarion call for Asian art, the influences of Japanese culture on the Western world were very strong. Just as French or American painters and printmakers in those days looked to Japan to find the authority with which they could create a modern style, so too was a popular attempt made to create a modern style and image for Narberth by turning to Japan. Nature was the basis of that brand of modernity sought here in 1914 (just as nature was also the basis of the Narbrook Park community project of the same period).

In this instance, particular kinds of trees offered a new standard of beauty and perception. People were told in Our Town newspaper of the outstanding way the Japanese had translated these living forms into a decorative system of great beauty at cities like Yokohama. Narberth became mesmerized with Japan's "Royal Flower." The Japanese cherry blossom soon was celebrated as our town tree. It was planted on main thoroughfares, in the Station Circle, in Narbrook Park, around the playground and in front of its community building, on Merion Friends Meeting grounds, and in Penn Valley especially along Braeburn Lane. And the local tradition advanced to the point where tree-bordered avenues became bright with pink, red or white specimens in dozens of varieties.

Also homeowners, encouraged to plant Japanese flowering trees and the Chinese crabapples which mark the high tide of spring blossoms, did so in large numbers, receiving special rates from Danish-born Narberth landscape architect and nurseryman Anton Emil Wohlert who led Narberth's "Japonisme" movement in tandem with the former English actress Gwendolyn Jane Pines (Mrs. Norman Jefferies) whose garden on North Narberth Avenue was a showplace often photographed in the Sunday supplements of Philadelphia newspapers.

Anton E. Wohlert's was not the only local firm involved in gardening and nurserymen's craft - the two other principal ones being Hugh B. Barclay and the longest-lived business of the three, the currently flourishing Albrecht's Nurseries. But in their day, which was before World War II, both Wohlert and Barclay did national advertising of their services and Wohlert's Garden Nurseries in

particular carved out a niche for itself that was nationally significant. Besides, everything Wohlert did on the broader scene seemed to have beneficial repercussions here in Narberth on the civic level because Wohlert was totally immersed in the civic life of the town - both individually and in cooperation with other people. So, Narberth's story in the first half of the twentieth century is closely intertwined with Wohlert's story wrapped around it, just like one of his prized and very rare Chinese long-cluster wisteria specimens which he had introduced to this country.

Earlier Wohlert had been a rail employee-gardener in charge of all station grounds of the Pennsylvania Railroad between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and the branch lines for fifteen years. He arrived in Narberth from Altoona to put down roots and raise a family soon after Alexander Capie Shand, about to become chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad, had transferred here from the same upstate railroad town.

Opening a nursery business here in 1908, Wohlert gained renown as a major popularizer of Japanese ornamental flowering trees in this country, supplying trees to more than fifty parks across the nation by 1926 including Fairmount Park, and doing all the original planting of such trees (182 crabapples) in Anacostia Park, Washington, D. C. Wohlert had begun trafficking in Japanese cherry trees one year after the city of Tokyo made its donation of 2000 cherry trees to the United States in 1912 as a warm gesture of continuing friendship between the two nations, and these were planted in Washington, starting the cherry blossom tradition there. Typically, in a given year during the first few seasons, as in 1916, Wohlert might import a shipment of 600 assorted flowering Japanese cherries of various colors and in twelve varieties including two weeping forms, direct from Yokohama.⁵⁴⁸

But he soon turned away from having imports be the major share of his merchandise. Instead Wohlert very wisely directed his skills to becoming a master at propagating Asian trees and plants from imported stock. In this way, he was able to minimize and avoid altogether problems that were cropping up about quarantines on Asian plant materials then being imported. Thus his tree specimens became available in very wide distribution - sought even by the Japanese. For example, when the Japanese Government decided to present 1500 cherry trees to Fairmount Park for the 1926 Sesquicentennial of American independence, they obtained them, not in the land of their origin, but from Wohlert's Garden Nurseries in Narberth.

Other customers included Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot (first chief of the United States Forest Service) and Mrs. Pinchot at their "Grey Towers" estate at Milford in Pike County. He also

⁵⁴⁸ Our Town, 1/20/1916.

did much replanting at Washington's old cherry blossom sites, and supplied many arboretums including the Brooklyn Botanic Garden which claims the nation's largest collection of Asian flowering trees and a renowned annual cherry blossom festival.

Besides gaining distinction for his offerings of varied magnolias, Wohlert stood in a class by himself when it came to wisteria, some rare varieties of which he is believed to have been the first to import to this country. Specifically, he was responsible for popularizing the rare Japanese long-cluster wisteria in the 1930s, listing sixteen varieties of it in a special publication of his on the subject.

In addition to publishing newsy trade catalogues of his varied nursery stock that contained information about customers and their preferences, Wohlert published occasional magazine articles. Notably one he wrote for National Nurseryman⁵⁴⁹ that placed Narberth on a par with a New England village that has become famous for its lilacs, a Southern city for its crepe myrtles or magnolias, and Charleston for its azaleas, when he explained that Narberth was well on its way to this, having so far planted over a hundred double and single pink, red and white flowering Japanese cherries. He had advised the town: stick with these and combine them with dogwoods for harmony. Wohlert and Mrs. Norman Jefferies, an Arts & Crafts enthusiast with a green thumb, each nurtured Narberth's enthusiasm for Japanese flowering trees to the extent this community started to become a “cherry blossom town” famous for its trees, and was editorialized as such in the Philadelphia Telegraph saluting its adoption of the Japanese cherry as the town tree:

So Narberth has borrowed from the cherry blossom cult. It is hoped that Narberth will become renowned for trees laden with pink blossoms in the springtime, and that Philadelphia will make pilgrimage to the enterprising and beauty-loving suburb.⁵⁵⁰

Moreover, the Asian emphasis of these plantings that originated with Wohlert surely was compatible with an Olmsted-inspired setting such as Narbrook. Several public parks that Frederick Law Olmsted himself designed ... had Japanese gardens added to them harmoniously around the same period Narbrook received its Asian tilt. Narbrook, designed “in the Olmsted tradition,” is unusual in that it had its Japanese component from the outset.

As noted, R. Anderson Pope was the overall planner of Narbrook Park who had the strong affinities with the Olmsted way of doing things. In a way, he had ties, too, with the Orient through his brother Arthur U. Pope, a distinguished Harvard scholar of the art of Persia (Iran and Iraq).

⁵⁴⁹ Our Town, 2/10/1916, p.2.

⁵⁵⁰ Telegraph, its May 5, 1916 edition.

Another staunch supporter of the trend toward “Japonisme” in Narbrook Park undoubtedly would have been its supervising architect D. Knickerbacker Boyd, a resident of Wayne. That Main Line community was well-known at the time for the popularity of what contemporary accounts described as the “annual pilgrimage” to the Japanese gardens of Mr. and Mrs. Robert LeBoutillier while the Japanese iris were in bloom (June).⁵⁵¹ The layout of their grounds featured a series of terraces constructed of concrete and overlaid with sod in a large amphitheater arrangement. A small stream had been dammed to form a lily pond there containing 200 water lilies in bloom. Over the pond was a concrete bridge, and the footpaths leading to it were lined with red-leaf maples. Other attractions included a rose-covered pagoda, azaleas, Canterbury bells, peonies, pansies and of course lots of iris. So, Boyd would have been receptive to Narbrook's plan when he heard it was to include an outdoor amphitheater, a creek, and (as the preliminary plan showed) a pond.

Besides, D. K. Boyd was then completing a commission for a client in nearby Saint David's for a large water-garden on his estate “Walmarthon,” in its heyday one of the Philadelphia area's grandest showplaces with peacocks on the premises (that water-garden still in existence as part of the campus of Eastern College). Boyd's work for that client, leather manufacturer Charles S. Walton, had begun with the design of a fifty-five room, tile-roofed California Mission-style house (1904-13), and continued with a gate lodge, gardener's cottage and greenhouses until 1916. Gardens, therefore, were very much on Boyd's mind when Narberth Civic Association hired him as supervising architect.

Another Asian influence felt at the time in our Narberth neighborhood was door-to-door Japanese salesmen with their suitcases full of Japanese prints that they took out and lined up so that the homeowner could make a selection. (My artist mother was one of their satisfied customers in the mid to late-1920s). This reminded me that during the second half of the nineteenth century, artists had seen art from Japan for the first time. And the lasting impact of their experience was profound - something that came across with particular appeal in the teens and twenties in Narberth. Indeed, the launching of our local cherry blossom tradition and the door-to-door marketing of Japanese woodblock prints in those days represented the tag end of an explosively transforming effect that Japanese aesthetics had upon Parisian and London artists and, in turn, upon American artists, craftsmen and practitioners of landscape art. Why not pick up again the thread of that beautiful “cherry blossom” tradition launched long ago with such heartfelt enthusiasm and renew it as a living symbol of peace between nations and a promise of continuing friendship between the City of Brotherly Love and Asian Lands?

⁵⁵¹ North American, Phila. 6/13/1915, p. 3 (or 8). Le Boutillier's.

Fascinating though it is to consider the influence of Japan, represented by the cherry blossom craze here and in Penn Valley, one must realize that for its main proponent Anton Emil Wohlert, this saga revealed another equally strong, period-enthusiasm widespread in the early- twentieth century. That was his liking for the storybook settings brimful of nostalgia portrayed in the sun-dappled forest glades of illustrator Maxfield Parrish, said to have painted like Salvador Dali without the bad dreams. Landscapes resplendent with the renowned “Parrish blue” had helped make Parrish one of America's most popular artists. Wohlert was referring to that signature trait when he made an eloquent plea to readers of Our Town to visualize those bright blossoms against a “Parrish blue” sky.

That Wohlert statement in praise of Parrish and in support of the ornamental cherry as our town tree suggests that this community-wide planting campaign may be considered one of the first serious attempts anywhere to bring the scenic sense of the illustrator (as distinct from the pictorial imagination of the painter) into a direct interpretation of landscape. Parrish's illustrations were fashionable in the pre-modern era, and have regained an appreciative audience today in the post-modern period, including among art historians. Parrish’s wealth of appealing detail in his paintings was balanced by large free spaces - his cherry blossom trees set against skies that faded from peacock blue overhead to periwinkle splashed with saffron below.

Narberth’s cherry blossom trend, which kept its vigor nearly fifty years, but has been allowed to subside, began before the popularity grew of visiting Valley Forge at dogwood-flowering time. The numbers of these ornamental cherries and crabapples have diminished noticeably across town compared with decades ago. Even at certain focal points where groups of these town tree specimens once stood - most notably at Station Circle and in front of the Community Library - they have been replaced without sufficient thought by other types of trees that have no special symbolic value for Narberth. Initiatives are now being taken by Narbrook Park's residents' association, however, that will restore the focal point for these trees that used to exist on its own turf on the common areas. So, look for some early results soon. Thus, it can be said that while the Asian trees are in bloom in late April, it is still well worth lingering in their vicinity to see them against the incomparable Maxfield Parrish sky of Narbrook Park at dusk. For more efforts have been made thus far to plant new trees of that sort (taking advantage of some of the improved varieties) in the common areas of Narbrook than elsewhere in town.

All the original common-area Asian tree plantings at Narbrook were made by Wohlert free of charge. And another - and probably the rarest - such planting by him was one that he made not long before the Great Depression permanently closed in on him and his business. This extraordinary tree was

a Dawn Redwood,⁵⁵² also called Metasequoia, that Wohlert planted on Narbrook's "lot No. 1" close to Windsor Avenue in the early-to-mid 1930s.⁵⁵³ Today quite a few of these specimens are to be found at arboretums in this country including Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore College, and they remain a favorite tree of nationally known horticulturalist J. Liddon Pennock, Jr. of nearby Meadowbrook. But at the time Wohlert planted this tender seedling, such trees had never been seen in this country. Botanists aware of this tree from studying fossils, had believed it to be extinct. Then an expedition to China found these stately trees flourishing there and returned home to America with seeds. Somehow Wohlert - we have his fully grown. Metasequoia to prove it - soon after they arrived here got hold of a few seeds either from that first batch or from another early-arriving batch of Dawn Redwood seeds from China. Wohlert then grew this tree at his Narberth nursery from one of the seeds and planted it as a mere sapling at Narbrook. Today this handsome Dawn Redwood towers majestically straight up some 60 feet.

Wohlert the nurseryman whose advertisements always listed him as a landscape architect, did all the planting of Narbrook's street trees (as he had been doing with most of the street trees throughout the borough). For Narbrook's street trees, he favored alternating plantings of sycamores and silver maples, interrupted in a few places by sterile horse chestnuts at the northeastern side of the drive and by an arc of a dozen or more small very early-blooming cherries that always made a white splashy statement at curbside on the "horseshoe" hilltop when nothing else was in bloom. Wohlert also favored common Arts and Crafts hedgerows, simple ball-hedge "topiaries," boxwood, cottage-style planting. Wohlert also set in place at the start of this model community most if not all the major trees on Narbrook's residential properties including several species of oaks on his own property (#26), most notably what is now its enormous Willow Oak. Of course, many old oaks, beeches and tulip poplars were retained in place when Narbrook Park was established, all of these along its hilly western length. Wohlert planted and replanted in Narbrook as needed from 1915 until his nursery business collapsed late in the 1930s. Other rare specimens Wohlert planted at #26 Narbrook also included a white Japanese long-cluster Wisteria like the several he had planted in the White House Rose garden, Washington;⁵⁵⁴ also, a rare Tamarac tree that appears evergreen but loses all its leaves in the winter, and tall and narrow like a pair of sentinels guarding the entrance to the main stone path leading to his front door - two Japanese cedars resembling

⁵⁵² "Philadelphians and Their Trees, A special Relationship," by Rotem Bar, July 7, 1985, [Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine](#).

⁵⁵³ Editor's note: The type of tree described by the author was rediscovered in China, as she relates, but in the 1940s; so the dawn redwood on Lot 1 most likely was planted by someone else at a later time as Anton Wohlert died in 1931.

⁵⁵⁴ Interoffice memo from the landscape architect A.H. Hanson to Mr. Finnan, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, dated June 4, 1937 – courtesy U.S. Department of Agriculture, Roland M. Jefferson, botanist "about nine of the rare Japanese wisterias which were planted around the two large trellises in the Rose Garden."

skinny cedars of Lebanon; and there were rare azaleas, some of which survive. On the common in front of his house stood a rare specimen of spreading cherry blossom tree - its flower buds appearing early, suspended like a cloud of tiny pink puffballs until they opened as single flowers of palest pink. A thing of beauty it was impressive to see how well-sited each of his Narbrook ornamental trees was, including his umbrella-like clear red crabapples, and tall white columnar ones with yellow berries tipped with red. Wohlert's crabs did not drop their berries, so when the frost turned them sweet, the birds came and ate them. On the lower banks of the creek, a plum and an apricot tree were of interest mostly to children over the years.

Anton Wohlert also added to that carefully nurtured picturesqueness in other ways. He was a familiar sight during the 1920s on snowy days driving around Narbrook Park in his horse-drawn sleigh, when not in one of his two Pierce Arrow cars.⁵⁵⁵ That was as late as sleighs were seen in Narberth, several milkmen having been the last to use them commercially for local deliveries a decade earlier. Previous to January 1926, it was customary for the borough to send out a horse-drawn plow after each snowstorm and plow just all the sidewalks, leaving the streets snowy for travel by horse and buggy, sleighs and wagons.⁵⁵⁶ Even after the changeover came, some citizens used as their excuse for not shoveling their walks, that they were "waiting for the horse."⁵⁵⁷ That expression soon became history when the new Burgess Henry A. Frye immediately enforced the new rule (See⁵⁵⁸) But it was Wohlert and his sleigh that stuck in my father's memory for fifty years after he last heard the bells and saw the graceful sleigh skimming around Narbrook's drives in the 1920s.

Wohlert's efforts to plant cherry blossoms on nearby Penn Valley roadways were facilitated by the fact that he and a powerhouse in Philadelphia publishing for nearly fifty years, Curtis Publishing Company head Walter Deane Fuller, were the driving force that started Penn Valley Civic Association, and renamed the district adjacent to Narberth Penn Valley, which previously had been called Fairview.⁵⁵⁹ This civic group commissioned the decorative Penn Valley markers featuring a silhouetted figure of William Penn with his walking stick, a symbol still visible on some major roads in that area of the township. Not surprisingly, Wohlert became as civically active in Penn Valley as he had been - and continued to be - in Narberth.

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with Virginia Abel (#18 Narbrook Park).

⁵⁵⁶ Interview with Mrs. William Webb, housewife and clubwoman, at her house, October 28, 1981.

⁵⁵⁷ Our Town, January 16, 1926, p.1.

⁵⁵⁸ Editor's note: the author had intended to complete this.

⁵⁵⁹ Phone conversation with Paul Wohlert, December 8, 1979.

The Artists' Colony Aspect⁵⁶⁰

The artistic influences of the time when Narbrook was founded were the last vestiges of the fashionable pre-modern ones – Pre-Raphaelite earnestness with its interest in decorative medievalism, adopted in widespread recoil against the effects of the Industrial Revolution. “Japonisme” as we have seen that offered a new standard of beauty, and an other-worldly atmospheric tonalism associated with the artist James A. McNeil Whistler. Certainly, the strivings of the first generation of artists involved in Narbrook represented much that American and French modernist painters would revolt against in the period just before World War I.

Narbrook's houses were never occupied exclusively by artists, nor was it ever intended that they should comprise an artists' colony. Nevertheless the “colony” idea did cling to the settlement in a rather vague way. For some artists inevitably were drawn to live at Narbrook by its very garden-city character or by its Arts & Crafts features. For that reason, Narbrook very nearly became an artists' colony in its earliest years by gathering its own momentum in that direction, even though it never sponsored its own utopian community of craft workers, as Delaware County's Rose Valley community had done. Narberth's only Arts & Crafts “work house” for craftsmen at the time Narbrook was founded was located several blocks away in a studio for hand weavers conducted under the direction of⁵⁶¹

Narbrook Park Improvement Association

The Narbrook Park Improvement Association is a nonprofit corporation whose members are the owners of residences in Narbrook Park. The Association owns and is obliged to maintain and improve the common grounds and roads located within Narbrook Park.⁵⁶²

The annual meeting of the Association is held on the first Monday in February, when the officers and Board of Directors for the coming year are elected, reports of the President, the Treasurer and the various committees are presented, the new budget is submitted, and the annual assessment of dues upon the members is determined. The annual dues assessment provides the primary source of funds which enable the Association to carry out its functions.

⁵⁶⁰ Editor's note: Even though this section was listed in Vicky's list of completed sections for Chapter 6, this particular version was found in a file marked “Chapter 6 rejects – Artists' colony aspect of Narbrook.”

⁵⁶¹ Editor's note: Here ends the text. Whatever existed has been lost.

⁵⁶² Editor's note: Included in the “common grounds” are the grass strips along the edge of the road - between the road and the sidewalk in front of each property.

The officers – President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer – and the Board of Directors are responsible for conducting the affairs of the Association between meetings of the members. For example, the President has the specific duty to maintain ownership signs at all entrances and exits of the service drives and to erect barriers to close off all service drives on July 4 of each year. Similarly, the Board of Directors must appoint the members of the three permanent committees: (1) Roads; (2) Landscape; and (3) Auditing.⁵⁶³ Members should contact one of the officers of the other three Board members on all matters involving Narbrook Park business or property.

Living Together

Situated in Narberth, which is itself a rare example of a small town with the qualities and continuity of “community” so often absent from today’s urban world, Narbrook Park is an area of friendly neighbors, quiet and natural beauty. Visitors often speak of it as an oasis.

To preserve and protect our lovely location, the members of the Narbrook Park Improvement Association have traditionally consented to a few principles that guide us in living together. Some of those principles are described here.

When property owners landscape, or add buildings, fences, or other appurtenances, they try to do so with an eye toward preserving the beauty and openness of the “commons,” the central, park-like area along Indian Creek (called Stepping-Stone Brook on some old maps).

Property owners accept responsibility for the care of the “commons.” Major jobs, such as grass cutting, leaf removal, snow removal, tree trimming and removal, and road maintenance are contracted out and paid for in the budget. Much else remains to be done, and over the years residents have been generous in taking care of these other jobs. Each spring and fall, for example, there are park clean-up days when all able-bodied residents, both young and old, join in a wide range of activities. Following the work, there is a picnic and in the spring a meeting of the membership is held.

Many individuals, either alone or in small groups, do a great deal to keep our “commons” nice. Activities include everything from pruning and fertilizing shrubbery, removing debris from the creek to digging up crab grass, taking off old rhododendron blooms, and protecting plants in the winter. In addition, all residents are asked to have the leaves cleaned from their own yards by the time the fall clean-up of the “commons” is completed by the firm hired to do it.

⁵⁶³ Editor’s note: In 2018, the By-laws were revised to change the permanent committees to (1) Landscape; (2) Stream and (3) Capital Improvements.

Everyone tries to protect the Park from abuse by calling attention to damaging or potentially hazardous activities. Littering the creek or grounds, breaking off tree limbs by injudicious climbing, thoughtless damaging of plants, and driving or parking on the grass are all things that none of us wants to take place, regardless of whether the guilty party is or is not a resident. Furthermore, games that create unacceptable levels of noise, or which might prove harmful to the participants, others, or the “commons” itself are to be avoided.

The property owners of Narbrook Park want to be good neighbors, and hope the other residents of Narberth will be able to enjoy the Park. If such use (for example, uncontrolled dogs, motorcycles, athletic groups, or noisy vehicles) creates a disturbance in the Park and causes concern to a resident, he or she should speak to the officers of the Park Association who are authorized to handle the matter.⁵⁶⁴

Block parties, other traditions

Narbrook Park has the town’s oldest block-party tradition, a seasonal activity going back about fifty years. Held annually on a Saturday during the month of May, this popular event is an outgrowth - as so many similar festivities of this kind also are in Philadelphia neighborhoods - of voluntary cleanup of this “block,” after which the residents rewarded themselves with an outdoor party. By contrast to Philadelphia’s three thousand after-dark summertime block parties a year, and those held in other neighborhoods such as Narberth's Wynnedale Road which celebrated its fourteenth annual block party in 1995 with a Sunday afternoon/evening celebration in June, as well as Forrest Avenue's and Conway Avenue's which are Saturday night affairs, Narbrook's event always takes place at Saturday midday. To honor both the borough centennial and Narbrook's own eightieth birthday, Narbrook's 1995 block party lasted all day and featured ensemble performances in the outdoor amphitheater under the direction of resident Peter Grove including the debut of a play interpreting the history of Narbrook Park written by Narbrook's children. The block-party tradition goes back fifty years also in Philadelphia, which has required permits during the past thirty years. This allows firefighters and police to know which streets are closed. A permit is not required for Narbrook's private road.

A list of tasks the neighbors' association hopes to accomplish during the morning work-session is circulated here in advance, and this encourages a high turnout of residents. They are welcome to invite picnic guests. Honorary Narbrook members are also invited to this block-party picnic. One of the two

⁵⁶⁴ Editor’s note: The foregoing was an early iteration of the informational “Narbrook Park Brochure” that is given to each new resident. The “Origins” Section was written by Jonathan Keim and the “Living Together” Section was written by Daisy Roberts. Both were Narbrook Park Residents. The information was provided to them by the author.

general meetings each year of the Narbrook Park Improvement Association is always held at the conclusion of this picnic.

Shared fun is part of what keeps Narbrook a real community, and one tradition even older at Narbrook than its block party features a couple of potluck suppers annually held since the beginning of this community, typically at Halloween and in the Christmas season. Caroling [was] another Narbrook tradition. In the 1920s, a large planted evergreen tree on the common below the bridge was lighted, its electric cord stretching to Mahl's house, #20. For caroling night 1993, a new tradition began: lighting up the entire Narbrook curving roadway with hundreds of lumière candles, each set on the ground in sand. The Narbrook block party began early in a sporadic fashion and was formalized after World War II, continuing down to the present time. During the 1920s and early-1930s, Maypole dancing and a Fourth of July parade for children were popular at Narbrook. Lately there has been some inclination to revive the children's Maypole event. The willingness to work together on such projects is as alive as ever

Narbrook Park-its meaning, including as a civic association-sponsored effort

Narberth Garden, as it was originally called, is especially significant because it was and is a successful realization of a strikingly progressive idea – a planned community combining open land conservation with houses built for middle-class people of modest means on small lots clustered together. The development took shape as a residential community after being proposed by the burgess of the municipality, planned by a civic association, and built by subscriptions to that group's carefully monitored plan. This garden suburb concept was designed and influenced by several prominent housing and planning reformers who resolutely envisioned improved living conditions for average citizens in the new suburbs close to American industrial cities.

The sources and precedents for the Narberth Garden design were mostly British and included, not the prosperous upper-class romantic suburbs of the nineteenth century but self-sufficient new English towns, as envisioned by Ebenezer Howard's garden city ideas, and carried out in practical terms for the first time in the garden city of Letchworth in 1903, as well as American suburban housing such as New York's Forest Hills Gardens (1909) and Maryland's Roland Park (1890-1920) both designed to be near city centers. Although quite small (a mere fourteen acres), Narberth Garden was one of the best early-twentieth-century American adaptations of progressive planning ideals. And since suburbs as we know them today are a blend of the two traditions of a reformist type and a slightly later middle-class or working-class orientation, these attributes can be studied in an especially pure form in Narberth Garden.

For Philadelphia's Main Line, Narbrook Park represented an attempt to transfer to the problem of town planning, a number of ideas that were already alive in the minds of American architects at the time. Narbrook - modeled on Forest Hills Gardens - and realized through the direct participation of a city planner and several architects well-known in the region, and with the forceful impression it made upon architect Robert Venturi in the 1950s freshly returned home from Borne to the Main Line, occupies a key position in the history of suburban architecture and design before World War I, and in the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted, its multi-faceted significance being something increasingly that historians seem ready to recognize.

During the second decade of the twentieth century, while the discipline of city planning was emerging, a mixture of features from two separate movements of that day, Arts & Crafts and Garden-City idea tended to be very evident in projects of this kind both in this country and abroad. And Narbrook was no exception. While Narbrook was being established, emphasis seemed to fall on one aspect and then another from these two movements back and forth.

Narberth's most ambitious residential project to date – one with ties to Forest Hills Gardens in Queens, NY and that, in effect, made Narberth for a time a laboratory for research in new ways of thinking about social space – was Narbrook Park. Projects this important don't happen without the leadership of public officials. And this one was supported by the town's newly elected burgess (mayor) starting in 1914. The Narberth Civic Association carried it from start to finish, with the assurance of continued leadership by A. J. Loos. So the backing for this initiative had the municipality's support, but it also had rarified thinking reflecting ideas of some of the best minds and community planners of their day, which is a kind of aristocracy in its own way.

Model communities come in all sizes and shapes. And Narberth has one that, although very small, is and always has been, a rarity. Narberth Garden (Narbrook Park) was one of the very few pre-World War I communities able to assimilate and interpret the complexity of new forms and ideas in progressive movements in planning, architecture, and housing reform that had crossed the Atlantic and were just then taking root in America. Putting an American stamp on those notions was an important part of their adaptataion. So it is especially useful to trace where in this country and abroad Narberth looked for inspiration and guidance in undertaking a project of that kind, and why the project was deemed such a necessity.

Probably the buzz started locally about this subject as early as 1908 or 1909. The pieces certainly were falling into place by then. And indeed Narberth might as well have been on the front lines of the major 1909 debate at the first National Conference on City Planning in Washington, D.C. – so close

were that event's main issues to the ones Narberth already had been agonizing over that same year. For one thing, Narberth wondered which to concentrate on – upgrading the physical appearance of the town or upgrading the circumstances of daily life for people living here? And on another point, was problem-solving a matter of merely controlling the physical fabric of this community by means of codes and regulations, or was it necessary to go deeper and fight against the evils of land speculation and exploitation that were the root cause of Narberth's galloping threat of congested living conditions – doing so in the most effective way, by government intervention?

Narberth already had several temporary barracks that housed large numbers of construction workers in double and triple-decker dormitory beds upstairs over stables for dray-horses. And it already had a taste of true urban density with its controversial Brick Row housing block. But the most worrisome element was the new developer in town starting to buy up every available lot for flat-roofed houses and bungalows in row after row. There were additional plans then on the books to pave over a marshy area with a grid of streets to feature still more closely set housing. What to do?

Yet it went against the American grain to adopt government intervention as a solution. After all, it later took a global conflict and clearly demonstrated extreme need for housing related to aiding wartime production efforts before the federal government stepped in during World War I, and it did so only “for the duration.” As for government-assisted planning before that, it was very, very rare at any level of government in this country even though such matters were much discussed at the above-mentioned first National Conference on City Planning, the consensus being that civic and commercial groups should not have to shoulder this responsibility, but instead it should devolve on public commissions set up for this purpose. In other words, such initiatives should be guided by government, but just how this should be done was agreed upon not at all.

That was the energized context in which a newly elected Narberth burgess seized an opportunity to launch a “Garden City” planning project to address fast-growing congestion problems on the borough's north side. Significantly he did not speak of adopting a one-shot comprehensive plan for the town (which would have echoed certain, by then accepted, goals of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.), but instead suggested that this was the dynamic first installment in a process of community-wide improvements that would be ongoing, as if such an activity represented a standard function of borough government. In this view, he was precisely on target with the latest thinking of reformers. For such a piecemeal approach to town planning actually was on the cutting edge of new theories of city planning then being set forth by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. who led that still-new profession throughout the

1910s decade and who also chaired the National Conference on City Planning, a firebrand group and steady force that got the planning profession off to a strong start.

Interestingly, the burgess' very next move in getting the "Garden City" started was to announce the launching of a civic association entrusted with taking charge of the entire task of creating and supervising this new project. Thus, in terms of adhering to procedures recommended at the 1909 National Conference on City Planning, Burgess Henry was taking two steps forward (by offering guidance from the borough to undertake a planning proposal he made as its newly elected burgess) and one step backward by assigning that complicated planning task to a civic association for realization. Government intervention lasting such a brief time - even if, as Narberth was in 1914, scripted to reappear whenever planning in the town needed revision - is a clear indication of the conflicted nature of the way local municipalities in the pre-World War I era dealt with operating in a gray area, lest their planning initiatives be perceived as obstructing free enterprise in a nation where market-driven real estate development was king.

How Narberth actually got to this point of letting advanced town-planning methods intervene to address middle-class housing problems (and a few working-class touches were added to the mix as well) requires taking a close look at what was happening as several new civic leaders moved into town just after the turn of the twentieth century. First an impressive YMCA facility was built here in the heart of the downtown commercial district after one of the most dynamic civic leaders in the town's history settled here and launched that effort, followed soon after by his becoming prime mover of our "Garden City" initiative, as he called it at the outset.

Meanwhile, construction of a handsome house (1908) for another new, civically active resident signaled the advent of the town's finest Arts and Crafts-style dwelling. Its leafy respite was thoughtfully based on the belief that scenic pleasure, in a hilly corner setting in full view would have a salutary effect on passersby. Located near Brick Row, this was Narberth's first building of many designed by prominent American housing architect David Knickerbacker Boyd.⁵⁶⁵ In his employ that year as a draftsman was a young recent Drexel Institute architectural graduate about to embark on a long career in the public housing field, and for whom the work that he and Boyd would soon do for a model community in Narberth was to serve as a major stepping stone. Initially looking around here while erecting that very sophisticated house, the two men very quickly would have grasped the severity of the situation Narberth faced in trying to stimulate a well-balanced type of housing growth.

⁵⁶⁵ His many professional activities were putting Boyd in the national limelight that year.

Consequently, one of them, very likely Victor D. Abel alone or acting in tandem with Boyd, became the lightning rod for the subsequent creation of Narberth Garden. All the known factors between 1908 and the burgess' early-1914 announcement of the project's launching, point that way.

Quite significantly among these, by the time Abel left Boyd's office (where his tenure after 1908 was very brief) to work for Wilson Eyre of Philadelphia, that celebrated Arts and Crafts architect had already been designing nine red-roofed houses (1911) for Forest Hills Gardens) the American standard-bearer among Progressive early-twentieth century middle-class communities in the Borough of Queens, New York. Then by 1914, Abel returned to Boyd's office, this time as a partner of that older architect. That was a fast rise for Abel, fueled no doubt by the fact that the Boyd firm in 1914 landed the important job of supervising the architecture of Narberth's new garden suburb.

So, Abel's fresh familiarity with Forest Hills Gardens housing and the fact that Boyd was a consultant to that major garden suburb all helped to cement Boyd and Abel's new working relationship with Narberth Civic Association. Also, Abel gained invaluable contacts helping that group book an impressive list of city planners and architects to address citizens on why the garden-city idea was right for Narberth. Professionals now took him seriously. Ebenezer Howard, on whose philosophy Letchworth in England, the world's first Garden City was based, and the two English architects⁵⁶⁶ who prepared its master plan and designed some of its houses, had led the way. So Victor Abel did what was expected of a garden-city architect. In 1917, he made his own commitment by moving into the Narbrook house he had designed for himself there while supervising the Narbrook Park project.⁵⁶⁷ With a growing family, he was putting down roots. It was also a key career move for that same year Abel became deputy chief of design and eventually chief of the housing division of the United States Shipping Board's Emergency Fleet Corporation for the construction of large-scale planned industrial communities by the federal government to house wage-earners working in the war industry in various cities, most notably Fairview (1918) and Yorkship.⁵⁶⁸ Abel's experience as that federal Agency's deputy director design for working-class housing, all of which conformed in general to garden-city principles was to have a trickle-

⁵⁶⁶ Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker

⁵⁶⁷ Editor's note: As indicated elsewhere, this house was #18.

⁵⁶⁸ Design of this nearby housing in which Abel was involved featured 1400 living units on 225 acres, built at Camden, New Jersey for the workers at the New York Ship Building Company there, using the highest quality materials including (as at Narberth) slate roofs. Originally called Yorkship Garden Village, this community is now regarded as the foremost example in America of vision about progressive planning, architecture and housing-reform movements serving the needs of the working class. The individual chiefly responsible for its excellence was the Emergency Fleet Corporation's design chief Frederick L. Ackerman, a leading Garden-City architect in America (whose deputy and successor Abel was). Among the people on Ackerman's and Abel's staff was the eventual planner (with Clarence Stein) of Radburn, New Jersey (1928) which people often mention as having similarities to Narbrook Park.

down effect here in Narberth. For as World War I ended and as the construction of Narbrook again picked up under Boyd and Abel supervision (and with Abel still living on site), the drive to complete it became noticeably more democratic. Thus at least one working-class family bought land in it and developed a pattern-book house speculatively – members of that family long afterward declaring themselves intensely proud of their hands-on participation in that community-building experience. Also, a civic-minded heiress living on a nearby estate built a retirement home here for her head gardener and his wife. And a local shopkeeper built himself bungalow, perhaps using a pattern.

England's garden-cities were a hot topic in this country when Narberth launched its own Garden City project. The Philadelphia suburbs already had produced a highly ambitious Arts and Crafts utopian community, Rose Valley in a rural section of Delaware County - the settlement patterned after those found in England. But a garden-city? That was a different concept, stemming from quite another philosophy though possessing hybrid elements. And no sponsoring individual or group in this metropolitan area had yet founded one.⁵⁶⁹

The urban design principles of Garden Cities reached back in time, long before the Progressive Era. One predecessor was the Cemetery Design movement of the 1830s in this country that linked ideas about scenery, design of the landscape, architecture and outlook in such a way that this combination soon seemed applicable to cities. But it took Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., one of the most important urban theorists of the nineteenth century, to work through that material and reconstitute it into a comprehensive process for creating a new and more openly built environment in cities. Then along came the City Beautiful movement, which was actually a political movement involving town planners, politicians and alert citizens, and that had some trickle-down effects in Narberth in the pre-World War I period by extending and refining some of Olmsted's legacy regarding the natural landscape as it was applied particularly at Narbrook. This movement had after effects too, felt in the eventual construction of the adjacent community building and town's main playground.

Quite essential to Narberth's model community project were the ideas of the social visionary Ebenezer Howard who, though often misunderstood, is now enjoying a revival of interest and is currently acclaimed by some as having been the twentieth century's single most important force in urban planning. His radical theories were not just about where to construct new cities, but about establishing a

⁵⁶⁹ Editor's note: In her other writings on Narbrook Park, Victoria Donohoe wrote: During the second decade of the twentieth century, while the discipline of city planning was emerging, a mixture of features from two separate movements of that day – the Arts & Crafts and Garden-City movements - tended to be very evident in projects of this kind. True to form, that blend of Arts & Crafts and Garden-City features occurs here prominently in Narbrook Park as well.

society based on voluntary cooperation among people living and working in small self-governed communities. To achieve his Garden City, Howard seems to have fused two separate types of late-nineteenth century experimental communities - the utopian cooperative ideal and workers' village, set up paternalistically by an industrialist. There were quite a few such communities abroad and some in this country. Howard's Garden City, far from being anti-modern was a new and healthy form of dispersed housing that still could boast urban density's positive attributes. Howard's ideas remained central to British town planning in a very practical way throughout the twentieth century.

Howard's theories as they applied to his - and the world's - first Garden City, Letchworth (begun in 1903) in England, had some close parallels to Narberth's small project. For one thing, his plan and public services for Letchworth were regarded as a framework for others to develop. The private company founded to launch Letchworth did not propose to build the town, but to provide a well-formed skeleton. Also noteworthy, while the Narberth town fathers and their hired professionals were looking to Letchworth for guidance, that new English "city" surrounded by its large agricultural belt was still very small (its population did not reach ten thousand until 1981, and later tripled in size). Then too, in the pre-World War I period, its voluntary restrictions and aesthetic control process that Narbrook emulated were already working well.

And because the Garden City movement wanted to merge social classes, it tried to play down any paternalistic character in its first project and seek diversity among its residents, even though Letchworth was of course the creation of a private landlord. This leveling attitude too had its counterpart in Narbrook which, as it came together, was egalitarian in a number of ways - chief among these being that, from the start, it sought support from the entire community.

Significantly, the belief of Raymond Unwin, a celebrated pioneer (with Barry Parker) of both Garden City architecture and town planning and very active at Letchworth, in the social purpose of the Arts and Crafts movement, with its acceptance of the self-contained rural village as a community ideal) is a viewpoint that Narbrook's designers Pope, Boyd and Abel certainly did share. For both the picturesque Arts and Crafts houses and that movement's more fundamentalist re-creation of the simpler vernacular cottage are shown to advantage not only at Letchworth, but here at Narbrook also.

There was another recent precedent - this one on our shores - for what Narberth wanted to do, meanwhile. And the heady example of that large garden-city within-a-city known as Forest Hills Gardens in Queens, New York, sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation, undoubtedly made the decisive difference in Narberth's being able to realize its own project from start to finish. Set up along surprisingly similar lines, although certainly on a much smaller scale and with significant differences,

those two independent projects are nonetheless linked in a number of ways. Both, after all, have played a significant role because of their ability to assimilate and interpret the complexity of new forms and ideas – many of the same forms and ideas - in such a fashion as to make them accessible to the general public.

Certainly the purpose in creating these two projects does not conflict - Goliath in this case serves as an inspiration for David. Forest Hills Gardens in Queens, New York was launched as a business investment of the Russell Sage Foundation, a nonprofit philanthropic group named for the great American financier. Begun in 1909 as a venture conducted for a fair profit, houses were built, sold and rented, and lots sold under protective restrictions. The foundation pursued this as a business investment with an educational purpose, whereas Narberth Civic Association never pushed Narbrook's "business investment" or "educational," potential, instead promoting its project chiefly as a means to enhance the town.

Mrs. Russell Sage, by then widowed, had pointedly advocated better and more attractive suburban housing for persons of modest means. Thus at Queens she sought results akin to the Garden Cities of England, with greenery and flowers, nearby playgrounds and recreational facilities, yet costing no more. Mrs. Sage hated row upon row of rectangular blocks in the suburbs. She wanted buildings to be durable all right, but situated in more healthful and attractive surroundings. She counted on Forest Hills Gardens to demonstrate that more tasteful surroundings and open space pay off in suburban development, believing this would encourage imitators. And she was convinced that the Forest Hills project, by seeking more economical methods of marketing land, would deliver an attractive income to the foundation. For theirs was not to be a pseudo-charitable plan. The Russell Sage people realized that a give-away program would only cripple the scope of the Foundation efforts by wasting its capital. And this, in turn, would thwart the group's goals by keeping back social advancement. Neither was its project intended as a suburb for laborers.

The way Forest Hills Gardens was put together left a footprint for Narbrook Park to follow in other respects as well. Two distinct corporations birthed Forest Hills Gardens – the Russell Sage Foundation holding the purse strings and the Sage Foundation Homes Company planning and executing the work. The latter unit appointed a development committee consisting of persons considered pre-eminent in their line notably landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and architect Grosvenor Atterbury (as supervising architect), chosen because they knew the situation of such developments both in this country and abroad. Keynotes of the enterprise were to be "careful and comprehensive initial layout," "attractive, substantial and durable buildings" and "experienced management" - the latter provided by the president of Baltimore's Roland Park Company, an Olmsted-inspired model community

layout designed by George E. Kessler.⁵⁷⁰ It may be Narberth people liked the idea Roland Park had “experienced management,” as that Baltimore project was a popular subject talked about here at the time.

How does this framework jibe with the way Narberth Civic Association set up the ground rules for its own sponsorship of a model community? Actually, the working arrangement was fairly close, with everything in both projects done by committee. Also, experienced designers were chosen here as well. The principals involved in the Narbrook project - the planner and the landscape architect, the supervising architects and at least three other supporting players - were very conversant with the Forest Hills Gardens project and either had some link with it or with the Russell Sage Foundation.

As for location, both developments were on a “main line” of a railroad - both approximately the same distance from the center of a major city, Forest Hills Gardens having built its own rail station while Narbrook is located near one. So, in both cases, location was a factor to ensure success, as both places were convenient to the city and capable of being properly laid out so as to meet the needs of people of moderate means even though land so close to the city tended to command a high price. As at Narbrook, lots of various sizes were put on private sale at Forest Hills Gardens (starting in 1911) so that buyers might build their own house in harmony with the general plan of development and under the guiding hand of the supervising architect.

Once inside these two projects, the visitor sees curving streets. And provisions were made from the start in both instances for open space. Also, at both Forest Hills Gardens and Narbrook, a solid outlay was made on roads, water supply, sewers and much of the landscape work, before house construction began. This helped potential buyers get a better idea of the appearance of the property when finished. At Forest Hills Gardens, an agency was to be created to maintain streets and other landscapes for general use, and Narberth arranged for committees to take care of such matters also. Those streets have never been dedicated - either to the Borough of Queens or to Narberth Borough.

One of the uncommon advantages Forest Hills Gardens had over typical suburban developments was that its sponsor, acting through the operational means it set up, was always ready to advance dollars when needed, for example to pay cash for things because it was not looking for big profits. Money of course was none too plentiful in the Narberth Civic Association coffers, so it had to make various public appeals. To their credit, neither group was ready to accept the notion of failure in a project of this sort.

⁵⁷⁰ Editor’s note: The layout and governance of Roland Park, a National Historic District, are very similar to those of Narbrook Park.

Commercial failure in such a venture would mean to the Russell Sage Foundation that its educational policy would miscarry. The decision to concentrate on a project like this would only justify itself to the Sage Foundation if wider ramifications were to be felt. Therefore, its chief success would be measured by its example to other investors on the regional and national scene. In those terms, a chip off the old block like Narberth Garden would seem to represent tangible proof of Forest Hills Gardens' success.

So, in that sense, Narberth Gardens' start several years after Forest Hills Gardens represented especially good timing for a passing of the torch to a very willing smaller community. And a young architectural draftsman, as we have noted, seems to have been most responsible for lifting the Narberth project off the ground and seeing to it that it was placed in the hands of persons able to take action on it and carry it through to completion. Actually, at the time this proposal was made to our community leaders, good ideas had a way of rising to the top in a climate of openness to creative proposals, and the whole town benefited from that fortunate receptivity.

And furthermore, for Victor Abel to have taken the initiative to make such a proposal would have been consistent with the official explanation at the outset that the newly elected burgess George M. Henry was responsible for the idea. This does not mean that Henry necessarily originated the idea himself. More than likely he gave it his full backing after the problem-solving plan had been proposed to him at a time when he was, during his 1913 election campaign, searching for appropriate goals and challenging tasks for his first term of public office. This would be a likely sequence of events, especially so if the idea were proposed to him by an architect or architects. For architects would not be eager to take credit for proposing such a project, and instead would be interested chiefly in finding an appropriate backer for it. In George M. Henry, they found the "perfect fit." For, as it turned out, Henry became the project's leading supporter, both governmentally and in the high-profile civic sense - a counterbalance to the guiding spirit that citizen A. J. Loos provided for Narbrook quietly and in the private sector only, on behalf of the civic association.

Chapter 6 - Narberth between World Wars - (1920-1945)

Red Cross	302
Farmerette Movement	302
American Legion Post.....	303
Home Guard - Between the Wars	304
Boy Scouts	305
Girl Scouts.....	306
Businessmen Organized	307
Independent Republicanism or Politics Between the Two World Wars	310
Public School in Narberth.....	312
The Schools – 1922 Loan Question: to Build?	313
Merger Talk During Home Rule.....	315
“Iron Man” Stites – A Great Depression Casualty	318
Two Icons – Two Luminaries: Albert Barnes and Bert Bell	322
Mulieres.....	324
Narberth Volunteer Emergency Relief (“NVER”)	326
Boys’ Club and the Early Church Teams	330
Narberth Girls Club.....	331
The Movies	332
Narberth Civic Association – [Third] – (1940-).....	336
World War II.....	338
Volunteer Medical Service	339
Fourth of July	341
Tennis and Golf.....	344
Basketball.....	346
Baseball - (Main Line League Baseball)	349
The 1920s.....	349
The 1930s.....	351
The 1940s.....	354
Careers of some of the Narberth players.....	357
Frictions: July Fourth Mayhem.....	359

Red Cross

No sooner had the Eastern Main Line Branch of the American Red Cross been organized at Bryn Mawr in March 1917, shortly before the United States declared war against Germany, than Narberth organized its own unit almost simultaneously, chaired by the young matron Edith G. Austin Stites. Daughter of prominent Philadelphia newspaperman Howard Austin, Mrs. Stites was aloof and had a patrician air that sharply contrasted with the populist leanings of her politician husband Fletcher W. Stites. If anything, that “aristocratic air” of hers was almost the norm among young women from Narberth and vicinity who volunteered significant amounts of their time for the Red Cross either here or abroad in World Wars I and II. The initial plans of the Red Cross Narberth branch were to have classes in first aid and home nursing with fifteen to twenty members in each class. Also, a junior unit was functioning here by June.

By close coordination, local community groups often were able to maximize interest in a special event by staging it at a location that also would gain from increased public awareness. For example, a well-advertised large garden Fete to benefit the **Narberth branch of the American Red Cross** on a Saturday afternoon and evening in mid-July 1917 was held in open land bordered by different sets of small-to-medium new tract houses in an area referred to as a small Triangle Colony (bounded by Price, Narberth and Montgomery Avenues) — housing construction being a high-priority item on the town agenda at the time, and thus the need to call attention to it even in wartime. Also very active then were a number of Narberth women who belonged to the Red Cross Motor Corps. Narberth’s Needlework Guild Unit cooperated by devoting one meeting a month each to Red Cross work, and the Women’s Community Club pitched in regularly as well. Narberth’s Red Cross room⁵⁷¹ at the YMCA closed its doors in January 1919, its work completed.

Farmerette Movement

Another patriotic effort in which Narberth women had a strong presence was the Farmerette Movement,⁵⁷² aimed at encouraging the production of farm produce as an economy measure on the home front. The local leader was Mary K. Gibson, who organized her task force of Farmerette volunteers to work land on her estate that she set aside for this purpose as a means of following

⁵⁷¹ Our Town, 8 January 1919.

⁵⁷² Main Line Chronicle, 15 March 1956. “Story of Maybrook” by Betty Floyd about the Women’s Land Army, etc. and Mary K. Gibson.

nationwide exhortations about belt-tightening measures. Some men were also involved, but mostly it was a women's project.

Meanwhile, the Wynnewood Farm Unit of the National League for Women Service left nothing to chance; it had girls available for farm work at twenty-five cents an hour working an eight-hour day. Almost certainly Miss Gibson's 53-acre Maybrook property with its wetland, woods and open space was that above-mentioned farm-unit affiliate of the National League for Woman Service. Another view of her sponsorship of such agricultural activity, however, is that her estate was "virtually taken over" by the Women's Land Army in order to train as many as 60 live-in "farmerettes" at a time, who then helped Pennsylvania farmers both in the field and with their livestock after their regular farm hands had gone off to fight the Kaiser's armies.

American Legion Post

The Harold D. Speakman Post, No. 356, American Legion, was founded in 1919.⁵⁷³ This facility was named in honor of a young Essex Avenue bachelor engaged to be married who enlisted in the Medical Corps soon after war was declared, and rapidly became a sergeant. Wanting a more active role, he transferred to the infantry, and when his 112th Pennsylvania Regiment embarked for France, he received his lieutenant's commission, serving with the Twenty-Eighth Infantry Division. For hours a fierce battle raged when American troops were ordered to capture the little town of Fismes which the Germans had re-taken. Speakman's company was sent forward in a final effort to capture the position. He was charging ahead of his men when a German shell landed in the midst of a group of Americans, killing Speakman and several of his men in early September 1918. They were lost in the great conflict raging in the fields of Flanders and Picardy. Brother-in-law of long-time Narberth school board chairman C. H. McCarter, Speakman, from an old Chester County family and educated at Philadelphia public schools, was the first Narberth man killed in action in World War I. An oil portrait of him is on permanent display in the Legion hall at the Community building.

The Speakman Post had many a local Civil War veteran in the line of march in its early Memorial Day (formerly called Decoration Day) parades, and sometimes Grand Army of the Republic veterans visiting relatives here in the borough would join the march, as for example when Dr. O. J. Snyder's father visited from out of state. By 1931, G.A.R. Civil War vets living here in the town had dwindled to three. Of these, Henry Doll of 215 Iona Avenue became known as the last Civil War vet on

⁵⁷³ Editor's note: See the more expansive section in Chapter 3 about Sergeant Speakman – "Class Conflict in the Military."
Chapter 6 Page 303

the Main Line. At the time of his death in 1947 at the age of ninety-nine, he was believed to have been the sole survivor of the Civil War Navy. This member of Admiral Farragut's fleet had seen service in the battle of Mobile Bay and the capture of the city of Mobile. He had enlisted in the Navy as a powder boy at age sixteen, and also served aboard the gunboat "Sebago." This Legion post removed the memorial from its first location in front of the Windsor Avenue Community Building in order to build – at a site set apart for it – Narberth's current War Memorial (1937).

This Legion post has from the start been active in civic affairs, bestowing prizes upon public school pupils and each year giving a good citizenship award to a local resident. It also launched a building and loan association (headed by Harry A. Simpson). As Narberth had about 200 servicemen in World War I (193 names appear on our war memorial tablet), a Ladies Auxiliary of the Speakman post was formed in 1920. (See also Chapter Ten for update on activities.)

Home Guard - Between the Wars

Also in response to worsening world conditions, Narberth at a town meeting in April 1917, organized its own large unit of the **Home Defense Reserve Association**.⁵⁷⁴ This group was described as in no sense military. Instead it was intended to aid local authorities in keeping order during any wartime contingency that might arise. There was to be nothing of the "tin soldier" about the organization, no gingerbread uniforms, and the head of each unit was to be called "director" instead of a military title. Clubs or "night sticks" were their only arms. Instructions in military drill were available to members, in which case they were armed with regulation rifles. Members could be called upon for such assignments as guard duty, which they performed in pairs. Eligible were married men age thirty-five and over. Merion had taken a similar step two days earlier, establishing its own unit⁵⁷⁵ at the urging of the Merion Civic Association led by editor /publisher Edward Bok.

Always eager to gain a competitive edge with any initiative being taken by activist Edward Bok and his group, Narberth formed a special committee for this purpose, and this new service unit was crowded with recruits, at least the first year. By 1919, the guard during a rash of burglaries voluntarily patrolled all Narberth streets after dark, and was available to escort women arriving home alone on late trains. All its members were sworn as deputy constables.

⁵⁷⁴ Home Guard unit founded at a town meeting, 1917.

⁵⁷⁵ It shows we were competing with Edward Bok and the civic association he founded – again.

A women's counterpart to the Home Guard was soon started under the name **Patriotic League of Women Workers of Narberth**. They did their drill under Lieutenant Crosby in the vicinity of the Armory at Thirty-Second and Lancaster Avenues, Philadelphia. Miss Augusta Witherow was their spokesperson.

Boy Scouts

Narberth Troop #1 (now called #176) was founded ca. 1918, and headquartered in the Scout House, a little structure built originally as a field office for the Spring Garden Insurance Company that took over management of C. W. Macfarlane's southside real estate development, the town's first southside real estate development. Activities of this group and other Narberth Boy Scout troops founded in the next decade or two can be followed closely in the Our Town newspaper accounts.

In the pre-World War II period, local scoutmasters included a number of Quaker men who were active members of Merion Friends Meeting. One was L. Fielding Howe, a man of military bearing, who had supervised construction of the Lantwyn Lane housing development. Also [among them was] Merion Meeting's clerk Sam Bunting, a historian and brother of the realtor, as well as T. Cooper Tatman who became clerk of that meeting later. Another Quaker family, the Shallcrosses, donors of Friends Central School's new gym in the early 1980s also were prominent backers of local scouting traditions. Bunting was very intense about a troop, believed to be a very old one, that had a huge green flag with a large red Welsh dragon on it. Known as Merion Two, the troop was a force to be reckoned with in the early days of scouting in our area. At a later date, this troop and its flag were resurrected without the dragon, and with a different number.

Narberth scouting survived the early post-World War II period in very good form, to judge by the contemporary accounts. But reflecting a national trend, it took a tumble during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1980s, however, saw a national turn-around and steady upswing in the number of boys joining the scouts, community service goals receiving top priority perhaps more than ever, and thus helping to counteract the trend whereby young people were said (in 1990) to know less, care less and vote less than any other generation. The irony of this is that the Information Age has given birth to a population so uninformed and apathetic that ours is called "the age of indifference." The good news is that for the first time in many years, our troop #176 registered more than twenty-five scouts in October 1991, at which time scout master Bruce McCluskey also announced the start of a marching bugle and drum corps, which has proved popular.

Centerpiece of the Narberth Cub Scout program, meanwhile, is Pack #212, founded in 1945 with Sam Barclay as its first club master, and currently featuring a membership of about sixty-five boys.

Girl Scouts

Assurances made by the trustees of the Narberth YMCA to the Girl Scouts that they would have a headquarters of their own in the new Community Building at the playground did seem to suggest a whiff of privilege was extended to those scouts. After all, dozens of community groups had vied with each other for such consideration originally, before the size of the projected building had to be trimmed for lack of funds. Why were the Girl Scouts favored over so many others? Probably to provide a quick and practical solution to a nagging problem: an acute short of space for their gatherings.

Narberth's first Girl Scout troop is believed to have started in about 1924, founded by the then recent postmaster Edward S. Haws' two daughters, kind-hearted and smart Lieutenant Marian Haws and her rather austere sibling, Captain Ruth Haws, a formidable pair.⁵⁷⁶ Their Troop met in the local Baptist Church which, already over-crowded with community activities centered there, was just embarking on a major construction project of a new church on the site besides. As for this well-liked pair of scout leaders, no sooner would Ruth acidly criticize a scout's bed-making techniques, than Marian would gently intervene to help the child get it right.⁵⁷⁷ Like so many of their generation here, these two sisters as well as their husbands-to-be Arthur L. Cooke Sr. and John Nash, respectively, were lifelong local residents. After double-dating, the two couples married in a double-wedding⁵⁷⁸ at the Presbyterian Church, followed by a big reception at the then new Green Hill Hotel in c. 1925. In word and in action, Marian and Ruth tended to set a very traditional example of American womanhood for their young charges from both public school and private, including the then nearby Agnes Irwin School.

A quarter-century later Narberth had twelve Girl Scout troops meeting here in the town. And today Narberth has girls meeting in twenty different troops across the area, the emphasis in activities being definitely away from proficiency in housekeeping skills and entertaining. Even with so many mothers working, there is no shortage of girl scout leaders here. An impressively well-attended local

⁵⁷⁶ Much data on its activities provided by Eleanor (Mrs. John M.) Lucas (scrapbooks of clippings) and by the writer's interviews with member of that first troop, Peg Bailey Thomas, discussing its founders, Marian and Ruth Haws, their lives and character, June 2, 1995 and 1985. Jon R. Keim's interview June 3, 1995 told of the Haws sisters' double-dating and wedding.

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Margaret (Peg) Bailey Thomas, 2 June 1995, who was in their troop; plus another interview with her in ca. 1985.

⁵⁷⁸ Interview with Jonathan R. Keim, a close relative, 3 June 1995.

Girl Scout Reunion marking Narberth borough's centennial year testified to the continuing vitality of this group during a seventy-year period.

Businessmen Organized

The first recorded group action taken by Narberth businessmen had been to band themselves into a large committee⁵⁷⁹ to canvass (in 1914) for new members for the local YMCA. Over the years the needs and concerns of the town merchants were often set forth for discussion on the pages of the weekly town newspaper. On one such occasion that publication, Our Town, editorialized⁵⁸⁰ about the growing need to brighten up Narberth business district with lights. It cited the example of Mr. Dando who kept a “bright” light in front of his Imperial Grocery every evening. And the point was strongly made that main street, after White's drugs and Davis' Store closed, was objectionably “rather dark.” The editorial advised: try keeping a light in the stores, at least until midnight. Many years would pass — and it took a full-blown crisis — before an association was founded to unite that business fraternity.

Surprisingly, the issues that did stir up local merchants in 1926 have a familiar ring because they sound up-to-date: traffic problems, insufficient main-street parking, delivery trucks crowding the right-of-way. And as a result, someone inevitably suggesting: let's widen Haverford Avenue. And while that commercial district was undergoing a period of unprecedented growth, storekeepers near station circle were already fretting about the westward march of a commercial strip along Montgomery Avenue. Merchants were kicking up enough of a storm over such things that they decided to unite. The immediate stimulus to the formation of a permanent association of Narberth tradesmen was the borough's parallel parking regulations⁵⁸¹ which quickly fell under protest from local merchants who got together to fight city hall on this. Their quick success with that initiative prompted their next step: formation of a business group.

Our Town lauded the endeavor, noting that “Our main street is very obviously in need of a brand-new viewpoint,” especially so now that the influence of the chain store becomes more potent, affecting everyone.⁵⁸² It also alerted readers that the recent Federal Census report specified that sixty-nine percent of the total business in our nation is being done by seven percent of the factors engaged in it. And the newspaper lavishly praised the head of this new Board of Trade, Ralph S. Dunne.

⁵⁷⁹ Our Town, Nov. 12, 1914.

⁵⁸⁰ October 20, 1923.

⁵⁸¹ Merchants fight city hall on parallel parking and won, Nov. 20, 1926.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

The timing was remarkable. No sooner did the civic association expire, than the new business group took shape - both events occurring the same month, November 1926. The new association was to be neither a chamber of commerce nor a men's club. (Mrs. Jefferies now was joined by other women who were beginning to operate shops here.) Matters under consideration included a reduction of the "hump"⁵⁸³ caused by the high crown of the street on Haverford Avenue just east of Narberth Avenue, stimulation of local buying, and ways to cash in on Philadelphia's drastic ban⁵⁸⁴ on center-city parking which was driving shoppers elsewhere.

Interestingly, this group also took a strong stand against a bold⁵⁸⁵ move then being made to try to zone part of Narberth's south side commercial, which probably dealt this preposterous idea its death blow. (At the time, a syndicate from Sixty-ninth Street had bought land on the south side, speculatively.)

Meanwhile, the attendance at board functions was steadily increasing.⁵⁸⁶ And when the Narberth Board of Trade pulled the Fourth of July Committee out of a financial hole, there was talk that this still-new group might take over management⁵⁸⁷ of that celebration the following year. The board also took an active role in calling for a new rail station, claiming the old one was a handicap to the growth of the Narberth business section. Like the local civic association that had preceded it - and that it partly replaced - this business group was a strong organization of its kind - perhaps the most vigorous unit of its kind that Narberth has yet had, much of this due to the organizational skills of one, focused man, Ralph Dunne.

And it started not a moment too soon. Already pressures were felt by local merchants as they contemplated what was happening in Ardmore. Their predicament was a fast-forward to what would happen on thousands of main streets across America a generation later. For in 1926, buildings began to go up in Ardmore's Suburban Square, an unusually early, and a successful, example of the long-heralded trend toward the decentralization of retail merchandising. This model development a short distance away was one of America's first shopping centers. Borough businessmen thus felt motivated to begin our custom of decorating mainstreet for Christmas in 1932.

The Narberth Board of Trade ran into tough times as the 1930s great depression began to settle in. Business people here were showing little interest in the group, Dunne lamented⁵⁸⁸ in 1930.

⁵⁸³ Reduction of street "hump," Our Town Dec. 4, 1926, p.1.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 29 January 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁵ Our Town, April 2, 1927, p. 1. At the time, a syndicate from a densely commercialized section of Upper Darby Township in Delaware County had bought land on Narberth's southside speculatively.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 3 September 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁸ Our Town, Jan. 17, 1930, p. 1.

Nevertheless that year the board was planning a business directory to be distributed to twenty-five hundred households in or near Narberth. The group, soon reactivated (1932) under a new name, **Narberth Business Council**, by some thirty local businessmen headed by Dunne, faced its greatest challenge, however, in 1933 when a citizens' committee was formed in Ardmore to marshal support in the business community for immediate action in accord with President Roosevelt's recently announced National Recovery Act. Industry had been the first to take up the challenge.

So not surprisingly among the local towns, Ardmore quickly moved to the fore to cooperate with this movement, as Ardmore had the Main Line's biggest industry, Autocar, pioneer auto builders turned heavy-duty truck manufacturers. Ardmore likewise had at that time the effective Ardmore Chamber of Commerce, which soon canvassed the entire Main Line from Cynwyd to Malvern to enlist every individual in support of Roosevelt's program for the speedy return of prosperity.

Addressing the Ardmore Rotary that year, the dean of Villanova College's school of economics declared that never before, not even in World War I, had there been such an effort as Roosevelt had just made to unite the country, and never before had our nation created a mechanism for support such as that recovery code. Former Narberth resident Samuel Vauclain, the Baldwin Locomotive Works chairman and a staunch Republican, celebrating his seventy-seventh birthday in 1933, spoke up in favor of that recovery act and predicted the rapid end of the business depression because of it. Of course, the outbreak of World War II wiped away any lingering effects from the Depression. And even before then, plants such as Autocar were producing huge numbers of trucks for the nation's defense program.

And it was a Narberth man, fuel dealer Ralph S. Dunne, a former president of Narberth Business Council, as it was by then called, who took the initiative to advocate formation of a **Main Line Chamber of Commerce** to assist small business in wartime trade — his topic in an address to the Ardmore Chamber of Commerce in 1943. Dunne pointed out the value of joint meetings, exchange of ideas and “thinking for tomorrow instead of yesterday” that such a broad-based regional group would represent. Results were forthcoming. In 1945, the Ardmore Chamber of Commerce was transformed into the Main Line Chamber of Commerce by substituting the words Main Line for Ardmore. Thus Dunne ranks among the founders of the Main Line group, now very active and, since 1982, relocated to its present address in Wayne. Meanwhile, Narberth men have played a leadership role in the activities of the Main Line Junior Chamber of Commerce, including engineer Raymond L. Woodall Jr., who during his presidency raised the membership considerably.

Independent Republicanism or Politics Between the Two World Wars

Throughout the 1920s, Narberth was considered a power base for Independent Republicanism because a prominent politician of that stripe, Fletcher W. Stites, a single-term State senator and Narberth burgess shortly before World War I, lived here. Even a year after Stites was out of his state office, one of his old lieutenants, a local magistrate, in 1928 began talking about his own plans to launch another Republican political organization aimed at rivaling the existing Lower Merion and Narberth Republican Association. Greeted with some skepticism, a claim was being made that five hundred people were interested in supporting that idea.

Initially, this new turn of events reportedly was interpreted to indicate that ex-Senator Stites might be preparing to stage a political comeback in his old job or to line it up for someone favorable to him in the next election. For Stites' successor in the state senate seat, a Norristown man who reportedly had not been received enthusiastically in Lower Merion and Narberth, was not expected to seek re-election. Stites also had another close ally in Narberth politics—the then burgess, Henry A. Frye, who was associated with Stites in his law practice. If Stites' focus was always on the big picture, Frye's was on detail.

A Harvard Law School graduate and long a positive influence in the town's public life, active even in old age in the community and in its Methodist church, besides being a firebrand who gradually acquired a mellower outlook, Frye was a nephew and protégé⁵⁸⁹ of Narberth's Harry M. Chalfont, head of the Anti-Saloon League of Pennsylvania. Recalling his long period of public service to the borough, first as burgess from 1936 to 1934, and thereafter for many years without pay as borough solicitor, Frye had this to say about Narberth while⁵⁹⁰ he held elective office here:

The chief characteristic when I served was community spirit. Joining Lower Merion was twice turned down, and the baseball team had a real following. Once during a game a Wayne player speaking Italian cursed the winning Narberth team. He was heard by an Italian-speaking policeman who called him to account in English, and there was almost a riot.⁵⁹¹

Henry Frye also noted:

There was great rivalry between the north and south sides, as demonstrated by the story

⁵⁸⁹ Interview of the writer with Elizabeth Smedley who affirms this, January 6, 1995.

⁵⁹⁰ Henry Frye's response when this writer asked him for three examples of an encounter that touched him as a public servant.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

about the child whose south-side parents had bought a house on the north side. When she was saying her prayers the night before they moved, she said ‘Good-bye God, we are going to the north side.’⁵⁹²

And Frye had this to say about what it was like to conduct borough business in the 1920s in the old Elm Hall:

My most interesting experience as a young burgess came during my first month in office and following a heavy snow storm. The sidewalks were not cleared, and summons were sent to at least twenty-five residents. At the hearing the ordinance was challenged by a well-known citizen as being “crazy.” I suggested that he might be interested in seeing who were the members of council when it was passed, and he took a copy and then started to leave the room. His way was blocked by a policeman, and I pointed out that he had been president of the council which had passed it ten years before.⁵⁹³

Fifty to seventy years ago in this town, some local politicians seemed to be soulmates of the crusty traditions of ward politics as practiced in Boston, where it is well-known that the entire business of everyday living could grind to a halt without the personal intervention of the local committeeman. One such man ruled Narberth’s southside politically in the 1920s and 1930s. Bert Nesper⁵⁹⁴ lived politics 365 days a year. And if Mrs. Smith needed her window-screens changed, she contacted her committeeman and he, in turn, dispatched his young nephew to do that task. Even if the nephew had other plans or an appointment, no matter. The request from the registered voter in Uncle’s precinct took precedence. Young Harry had to go over immediately and do the job. So one year the nephew, by then having reached voting age, passed by the south-side polling place and saw who they had standing outside greeting the people. It was somebody he regarded, to put it bluntly, as he did, as one of the biggest crooks in Narberth. He said to himself, “I’m not going to vote for him.” And he did not, although his uncle was supporting that candidate.

That same day at lunch, the young man’s uncle glowered at him and fumed: “You’re a traitor. You didn’t vote for my candidate.” To which the nephew, slightly uncomfortable, retorted: “How can you know that? There’s all afternoon to go yet at the polls. So, how can you be certain of a thing like

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Interview about Bert Nesper with his nephew Harry Berry, by this writer, November 8, 1989. Nesper raised Harry, was his uncle and guardian.

that?” The reply was glum and insistent: “There are six people here on the southside who didn’t vote for my candidate today, and you are one of them.”

It was the great heyday of the Big Lever. Just pull it to settle any problem, and ask no questions. The usefulness of the big lever was proven over and over in American grassroots politics. It still works sometimes if there is an emotional issue at stake, and if voters can be persuaded to block out every other consideration except the overriding one, whatever it happens to be.

Also at a grassroots level, Narberth has always had its colorful - or at least memorable - Republican committeemen (including air raid wardens) who knew intimately every man, woman and child in their voting precinct and every relevant (and sometimes irrelevant) fact about them. Such people were glad to go to great lengths to be of service to the voters in their district, especially noticeable in towns like this during the long period of one-party rule, when local candidates did not have to campaign or ring doorbells because whoever the Republican party put forward to run for office, was reasonably certain to win.

An example of the old-style dedicated, lifetime committeewoman here in the town would be Isobel (Ibby) W. Pittenger, active through the 1980s. She kept up ongoing friendly contact with “her” people sometimes even fifty years after a particular family had moved far away. Ibby could be relied on for such extra duty as chauffeuring around an individual member of such a family who returned to town on a nostalgic trip hoping, as former residents so often do, to re-visit the old neighborhood in which their family once lived and search for any long-time residents who might still remember them. Ibby would pitch right in like someone on safari hunting for big game, and make a slew of contacts for the returnee.

Another long-serving Republican committeewoman who developed warm rapport with a great many local people over generations was the cozy matronly sister of a benevolent pharmacist whose corner drug store with soda fountain was a teenagers’ gathering place and Narberth fixture for generations with its huge mortar-and-pestle sign anchoring the corner. Fair-haired and Irish, the Shea family was full of brothers, sisters, nephews and cousins everyone knew because their folks had lived here such a long time and had jobs in the town, Active in politics at about the same period as Pittenger, Mary Elizabeth Shea McClain took pride in the number of American presidents she had met.

Public School in Narberth

A two-story public-school building was constructed of stone from the designs of D. Judge DeNean, an Ardmore architect born in Maine, and opened by Lower Merion Township School District at the northeast corner Sabine and Essex avenues in 1893. Sabine Avenue, which had been petitioned

largely by people in the Wynnewood and Ardmore vicinity, was not officially opened until the following year. The School Board of the new borough took charge of the school facility in September 1895. At the time there were forty-four pupils in eight grades, all taught by Miss Allie G. Plank and one assistant. The first Narberth High School commencement in 1909 had four graduates. Rapid population growth led to a \$55,000 bond issue for modernization effective autumn 1916. By 1920, 592 pupils were enrolled and a three-acre playground added to the school plant.

Narberth High School granted eighteen diplomas in 1922. But controversy swirled over its future. Finally, a solution was found when voters went to the polls on election day. A defeated bond issue for a separate high school building sent high school pupils to Lower Merion in 1923. Kindergarten through eight had an enrollment of more than 500 in 1930. That year James Drennen became Supervising Principal, a post he held for 21 years. In 1931, the school Press Club started publishing the prizewinning Sun Dial newspaper. At this time, the building unit housing the intermediate and upper grades was modernized extensively by architect Victor D. Abel, providing new floors, new stairways and partitions and a new floor plan. Grades six through eight, based on a modified Junior High School program, and the intermediate grades four and five comprised the Upper School. Its faculty consisted of four intermediate grade and eight junior school teachers. It had a secretary and two custodians. The Primary unit, comprising kindergarten through third grade, had eight teachers and a physical education instructor. This stone building, connected to the east end of the Upper School by a passageway leading to the cafeteria, was modernized during the forties.

Still a frequent topic of discussion in Narberth are two historical pageants Narberth Public School presented – “A Nation Rises,” held in Narbrook Park for the Constitution’s hundred-fiftieth anniversary (1938), and “A Community Rises” which celebrated the borough’s fiftieth anniversary (1945). Seventh and eighth grade pupils went to Lower Merion Junior High School starting in 1961. A new school (Chapelle and Crothers, architects, John Donovan Inc., builder) for kindergarten through sixth grade was built, 1961-2. Narberth Public School merged with Lower Merion in 1966. It closed in 1978 due to declining enrollment. The building was recycled for private business use, and the children bussed to Bala Cynwyd.

The Schools – 1922 Loan Question: to Build?

School questions have always riveted town attention and stirred emotion. Take the \$165,000 loan question that came up for a vote in autumn 1922 after Narberth School Board had requested that the

community construct a new building to meet the pupil crowding problem. Narberth split into two bitterly opposed camps over this issue.

Not surprisingly the school board led the faction committed to having the town maintain its own schools - elementary and high school - Lone Ranger style without cumbersome outside connections. This group saw the proposed building as the obvious next step and the capstone that would complete the local plant. Marshaled against those traditionalists was the faction claiming Narberth High School should be abolished. These reformers argued that Lower Merion should be requested to take over that segment of our educational system.

Finally, by an overwhelming vote of 812 to 190, the taxpayers spoke, defeating the loan and forcing the school board - at the time against its will - to enter into an agreement with the township. To its credit, that board after the bitter defeat of its plans, approached the new arrangement with a desire to solve any and all problems.

Four years later, Our Town editorialized⁵⁹⁵ that Narberth now had 187 students at Lower Merion High School obtaining a fine education. Those students were described as prominent in athletics and class activities and proud of their school, while Narberth's own school buildings, so crowded in 1922, were now seen as fitting all needs. Besides, a good library had been assembled, a manual training course started and the domestic arts department enlarged. The editorial also noted that the bonded indebtedness in 1926 represented just one-fifth of the Narberth school property's value, and was rapidly being reduced. Thus, with the tax millage being kept down, Narberth public school's healthy financial condition seemed assured - quite a contrast, the paper went on, to the many other school districts that carry staggering debts. This seemed fortunate, too, it declared, in the face of mounting municipal costs, and the "terrific financial load" being carried by the borough government.⁵⁹⁶

By that account, the local school picture certainly seemed rosy. But the respite was brief. It was not long before those calm waters felt a splash. Her name was Margaret Gutelius Town,⁵⁹⁷ daughter of

⁵⁹⁵ September 25, 1926

⁵⁹⁶ Kindergarten through grade eight had an enrollment of more than five hundred in 1930. That year James Drennen became Supervising Principal, a post he held for twenty-one years. In 1931, the school Press Club started publishing the prizewinning Sun Dial newspaper. At this time, the building unit housing the intermediate and upper grades was modernized extensively by architect Victor D. Abel, providing new floors, new stairways and partitions and a new floor plan. Grades six through eight, based on a modified Junior High School program, and the intermediate grades four and five comprised the Upper School. Its faculty consisted of four intermediate grade and eight junior school teachers. It had a secretary and two custodians. The Primary unit, comprising kindergarten through third grade, had eight teachers and a physical education instructor. This stone building, connected to the east end of the Upper School by a passageway leading to the cafeteria, was modernized during the forties.

⁵⁹⁷ Interview with many who knew her.

the Robert Strawbridge Gutelius family prominent in upstate Mifflinburg, a thrifty manufacturing center in Union since early times. Although her own three children all attended exclusive private schools, red-haired Mrs. Town, a respecter of persons with a pronounced Nativist streak yet whose energy in public causes knew no bounds, became Narberth's great public schools crusader.

Merger Talk During Home Rule

The pocketbooks of private citizens were not the only resources under heavy pressure during the 1930s Depression. Also in short supply and dwindling rapidly were resources to assist the normal functioning of Narberth public school with its eight grades. At the time, this facility was maintained by its own separate school district (classified as a third-class school district on account of the town's population size, under state law). For, with the exception of a few independent school districts, every city, borough and township in the commonwealth then constituted a separate school district.

So, action was taken to appoint a committee chaired by the outspoken Mrs. Margaret Gutelius Town⁵⁹⁸ (who, with her physician husband, Edwin C. Town, Jr., a railroad physician's son, was one of the borough's founding families) to study ways and means of keeping up the standard of public education for Narberth children in view of the immediate and serious problems facing it. (Students completing eighth grade here at the end of the 1920s had grown accustomed to arriving at the township high school with their studies further advanced⁵⁹⁹ than other incoming pupils in subjects like Latin). Yet, the upshot was that two months later a sub-committee submitted a report at a 1932 public meeting advocating a drastic solution to the problem - namely that the Narberth Borough charter should be annulled, which would make Narberth a part of Lower Merion Township again.

The report, presented by subcommittee head Arthur W. Burns, who also submitted copies to the borough and township, declared that the borough would realize an immediate tax saving of fifty-thousand dollars or twenty-five percent a year if it merged with the township. This point was not disputed at the mass meeting, attended by all the local elected officials and two hundred citizens. Apart from that, however, the "school problem" was the only consideration put forward as a reason for merging with the township.

⁵⁹⁸ Interviews with persons who knew Mrs. Town have revealed much over the years. Peg Bailey Thomas mentioned July 2, 1995, Mrs. Town's attitude toward her daughters – spoiling the one who married into a rich and prominent family and short-circuiting the one who married a poor man she loved. ...Her well-educated son became a recluse in the attic of Town's house, N.W. corner Windsor & Narberth Aves.

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with Margaret Bailey Thomas.

A highlight of the evening was an eloquent speech in support of the borough form of government by Narberth's former state senator Fletcher W. Stites, who had a reputation as a silver-tongued orator. He noted that most of the people present had grown up in Narberth, married here and had seen the borough develop: "We are proud of our town. We have the real home town spirit."

Stites went on to say that the people of Narberth have all the improvements a modern community can ask for. He specifically mentioned well-paved streets, and pointed to the fact that the citizens had built up the borough to a five-million-dollar tax base. He praised the borough council as men of the highest integrity, declaring that in his experience he had never seen a more self-sacrificing group of public servants, and that among them there had never been the slightest suspicion of graft. He made the further point that "[t]he borough form of government had not cheated the taxpayers of one cent." He drove home this point by declaring:

We, if we merge, are turning over our five-million-dollar taxable property to Lower Merion, and getting not one thing in return except a solution of the education problem. I believe we can solve this problem without sacrificing our political independence.⁶⁰⁰

As far as he was concerned, Stites argued, "The advantages of going into the township are ... far outweighed by the advantages of remaining a borough." And he advised that citizens should forget thinking about trying to get the state legislature to change its ruling on separate school districts just to benefit Narberth in its present situation, because Harrisburg will not do it, he emphasized.

One citizen from the audience then inquired whether there was any assurance Narberth would be represented on the Lower Merion Board of Commissioners. The advocates of merger assured him it would. Then Stites interjected:

Today Narberth is governed by its own men ... to whom we can take our problems with the assurance of careful attention. Lower Merion now has thirteen commissioners. If Narberth had one representative, he would be one in fourteen, instead of the present council.

He then turned to Arthur W. Burns and praised his effort but noted that Burns' subcommittee would not have come to the conclusion it did (that is, to advocate government merger) except for the school situation. Stites, concluding advice was to move forward, not to drop the matter but to see if people can get together and find a way to solve the school problem without resorting to such a drastic solution as a merger of local governments. Aided by a natural ability to persuade people to be optimistic

⁶⁰⁰ Stites' quotes are from Our Town.

through the sheer force of his personality, Stites displayed that night his skill as a civic leader - something quite distinct from the skill of a legislator - in getting people behind the idea of solving the schools crisis without sacrificing independent rule.

Whereupon the matter was put to a vote at the meeting and defeated by a standing vote, one hundred seventy-five to twenty-five. The losers vowed to renew their fight another day. And they pressed their campaign to gather signatures of two-thirds of the taxpayers so that a petition for the annulment of the borough charter could be filed in Norristown. Also, the same group soon circulated a pamphlet containing the arguments for and against the merger in an effort specifically to answer objections made at the citizens' meeting.

One unsuccessful strategy that Burns tried next in response to Stites' accusation that the school issue was the single overriding reason Burns and his group sought to abolish our borough government. Arthur Burns soon launched a very well-organized Narberth Taxpayers' Association with an impressive board of directors. It touted its money-saving message "from Philadelphia to Paoli," but was roundly criticized meanwhile for misrepresentation and branded a "Borough Buster" and a "Save the Dollar Club" on the letters to the editorial page of the town newspaper.⁶⁰¹

Two years passed, meanwhile, before the pro-merger forces gathered enough momentum - and the necessary signatures - to have their day in court,⁶⁰² although they reached the point in October 1934 where they had compiled 1500⁶⁰³ of the necessary 1800 signatures. This second "go" at revoking Narberth's home rule had a surprising element of farce and impropriety about it that ended in melodrama. From every indication, the driving force behind the effort was still the public school and its enhancement. But some of the supporters of this movement apparently felt desperation in their crusade. This renewed campaign and its hotly contested petition mark only the second time in Narberth's history that an effort was mounted to recall the borough's incorporation.

In January 1936, at the court hearing on this matter, defenders of borough government protested that fraud and forgery were evident in the petition then being presented. They charged one person's handwriting had signed many names, and brought along witnesses ready to testify that their names had been forged. The petitioners' lawyer, while denying fraud, replied that if such a thing were proven, he would withdraw the petition.

⁶⁰¹ Our Town June 30, 1933, p. 4, including a long letter from Walter Cowin.

⁶⁰² Our Town, 30 June 1933, p. 4.

⁶⁰³ Main Line Times, October 1934.

The court called a conference of the lawyers for both sides. When they emerged, the pro-merger lawyer admitted some signatures were bogus and asked to withdraw the petition. The borough lawyer, before the judge reached his (affirmative) decision, stated that he would like it known that there was no factional fight in Narberth, but that a few people had stirred up the trouble.

For the Narberth Home Rule Committee, it was a clear case of life begins at forty-one. The committee announced a February victory celebration that year, 1936, to mark the borough's birthday - held, unavoidably, a month late. But the important thing was that the milestone was the forty-first, and counting.

“Iron Man” Stites – A Great Depression Casualty

“Iron Man” Stites, a Great Depression casualty,⁶⁰⁴ had seemed invincible. Fletcher W. Stites, a product of Cape May, New Jersey public schools, was a graduate of Indiana's Taylor University⁶⁰⁵ (formerly Fort Wayne College), a Methodist institution where he headed one of the two literary societies)⁶⁰⁶ and of the University of Pennsylvania Law School. His father, Edgar Page Stites, had seen action as a Methodist missionary in the Dakotas, was a riverboat pilot, Civil War vet, a Cape May native, and a Mayflower descendant of John Howland. That Stites parent, like his first cousin Eliza E. Hewitt, became a well-known gospel hymn writer and his songs were widely used in evangelistic crusades as well as at Narberth Methodist Church where his son Fletcher proudly taught them (including “Trusting Jesus” and “Beulah Land”).⁶⁰⁷

Admitted to the bar in 1904, Fletcher Stites had been a one-term Narberth burgess before World War I. He was elected a State Representative in 1917, and while serving as chair of the Legislative Committee to investigate prisons in the state, he was instrumental in bringing about reforms in the handling and housing of criminals. As a State senator (1923-1926), Stites gained recognition both for his political independence and as that body's pre-eminent orator, of whom it was said:

There is no quibbling, no ducking, or dodging of issues when [Stites] is on the floor. He is a problem to politicians, but he is easily understood by broader and wiser men.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁴ The Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, obituary, June 27, 1933; Our Town, obituary, June 30, 1933,

⁶⁰⁵ Taylor University Yearbook, 1901, p. 57.

⁶⁰⁶ Taylor University Yearbook, 1901, p. 57.

⁶⁰⁷ Kenneth W. Osbeck, 101 More Hymn Stories (Grand Rapids, 1985), E. P. Stites p. 294 and Howitt P. 181. Elizabeth Smedley in her correspondence of June 12 & 13, 1995, recalls “Beulah Land” sung in at least one old movie such as Sergeant York, or a hymn Grace Moore sang in church in her first film.

⁶⁰⁸ Our Town, June 30, 1933.

And yet while he held elected office in Harrisburg, he continued to serve Narberth in official capacities - most notably for the last nineteen years of his life as borough solicitor, very likely without pay. Most recently Stites had been considered for the post of lieutenant governor.⁶⁰⁹

No other widely-known politician, it seemed, had lavished more generous attention on his hometown community at the height of his powers, dispensing valuable advice when needed, serving on local boards such as that of Narberth National Bank, and using his celebrated power as a silver-tongued orator to instruct his enormously well-attended classes for men at the local Methodist Sunday school which he headed. The townspeople responded with affection and gratitude. A family man, with a son attending Harvard, Stites lived gracefully in a spacious house (413 Haverford Avenue, moving there in 1916 from smaller quarters the Stites had occupied as newlyweds in 1906 at Windsor and Grayling) and according to one disputed report⁶¹⁰ not yet verified, and perhaps untrue, owned most of Narberth's "Brick Row" neighborhood. Old timers remembered him best as "Flick" Stites, the youthful power-hitting Narberth star baseball player known as the "iron man"⁶¹¹ of the Main Line League, who had turned down offers from major league teams.

Then came the Great Depression, and everything went topsy-turvy for Stites, though this did not become apparent immediately. Before that, a sensational murder trial⁶¹² in December 1931 in Norristown catapulted Stites to national prominence as the defense attorney for a Main Line socialite. Due to nationwide press coverage of that trial, Fletcher Stites became a household word. His eloquence moved the courtroom to tears and he won the acquittal of the defendant (Edward H. B. Allen), much to the satisfaction and delight of the crowded courtroom, some eighty reporters assigned to cover the trial, and the public at large.

The gun fatality had occurred at the fashionable Green Hill Hotel, Lancaster Avenue and City Line in Lower Merion where the Allen family lived - seventeen-year-old debutante Rose Allen, the defendant's sister, having provoked Eddie's rash action after she was seduced by Francis A. (Skinny) Donaldson 3d (the victim) whose cavalier attitude turned her against both her ailing father and her brother. No question but that Fletcher Stites reached the summit of his popularity around this time, and was considered a shoe-in as the next governor.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. on April 3, 1926 says he filed to run for that office in the 1926 primary; its April 10 issue says he withdrew his candidacy.

⁶¹⁰ Otto Duer's claim, made in a telephone interview about "brick Row" ownership, was disputed by Frank H. (Bud) Hewitt in an interview, August 24, 1994.

⁶¹¹ Our Town July 1, 1915.

⁶¹² Coverage of the sensational Allen case was updated by Elizabeth Smedley's article in the Main Line Chronical in August 1973, immediately preceded by a series of four articles on the trial by that weekly's staff writers.

Naturally, it did not hurt that two competing Hollywood film studios released movies⁶¹³ in 1932 based upon that courtroom drama. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's film "Unashamed" featured Lewis Stone starring as Fletcher Stites, Robert Young as the accused socialite, and Helen Twelvetrees as the defendant's sister. Meanwhile, Warner Brothers' rival movie, "Two Against the World" starred Constance Bennett, Neil Hamilton and Helen Vinson. The murder case itself, involving socially prominent people was regarded by some as one of the most sensational of its type since the Harry K. Thaw/Stanford White murder case twenty-five years earlier. As his Hollywood-sounding early nickname Flick suggests, when the role was right for him, Stites was peerless.

However, the stresses caused by the Great Depression revealed themselves in the circumstances of Fletcher Stites' life at this time in the conflict he experienced trying to maintain (and teach, in Sunday school) the old thrifty Protestant values after the new consumer culture of the 1920s had swept over the scene like a tidal wave. The new notions of consumerist abundance must have exerted a powerful attraction on him - enough so that he bent the rules to obtain money by illegal means, monies of course that he intended to pay back before they were missed.

Fletcher Stites was Narberth's most stunning example of the type of person that cultural historians now cite in their argument⁶¹⁴ that the middle class was far more psychologically devastated by the 1930s Depression than the working class, which had more experience in adapting to privations of various kinds, and more outlets to share their problems with other people who had been down the same road. By contrast, the first taste of economic insecurity put the well-heeled Stites under enormous pressures totally unfamiliar to him. This "rock" that everybody had depended on suddenly felt helpless and humiliated. His predicament brought a monumental sense of personal failure because the man could no longer cope. His reaction to pressures building up in him, Fletcher Stites unethically "kited" a check or checks he was handling at Narberth National Bank, the kind of thing that apparently quite a few American banking officials of that era had been doing in an effort to buy plentiful stocks at low prices after the stock-market crash of 1929.

One such high-level bank officer, a Narberth resident employed as president of a bank⁶¹⁵ in Philadelphia had committed suicide after kiting a quantity of checks. A man with mid-19th century English and German roots in Tamaqua's upstate Carbon County coal region, he had settled here among

⁶¹³ I am indebted to Elizabeth Smedley for bringing these two films to the writer's attention.

⁶¹⁴ Sussman, Warren I. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1985), re 1930s culture.

⁶¹⁵ Interview given anonymously by a close relative of that banker, August 24, 1994.

numerous kin from the same place, a family network still represented in this town and that has shown vigorous conservative community leadership here in the ensuing decades.

The moment of truth came for that Narberth man and for Stites after President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933 and declared a bank holiday. For Stites, that meant a thirty-three thousand five hundred-ten dollar check he had issued on Narberth National Bank was caught in the process, causing the bank to fail temporarily in 1933. It was not allowed to reopen immediately, and the townspeople blamed Stites. What Stites, an insurance law specialist, had done with the money, was try to shore up the Keystone Indemnity Exchange⁶¹⁶ he headed. Stites was president of the Keystone Indemnity Company, the parent concern that operated the exchange, the latter having a membership of twenty thousand among motorists to whom it issued reciprocal insurance. When the State Insurance Department took over that exchange in May 1933, it was disclosed that claims against the Keystone Indemnity Exchange totaled one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars. As one plain-spoken man who became a Narberth magistrate in the late-1930s, said much later in summing up the 1933 Narberth banking shortfall and the related auto insurance caper: “Stites got his hand caught in the till in Harrisburg and committed suicide.”⁶¹⁷

This much is certain: Stites was pulled in two directions up to the very end, even when his secret shame exploded into a very public scandal. One of the bitterest pills Stites had to swallow in this scandal: this lay-missionary’s son had been pressured to resign⁶¹⁸ his Sunday school superintendent’s post by his young law office associate Henry A. Frye, who in this matter was righteous to a fault. Stites resigned and was not seen in the Sunday school again, but did attend church worship services one Sunday in May. Supposedly his last deed just before going home that final June day was that he stopped by the Methodist church to see if everything was in good order there.⁶¹⁹ Arriving home, he either had a coronary, as reported or, as most people in the town believed amid the firestorm of controversy surrounding his sudden death at the age of fifty-two, took his own life.

Meanwhile, Stites had signed over⁶²⁰ his thirty-thousand-dollar life insurance policy to the bank to cover the overdraft. So eventually (six weeks later) Narberth National Bank reopened⁶²¹ its doors.

⁶¹⁶ Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, June 27, 1933.

⁶¹⁷ Telephone interview with Otto B. Duer by this writer.

⁶¹⁸ Telephone interview with Elizabeth Smedley, January 5, 1995.

⁶¹⁹ Interview with Jane Smedley Thorn, October 25, 1992.

⁶²⁰ Public Ledger obit.

⁶²¹ An undated news article, “Stites’ Promise Kept,” probably from the Public Ledger, states that six weeks later his debt was paid.

And Stites' law office associate Henry A. Frye, who was then the burgess, soon took over Stites' old job as borough solicitor, a post Frye subsequently held for many years without pay.

The Stites affair had dealt the Protestant ethic in this town its heaviest blow yet, and the pain was felt by nearly everyone on a personal level. A new era was dawning, but the old tested values still had plenty of local life left in them. Area Methodists in particular never forgot their warm regard for their former "iron man" comrade who stumbled and fell in Narberth's darkest Depression hour. And John J. Cabrey, writing a long, thoughtful and sympathetic posthumous tribute to Stites in Our Town,⁶²² placed the sad loss of this community leader in context, ending with:

Laden with abundant gifts, Fletcher Stites lost his life in the great depression. Lesser men merely lost their money and so it has been since the beginning.

Two Icons – Two Luminaries: Albert Barnes and Bert Bell

Two of Narberth's strongest icons as a small town - its voluntary fire company while it was the center of community life and the intense grassroots interest in sports - each drew a nationally known luminary who focused much of his attention here during the second and third quarter of the 20th century. Just as the fire company activities drew the brilliant and pugnacious art lover Albert C. Barnes, so too the community-wide mania for sports drew another renowned individual, the pioneering National Football League commissioner Bert Bell. Barnes' Narberth years lasted until mid-century; Bell's began just before it.

At the time the focal point of Narberth's social season and a great crowd-pleaser were the firemen's annual suppers at Elm Hall attended by neighboring Merion art collector Dr. Barnes, who also served on this fire company's board, and was an honorary vice president.⁶²³ One year Dr. Barnes attended that firemen's banquet in a tuxedo, but declared he would not make that mistake again. Because one fireman, seeing the doctor's formal attire, went home and donned his own rumpled waiter's outfit and returned to the party.⁶²⁴

Albert Barnes loved to attend fires, and even sent a visiting French dignitary, Paul Guillaume (a Paris art dealer and major player in the international art world's then recent "discovery" of the

⁶²² June 30, 1933, p. 4.

⁶²³ Our Town, May 1, 1926, p. 1.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., May 17, 1924.

importance of African sculpture) for a demonstration ride on a new Narberth pumper driven by trusty Albert Nulty. Summing up his ride, the frazzled Frenchman exclaimed “Monsieur, *ça va vite!*”⁶²⁵

A friend and confidant of Dr. Barnes, Albert Nulty ⁶²⁶ traveled extensively with him in search of a quarry with stone suitable to construct Barnes Foundation, finally finding it in France. Nulty also served as a curator on the Barnes Foundation staff after the doctor sent him for special studies with a prominent art conservator, William Shur. Nulty likewise was chiefly responsible for handling the arrangements when the great modern master Henri Matisse was being commissioned by Barnes to paint the foundation’s now-famous mural.⁶²⁷ In memory of Albert Nulty, Narberth fire chief from 1942 until his death in 1957, Barnes Foundation gave Narberth Fire Company the area’s first-ever rescue truck,⁶²⁸ housed in 1958.

Assuredly the most visible reminder of the Barnes devotion to this fire company is the bronze plaque containing a large portrait-head outside the firehouse honoring Borough Council secretary and fire chief Charles V. Noel, who perished the day after Christmas in 1937 fighting a St. Charles Borromeo Seminary fire. Noel was the only Narberth fireman to lose his life in the line of duty. Dr. Albert C. Barnes suggested the memorial, then commissioned Barnes Foundation art student Marcella Broudo to make it. The plaque moved, when the fire brigade did, from Forrest Avenue to Conway.

Useful as a morale-booster in that lean Depression era was the organization at Narberth fire hall in May 1930 of a new police-firemen baseball league⁶²⁹ to cover the township and borough, aimed at playing twilight games in Narberth and Cynwyd, with the politician-athlete, former State Senator Fletcher W. Stites as its president. Unveiled early in 1940 was a firehouse financial plan whereby the brigade was to pay its own bills from funds received from the borough each month. Those arriving funds were to be small at the lean period of the town’s income and more when it had more—the idea being that money is handled most carefully when one knows how much things cost. Councilman Roland Fler,⁶³⁰ a lawyer, had taken a long time to draw up the plan.

Barn fires⁶³¹ were perilous in the early years, and town-founder Edward R. Price’s large stone barn was lost in that way. In another instance, a tramp just trying to keep warm and acting carelessly,

⁶²⁵ Ibid., April 17, 1926, p. 1.

⁶²⁶ Correspondence with Jane Nulty Dixon, October 1, 1996 and correspondence with the author who said architect Robert Venturi searched for and found the most suitable stone quarry in France.

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Author’s correspondence with Violette de Mazia.

⁶²⁹ A police-firemen baseball league. Our Town, May 16, 1930, p. 21.

⁶³⁰ Telephone interview with Robert E. Baker, August 3, 1994.

⁶³¹ Our Town, March 17, 1917, p. 2. The Robert Owen barn fire came within 75 feet of destroying his house, that we call Penn Cottage.

burned down two barns - one at Langdon Lea's in the borough and the other at Robert Owen's "Penn Cottage" across the road in the township.

Our great football personality, Bert Bell (1895-1959) was Narberth's best-known citizen of any period. His word was law in football and, as commissioner of the National Football League in the forties and fifties, he turned that sport around, while living in a turreted Queen Anne Revival house at 323 Haverford Avenue. Under National Football League commissioner Bell, 1946-59, that sport rapidly rose up to challenge baseball's popularity, attracting three million paying customers in 1958, thus outdrawing college football.

America's first pro-football czar, Bert Bell led constant open "hot stove league" football discussions at Pop Davis' general store on Narberth's mainstreet, and ran the NFL mostly from his own nearby homestead. Bert came of a strikingly cultured background, married a woman who was both a great beauty, gracious and religiously devout. They raised two sons and a daughter in Narberth.

Mulieres

Interestingly, the women's auxiliary of the Narberth Fire Company, known as the "Mulieres"⁶³² (Latin for Women's Auxiliary) sprang to life due to the financial crash of 1929 and reached its stride after the bank closings in 1933, its aim - to further the interests of the brigade while it was in dire financial straits. This group raised funds to supplement the slender revenues that this volunteer fire company obtained from dues. Likewise it paid for fire-fighting equipment and provided recreational furnishings for the firemen. The founding of the Mulieres was the first of Mrs. Eberhardt Mueller's many benefactions in the town.

These women of Narberth initially set out in January 1930 to help the brigade pay for its hook and ladder truck. As a fund-raiser, they launched a barrage of activities in rapid-fire succession that month - an old-fashioned supper of roast beef at Elm Hall, a card party, a cake sale, a lecture the next day, and fortune-telling by Madame Olive. Meanwhile, teams of women drawn from the Mulieres' huge committee began canvassing every house in the fire company's coverage area as well. The Mulieres quickly became a high-profile organization that first season.

Then as the year drew to a close, how like chairman Suzanne Mueller to celebrate her Christmas Day twenty-first wedding anniversary in 1930 by hosting the Mulieres' community-wide Christmas

⁶³² Correspondence with Jane Nulty Dixon, January 17, 1994. Mrs. Dixon kept the Mulieres' records.

night carol service and entertainment⁶³³ for adults and teenagers - this followed two weeks later by the start of a membership drive.⁶³⁴ Volunteer groups in the town clearly were working harder as economic conditions worsened. On Christmas night 1931, the Mulieres held open house for all Narberth residents over 16,⁶³⁵ while on Christmas afternoon they sponsored a movie for the under-16 crowd. (The night before, the Legion post had hosted 100 kids for Christmas Eve dinner.)

The Mulieres are especially warmly remembered by old-time Narberth residents for sponsoring the firemen's annual dinner on Washington's Birthday - for decades quite a popular social event and community-builder in the town. The Mulieres did not originate this celebration however. It dates back beyond its being a Lincoln's birthday observance to the earliest days of the fire company when it was widely considered an honor to be a fireman, and the dinner is remembered by one woman (Margaret Eyre Russell, born 1899) who grew up here in the pre-World War I period, as a major event that vied with Christmas and the Fourth of July as a community-wide observance. At the time, the way this event was organized, many women would each take charge of a single food table, assisted by other women. As there were no baby sitters, small children played in the aisles, snatching olives from tables and making a nuisance of ourselves, Marg Eyre said. During these first two decades of the existence of the firemen's dinner, the evening's highlight was the dancing. Young children were allowed to sit on the sidelines for the first few dances before being packed off to bed. Recalled Margaret:

No one who loves dancing would ever forget Count DuMarais and his beautiful wife and Charley Bodansky and his attractive wife waltzing as it should be waltzed. The two wives were the "Queens of the Ball" and every husband wanted to waltz with them.⁶³⁶

So Suzanne Mueller and her Mulieres had a tough act to follow when they took over sponsorship of this firemen's supper. Yet they not only rescued this very popular social event from extinction at the start of the Great Depression, the brigade's all-time low ebb. They also found ways to increase public enjoyment of it even further. Most notably by seeing to it that the honored guest at those firemen's dinner affairs continued to be for many years the irascible and brilliant Merion art collector Dr. Albert C. Barnes of the Barnes Foundation, a great friend and patron of Narberth Fire Company through his deep friendship with fire chief Albert H. Nulty, his former coachman while Dr. and Mrs. Barnes still

⁶³³ Our Town, 2 January 1931, p. 1.

⁶³⁴ Our Town, Jan 9, 1931, p. 1.

⁶³⁵ Main Line Daily Times, Dec. 15, 1931, p. 12.

⁶³⁶ From "My Recollections of Narberth" by Margaret Eyre Russell compiled as the second of three installments and given to the author Sept. 28, 1980.

lived in Overbrook before moving to Merion. Nulty had just moved to Narberth (1910) and joined the fire company.

Besides the regular assistance the Mulieres gave these local smoke-eaters, they responded to special needs as they arose. For example, immediately after Narberth's worst fire (when most of the business block was consumed in a dramatic fire on a bitter cold and snowy January night in 1940), the Mulieres extended a glad and warm hand by ordering one hundred forty-four new pairs of gloves⁶³⁷ to be purchased for the Narberth Fire Company. The Mulieres' way of doing things was certainly an improvement over the old, impromptu, crisis-intervention approach. Like the time the brigade was short of cash one year, in September 1927, and it roped off the Haverford Avenue mainstreet for three days on a weekend to hold a Firemen's Carnival⁶³⁸ there. Reportedly a success, the event featured booths installed and bright lights hung in the midway, plus appearances by "Miss Philadelphia" who was to be in the Atlantic City beauty pageant that month.

The Mulieres no longer exist, but perhaps there has been less need for their services in recent decades. For one of the benchmarks of Republican rule in Narberth during the late-twentieth century has been an increase of male bonding between Narberth borough council and the fire company. The most high-profile recent reminder of this is council's very willing support of firehouse improvements during the expansion of our municipal building completed, in 1995. Groups such as the community library, with more women involved, must struggle harder to gain council's attention, in the opinion of some.

Narberth Volunteer Emergency Relief ("NVER")

Certainly the local churches were a great source of assistance to needy families during the Thirties Depression. This same period also saw other pressing emergencies, such as at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War when Saint Margaret of Antioch's Church helped a suddenly destitute Spanish consul Juan Peinado, his wife, four young children and sister-in-law, then Number 40 Narbrook Park residents, to find another home in the town - the church parish - paying their rent and giving other assistance until that family eventually fled to Mexico.

But the outstanding organization that came into existence expressly to fight miseries of the Depression was the Narberth Volunteer Emergency Relief (NVER),⁶³⁹ founded by a local dynamo Mrs.

⁶³⁷ Town and Township January 12, 1940, p. 5.

⁶³⁸ Our Town September 10, 1927

⁶³⁹ For much information about the workings of this group, I am indebted to Bernice Piercy Chain Weightman for in-person and telephone interviews focused on mid-July 1980; correspondence with Muriel White Baker, July 11, 1980, several interviews with Robert E. Baker in 1990s, and an interview with Mrs. H. J. Mosteller on June 14, 1983.

Eberhardt Mueller (Suzanne Kurzenknabe). The group dispensed food, medicine, dental and medical services, clothing, furniture, cribs, milk and coal for fuel to individuals and families needing help. And the plan of assistance was such that the recipients were able to maintain their dignity and not feel like objects of charity.

This relief group was an outgrowth of both the Mulieres and the Narberth branch of the Needlework Guild of America, active in the town since 1904. Women from this guild met every Friday afternoon at Mrs. Mueller's house to sew for charity (this region had six hundred members and sixty directors as late as 1945). Also in attendance at these sewing get-togethers at Mueller's (which were in addition to the guild's regular monthly meetings in a local hall) were several young girls who became protégés of Mrs. Mueller's and carried on her work in the town - most notably Bernice Piercy, a white-collar railroad man's daughter, and also Muriel White, whose family had a local retail bakery.

Ground rules⁶⁴⁰ of NVER's distribution of goods were that Mrs. Mueller initially talked with the needy family, giving each a number. Next a representative of that family was expected regularly to stop by the sizeable open porch of Mrs. Mueller's stucco house at 208 North Essex Avenue and scan the line-up of big marketing bags, looking for one, two or three bags with their number on it. Such bags contained very basic items such as food and toothpaste. This service continued considerably beyond the Depression. While Narberth native Bernice Piercy Chain, the burgess' wife, was in charge of the project by the end of World War II, there was less demand for food and more for clothing, which she delivered to the recipients personally. In addition to families, many old people were helped by these services. Some families also asked assistance from NVER to obtain birthday and Christmas presents for family members, including many for young children, and one of the workers (schoolteacher-to-be Christine Mahl) became very skilled at selecting such presents that were both appropriate and affordable. A big helper of Mrs. Mueller in her charity efforts was J. Bertram Nesper⁶⁴¹ during his term as Narberth postmaster, 1926 to 1935. One ethnic group in the town that did not seek assistance from NVER was the Italian American community, whose closely-knit families helped each other. Supplementing this, Saint Margaret's pastor, Father Toner, saw to it that the Italian kids were supplied regularly with shoes and milk.⁶⁴²

Another NVER distribution method mainly in operation during the thirties Depression, and not beyond that time, was that Mrs. Mueller diplomatically arranged lists (for example in the case of food)

⁶⁴⁰ Telephone interview with Bernice P. C. Weightman, 17 July 1994.

⁶⁴¹ Interview with Harry Berry, March 15, 1995.

⁶⁴² Telephone interview with Donato (Dan) DiPrinzio, October 16, 1999.

of would-be donors and keyed this to whichever local grocery each donor-to-be regularly patronized, and then matched this against a list of basic food products. This worked well in the case of bulk items. Such goods thus were available free of charge to needy people. It is not entirely clear whether the recipients themselves scanned “lists” of food available for them at certain stores, or whether just by going to shop at the local stores, this would trigger the system.

Donors were local residents Mrs. Mueller and her committee knew were weathering hard times better than others. The way this program worked in the case of donors was, for example, a local head of household such as Howard Fritsch,⁶⁴³ an insurance man, and former local justice of the peace, was signed up always to be ready to provide sacks of potatoes from the store he patronized. Thus Cotter’s Market knew that one of its star customers, Mr. Fritsch, would want that item put on his bill whenever a request for a sack of potatoes was made by a needy family. A NVER recipient could go to Cotter’s to shop like any regular customer in good standing, “buy” the sack of potatoes, and Mr. Fritsch had a standing agreement to pay for it. Thanks to an elaborate network of similar arrangements with other Narberth donors and suppliers participating in this program, many people in town kept nourishing food on the table and a steady supply of coal in the furnace.

Among NVER’s fund-raising methods were parties given by women members of the group’s board of directors. It was an organization with no expenses and no overhead, just a great deal of careful networking that required much work and monitoring to keep the program running smoothly. Strict confidentiality was maintained at all times regarding the recipients of assistance from Narberth Volunteer Emergency Relief, and not even members of its board of directors knew their names. That organization was still in existence in 1946 later going dormant and remaining so until it “died” when Dottie Smith, its last nominal director, died nearly fifty years later.

Mrs. Mueller’s initiative in founding NVER seemed more finely tuned to local needs and resourceful in its methods than a number of other relief efforts occurring at the same time. One such effort going on in this locality and a wider area was that of the combined service clubs (including the Bala Cynwyd-Narberth Rotary Club) which were then aiding the Main Line Emergency Committee by placing barrels in various stores throughout the area for donations of non-perishable food and clothing.

Another source of assistance was available at that time specifically for needy families of Pennsylvania Railroad workers, and presumably some Narberth residents received help in this way. The Women’s Aid of the Pennsylvania Railroad, headed by Mrs. W. W. Atterbury, wife of the president of

⁶⁴³ Interview with Mabel Fritsch Knapp, Howard’s daughter in about 1983.

that railroad, materially assisted more than twenty-one thousand families in 1931 alone, and reportedly paid more than forty-two thousand visits of encouragement to families in all parts of the Pennsylvania Railroad system that year, from New York and Washington to Saint Louis and Chicago. With a membership of two hundred forty-one thousand three hundred eighty-seven wives, mothers, daughters and sisters of employees of this railroad at the time, the group was an outgrowth of its Women's Division of War Relief, organized during World War I to assist families of its employees called to military service. That Women's Aid had remained active in the postwar era. Claiming to be the largest women's organization in the world, it also was entirely independent of any outside agency.

Suzanne Mueller⁶⁴⁴ (Mrs. Eberhardt Mueller) of Harrisburg had the indomitable spirit of her father,⁶⁴⁵ a German immigrant who, arriving on our shores orphaned and alone at age 14 with only his uncle's violin and a small inheritance, became a music publisher, revival gospel-song writer, nationally-known Harrisburg music teacher active throughout the mid-Atlantic region including Appalachia where his songs are now interwoven with ballads, Billy Sunday also using many of his hymns, and raised 15 children, Suzanne being No. 14. Her husband,⁶⁴⁶ from Cincinnati, was a maritime engineer who supervised very precise cartography of coastal waters, and worked here for the Curtis Publishing Company.⁶⁴⁷ They settled in Narberth upon his completion of a period with the diplomatic corps in the Philippines in a fairly new Smedley-built house they bought from that builder in 1920. And Suzanne Mueller quickly jumped into public service. Very gregarious, they talked to everybody. A childless couple, they were very romantic, and always had a date (with each other) on Friday night. Music-loving, Suzanne Mueller started regular community dances at Elm Hall, and often hosted pre-dance suppers at her house with lots of guests. The Muellers, unlike other local residents of their generation, would drop in on the Junior Women's Club dances and fit right in. Nobody thought of their age.

You felt they were very modern. Suzanne Mueller certainly had a lot of empathy with young people. She would speak up on my behalf to my mother to persuade her of something I wanted to do.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁴ See William H. Egle, Biographical Encyclopedia of Dauphin County, PA (Chambersburg, 1896) p. 477; marriage license application, Dauphin County Court House, Harrisburg, vol. U2, No. 147. 1909.

⁶⁴⁵ John H. Kurzenknabe. See W. H. Egle's Biographical Encyclopedia of Dauphin County, p. 475-477; Don Yoder, Pennsylvania Spirituals, PA Folklife Society (Lancaster, 1961), p. 428-429; Ernest Morrison, Sing, Harrisburg, Sing (Mechanicsburg, 1986, p. 15-21).

⁶⁴⁶ Marriage license application, 1909.

⁶⁴⁷ Interview with Robert E. Baker, April 24, 1994

⁶⁴⁸ Interview with Bernice P. C. Weightman, July 17, 1994.

Apparently one of the peculiar elements of fashion that she had was the quality of presenting change or novelty as something necessary, in that way endowing the temporary with a psychological illusion of permanence.

Suzanne Mueller followed through without hesitation on her interest in children. She went to court several times to protect local children against neglect or abuse. It was part of the habit the Muellers had of “adopting” other people’s offspring.⁶⁴⁹

In essence, Suzanne Mueller’s career as a leader of volunteer effort in the borough (where all her attention was focused) reflects the evolution of the cultural setting of the late-1920s and early-1930s from a more traditional one centered for women around hearth, home and school such as had existed here unchallenged before women gained the vote in 1920, to a more socially involved and problem-solving orientation. It was one that went beyond what the Kings Daughters and Mary K. Gibson, fine as it was, had been able to do for children, and that set up a network that would enliven the borough for generations to come, as we shall see.

It is unknown what effect her then recent experience of living in the Philippines may have had upon her, but that tour of duty seems to have been the first telescope on life that this woman was given while still young, soon after her marriage⁶⁵⁰ at Harrisburg’s old Salem Reformed Church on Christmas Day 1909 at age thirty. Perhaps Suzanne Kurzenkabe Mueller merely changed the lens and adjusted the focus when she arrived here brimming over with enthusiasm. Her one notable eccentricity: petite and rather plain, she rode her bicycle with her waist-length hair flowing in the breeze, held in place only by a headband with a feather in the side of it.

Boys’ Club and the Early Church Teams

The local YMCA had billed itself as “the center for boys and men,” which it certainly was, for as long as it lasted. But even during the Y’s heyday, other group activity for young people existed, for example the **Narberth Boys’ Club**, which sponsored bowling at the time. When reactivated in 1944 for boys under eighteen, this club had varied sports activity. Meanwhile, during the 1920s and early-thirties, nearly every Narberth church⁶⁵¹ had its basketball team, as well as each having its own junior and senior bowling team in the Narberth inter-church bowling league. Narberth Boys’ Club basketball team,

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Dauphin County Court House, marriage license No. 147, 21 December 1909; marriage record, December 25, 1909, signed by Rev. Ellis A. Kremer of Salem Reformed Church.

⁶⁵¹ Early history of all the churches’ sports teams is based upon the writer’s interview with Harry Berry, May 18, 1994.

coached by Harry Hollar, played in the gym of the Baptist church, which did not have its own team. The Presbyterian and Methodist churches' basketball teams played in their own gyms, and the Catholic Church also had a team, but no gym at the time. And the Lutheran church had neither.

Saint Margaret's is the only one of these local churches still carrying on this hoops tradition. In the 1993-94 season, its grade school (which now has pupils from Gladwyne's Saint John Vianney and Penn Valley's Saint Justin parishes as well as Saint Margaret's) had seven basketball teams playing competitively – four teams playing in Catholic boys' leagues and three teams in the Catholic girls' leagues. This elementary school also has football, softball and volleyball teams. Meanwhile a local unit of the Catholic Youth Organization directs sports activities of the parish's teenagers. In July 1994, Saint Margaret's eleven-member Youth Ministry/CYO Board, headed by the pastor, announced development of a combined spiritual and athletic program for this church's parishioners in grades seven through twelve aimed at providing “spiritual, service and athletic opportunities.”

Narberth Girls Club

Meanwhile, the local boys' club also had its counterpart. In 1931, one of the former players from the Narberth Athletic Club team, Hilda Smedley who was Mrs. William H. Durbin⁶⁵² by then and still living in the town, invited all Narberth girls interested in sports to gather each week at the local Baptist church “for an evening of fun and exercise.” The response was quite gratifying, as in many instances fifty girls were recorded present in her attendance book for those meetings. Mrs. Durbin and her girls were chiefly interested in launching a basketball team, which in turn led to formation of volley ball, hockey and baseball teams. The Women's Association of the Baptist Church meanwhile shouldered the expenses of the volley ball and basketball teams.

As a result of the popularity of these activities and their growing attendance, Mrs. Durbin organized the Narberth Girls' Club as the umbrella organization for the various sports teams. They used the public-school gym for their local games, and made a very strong showing, their record by 1939 being that they had won eighty or more percent of all games played. They showed particular style in the sport of basketball, each year during that first decade of play meeting an increasing number of opponents in city and suburbs.

Mrs. Durbin served as coach until Edward Burgess took over the reins in 1938. In 1939 there were more than twenty club members, many of whom had belonged from the start. In the interim they

⁶⁵² Mrs. Durbin's Narberth Girls' Club.

had added social activities (Mrs. Durbin sponsor) to sports. And in June 1939, still under her sponsorship, they presented their first play, playwright James F. Stone's three-act drama "Lovely Ladies," arranged and directed by "Ben Grove Price. The chief purpose of this club, which died in the 1940s, was to give: "the girls of Narberth and vicinity an opportunity to keep physically and mentally alert, and thus grow to be better citizens. (1939 brochure)" while learning the value of good sportsmanship and fair play.

The Movies

Bitter fights over Sunday movies which split the borough into pro and anti-factions in 1935 and again in 1940, showed the continuing strength of the Protestant ethic in the town. And yet Narberth's then tiny Catholic minority played a crucial role in the outcome.

For in a remarkable instance of the sharp divisions that tore the town asunder over this issue, two Catholic brothers, each the head of a large household and living five blocks apart on the same street, led the opposing forces in this struggle. The tension was greatest in 1935. But that dispute produced a long-standing feud of the magnitude almost of the Hatfield/McCoy conflict, with the brothers barely on speaking terms ever after, some say. Both high-profile figures here in the period between the two world wars, the brothers were a study in contrasts in many respects.

Ten years separated the eldest brother John, the talker, from his youngest brother Raymond, the listener, for whom John had been a father figure. They grew up in South Philadelphia in a family of seven children of poor but proudly Irish parents, a house-painter and an Irish sea captain's daughter. She was the stronger parental influence, a deeply religious and witty woman who held the family together. Both those sons of Molly Kelly Cabrey who settled in Narberth after World War I and raised families here were self-made men with prosperous Philadelphia businesses, who brought new energy into sponsorship of recreational and sports activity here at a crucial moment when fresh leadership was called for. That these men happened to be Catholic must have been very disturbing for some in the community, especially during the 1920s, but even in the 1930s, long before the Catholic population of the area rapidly grew and crescendoed after World War II. In Narberth, John seemed ever in the public eye, while Raymond often was perfectly content to be the power behind the scenes.

A ubiquitous presence, and yet John J. Cabrey seemed aloof, liked to pontificate,⁶⁵³ and he could lay down the law with a dramatic flourish. This tall man was ultra-conservative, took himself very seriously, was capable of a scowl now and then, and seldom greeted people with a ready smile on the street. Even his massive three-story all-stone house prominently situated cater-cornered to the present post office, had a stolid, forbidding look about it, and did not long survive his death, one of the large houses leveled in the postwar era. Although he never sought or held public office, this owner of a Philadelphia textile firm who also helped found a local Catholic college for women (Rosemont College), cared a great deal about this community. Enough so that he became a driving force in the effort to establish a Narberth Community Playground and to see that it flourished. Moreover, John J. Cabrey became owner of Narberth's Our Town weekly newspaper, and also wrote an outspoken local opinion column for it under the heading "The Spectator." Cabrey relished this journalistic role enormously.

On the other hand, his kid brother Raymond A. Cabrey was always the picture of placid well-groomed informality seated on his folding chair in deep center field watching Narberth's Davismen play baseball. Seems appropriate this great fan should live opposite the baseball grounds here, just as he had lived directly across from Philadelphia's Major league baseball stadium, Shibe Park, earlier, when his two oldest kids were tots. Both diamonds were an integral part of their neighborhoods. And Cabrey was used to seeing residents sell cut-rate tickets allowing fans to view Shibe Park games from their rooftops. Owner of a barrel and steel drum factory, he founded the National Barrel and Drum Association which is the leading organization of the industry today, and also served in the Office of Price Administration under Roosevelt during World War II, representing the entire industry. Father of eight, all of whom he sent to college) like his brother John did with his six), Ray Cabrey was casual, friendly, public-spirited, and readily gave neighbors a lift in his impressive big Cadillac ("his only luxury")⁶⁵⁴ which he turned in for a new model each year. Besides a keen interest in children's sports, Ray had a love of baseball that made him a natural choice as president of the town's semi-pro baseball team. In that capacity, he supported the Main Line League's champion Narberth baseball team with his own funds for many years, besides hosting a festive annual dinner at his stucco house for that town team's players and their friends.

⁶⁵³Interview with publisher A. Livingston, who admitted he nicknamed J. J. Cabrey "the cardinal" because Cabrey "bossed the priests around."

⁶⁵⁴ Correspondence with Mary Jane Cabrey Cunningham, about her father and their family history, November 20, 1996.
Chapter 6 Page 333

His concern for players showed itself in other ways, as when Narberth's Mickey Gavin was injured⁶⁵⁵ immediately after the baseball season ended. Ray Cabrey responded quickly by going with his eldest son to give blood and then he organized a campaign to assist financially.

Not surprisingly, the softspokenly gregarious Raymond not somber John, was the brother who wanted to see the rules eased⁶⁵⁶ that forbade Sunday movies. Raymond asserted that such movies could hardly be more harmful to the spiritual welfare of the community than such other activities as Sunday baseball⁶⁵⁷ and tennis, already permitted here for a long while.

John J. Cabrey, however, countered with a declaration that nothing additional should be done to "break down the Narberth tradition" as a community of homes and of church-goers. As noted, those siblings were Irish - and devout Catholics. But in this hard-fought battle, John became the standard-bearer of the heavily Protestant anti-Sunday movie crusade, entering into the thick of the combat with a zeal surpassing that of most of his Protestant neighbors. (Perhaps the only way for a Catholic to win followers as a voice in the community in the 1930s, was to support the causes of the dominant Protestant group. He never would have earned local acceptance as an editor had he done otherwise at that period, or even later.)

In the first round of the fight (1935), Narberth's Sabbath-promoting residents scored a rather decisive victory in the general election when a referendum on the question was defeated one thousand eighty-nine votes to eight hundred fifty-two votes following a campaign that featured a house-to-house canvass and election-night telegrams to every voter in the town.

Even as Narberth was turning down the proposal for Sunday movies in the 1935 election, Lower Merion Township that day okayed the same proposition by a seven hundred seventy-five vote margin. Journalists lost no time declaring Narberth cinema "stranded on a blue-law island in the middle of an oasis"⁶⁵⁸ for Narberth movie patrons were scurrying off in other directions all over the township - to movies in Ardmore, Bryn Mawr and Bala Cynwyd.

⁶⁵⁵ Narberth's star shortstop, newly signed with the Chicago White Sox system, lost a leg when a girder fell on him while working for a construction company in 1936 (Gavin's obit, Philadelphia Inquirer May 10, 1999).

⁶⁵⁶ In a telephone interview, Elizabeth Smedley on January 5, 1995 said open-air movies were being shown at the playground before the mid-1920s when the present movie theater opened.

⁶⁵⁷ A generation had passed since the town team manager, Fred Walzer, proudly declared in 1915 that Narberth had not yet played a Sunday baseball game and does not intend to, nor did he believe any player of his team ever played one (Our Town, August 5, 1915).

⁶⁵⁸ Main Line Times August 15, 1940, p. 1-2.

In this Commonwealth, the prohibition against Sunday movies, baseball games and other “disturbers of the Sabbath” had been left up to the voters in their respective municipalities. So, it was inevitable that the matter would come up again eventually.

In 1940, the moving-picture theater manager and his cashier circulated a petition addressed to the Montgomery County Board of Elections, requesting that the Sunday movie proposal be placed on the November ballot for a second popular referendum. Meanwhile, they presented the document to the borough council for its review.

In that presidential election year, Narberth was one of eight area towns voting to settle the issue of Sunday moving pictures, the other communities being the Montgomery County boroughs of Ambler, Conshohocken, East Greenville, Jenkintown, Norristown, Pottstown and Pennsburg. At the time the ratio of Republicans to Democrats was almost six to one, with 2,978 Republicans and 300 Democrats in Narberth, and 17,716 Republicans and 3,352 Democrats in Lower Merion.⁶⁵⁹

The opposition was still strong of course, and virtually every borough church⁶⁶⁰ was against it again in 1940. But while Lower Merion turned in the largest majority in history up to that time for Wendell Willkie against Franklin B. Roosevelt for a third term, and Narberth’s presidential vote tallied 2,219 for Willkie against 776, Narberth okayed Sunday movies⁶⁶¹ by special ballot. And the margin showed that Sabbath keeping was still strongly on the minds of many people here. Believed to be decisive in turning the tide in favor of the Sunday movies question was the plea of the theater operators that the earlier (1935) vote had caused unfair competition, since they had to close on a day on which the surrounding movie houses were open.

The vote of 1,470 to 1,381 saw the town’s election District One deliver by far the heaviest favorable count - substantial enough to compensate for the measure’s defeat in the other two voting districts, including Ray Cabrey’s. For a somber John J. Cabrey, it was a humiliating defeat - all the more so because the determination of his own District-One neighbors carried the day.

Curiously, this dramatic episode of a Sunday movie ban in Narberth and the tug-of-war between two devout brothers was played out against a wider backdrop in which Philadelphia’s Dennis Cardinal Dougherty had shown far greater displeasure than any Protestant with Hollywood, and was determined to keep his flock out of harm’s way, for in 1934, he forbade all Catholics in his archdiocese from

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., October 31, 1940.

⁶⁶⁰ In a telephone interview, Elizabeth Smedley on January 5, 1995 said that the “very prim and proper” Presbyterian pastor, Mr. Van Ness, always went to the city to attend movies, as he believed he would give bad example to his flock if he attended them in Narberth.

⁶⁶¹ Main Line Times, November 7, 1940.

attending any movies whatsoever under pain of committing serious sin. He renewed that ban in 1935 and died in 1951, never having rescinded it.⁶⁶²

Narberth Civic Association – [Third] – (1940-)

In Narberth, each generation seems to return fresh to the idea of creating a civic association. True to form, this goal was renewed for the third time in the late summer of 1940 when a man of considerable organizational abilities put out feelers for the formation of a new Narberth civic association. (The previous one had expired in 1926, and the population more than doubled since 1915.)

A fuel dealer on mainstreet, Ralph S. Dunne had served in Naval Intelligence in World War I. An organizer of the Main Line Chamber of Commerce,⁶⁶³ and at the time a past president of both Narberth Business Council and of the town's earlier civic association (elected 1924) he was also a bank director and an eventual high-ranking rotary official - someone with unusual stamina and determination. His background as a high-profile, prosperous, local, Protestant businessman in a small American town between the two world wars as the Depression was ending, gave him the right credentials to undertake such a task. The timing of his proposal showed a certain resiliency, coming so soon after hard times. He had been one of the participants in Mrs. Mueller's emergency relief program to put food on every table and fuel in every furnace of the needy of the town during the lean thirties.

Dunne approached the new task by mailing a letter and an eight-page exposition of his proposal to two hundred twenty-three Narberth residents and seventy-seven non-residents in adjoining Merion and Penn Valley. Some two hundred-ten residents replied, all favorably except one. Also forty-four of the non-residents answered in similar fashion.

The new association would usurp none of the powers of council or the planning commission, Dunne explained.⁶⁶⁴ Instead it would supplement and strengthen their work by focusing public opinion on a wide array of community improvement needs. Of those suggestions of his for improvements that drew a positive immediate public response by mail were: plant elm trees on both sides of mainstreet's "hitherto barren and desert-hot highway of business"; encircle some of those tree-trunks with benches and install several well-placed drinking fountains; require every business there to have green-and-white awnings; establish small quiet parks at Windsor and Forrest avenues and at South Essex and Elmwood

⁶⁶² Morris, Charles R. *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York, 1997).

⁶⁶³ Founded as the Ardmore Chamber of Commerce on May 10, 1921, it changed its name to Main Line Chamber of Commerce in 1944. Both Dunne and his wife were U. of PA graduates (interview with Wm. E. Clear, Jr., 20 July 1994).

⁶⁶⁴ *Main Line Times*, 15 August 1940.

avenues where adults might play shuffleboard, bocce or checkers in the shade; construct two attractive parking lots - one across from the post office (then on Essex Avenue) and the other on Elmwood; lease the old Pennsylvania Railroad station for community uses such as Red Cross Emergency Aid, and build a playground for little children at the head of Iona Avenue.

Many of these and similar projects the proposed association could finance and carry through by itself, Dunne declared. And although he was quick to point out that a large part of the group's activity would involve cooperation with borough council and the planning commission, he reminded people that a civic association could give those bodies invaluable help. This was, he asserted, a practical dream that could be accomplished if only enough of Narberth's citizens desired to live in that kind of community badly enough to join the civic association and pay dues of one dollar a year.

Ardmore's weekly Main Line Times thought well enough of the idea that it took the unusual step of placing an editorial on page one praising the:

practical dreamer who can get things done because he has the imagination to visualize the impossible and the courage and energy to accomplish it. ... We think it is important enough for a front-page editorial because we believe that Ralph S. Dunne can do what he thinks he can do in Narberth, and that, if he can, the same thing is possible for every community along the Main Line.⁶⁶⁵

A formal organization was set up at a September mass meeting, and the talk given at the first official civic association meeting by a representative of the Pennsylvania Forestry Service addressed the number one priority item on the agenda of the new citizens' group: "Tree Planting in Business Communities." (The speaker recommended Chinese elm and Japanese gingko plantings). However, the association's trees of choice for mainstreet turned out to be red or scarlet oaks and sugar maples.

By October 1940, board members of the new civic association headed by Dunne were announced.⁶⁶⁶ This very diverse slate wisely included second-generation members of such prominent Narberth families as the Shands, the Looses and the Jefferies that had been civically active here for three decades (railroad bigwig Alexander C. Shand's daughter Elizabeth who was married to Paul Loos, son of mover-and-shaker A. J. Loos, and Mr. and Mrs. J. Norman Jefferies who always lent a theatrical flair to things were represented by their daughter Hulda who was Mrs. Carl F. Weihman, by then running the Jefferies women's apparel shop with her daughter Jane. That slate of board members, a model of its

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., October 8, 1940

kind, also included past and future members of the board of directors of Narberth public school (accountant Hervey C. Keim, a 1906 arrival in Narberth who like both his brother and sister had settled here to raise a family and had sent children to that school, and southsider Mrs. Robert Wetherald, active in the League of Women Voters, who was elected to head its Statewide organization in 1947). Also locals with strong public relations credentials (Robert Fellows Wood and Karl H. Rogers), future borough councilman Arthur L. Cooke, Sr. who was a building-supply manufacturer's representative, and center-city bank teller William E. Clear, Jr.⁶⁶⁷ who had married his public high school sweetheart after both graduated (1928) from the University of Pennsylvania, this couple settling into a small Narberth semi-detached house they struggled to buy during the Depression. Also local businessmen Joseph Adelizzi and Salvatore Fratantoni⁶⁶⁸ and two others, A. C. Miller of Penn's famed football-playing Miller family, and William J. Searle. This broad selection of citizens touched base with the old established residents and aimed to build bridges to such new arrivals as the as yet unassimilated Italian-Americans, who represented the latest ethnic surge in the town's population. Adelizzi Brothers had by 1914 opened a tailors, dyers, dry-cleaning establishment which remained many years an anchor in the heart of town (and sprouted a branch in nearby Bala Cynwyd), while Fratantoni had a plaster-contracting business here.

World War II

But before substantial progress was made on the civic association's ambitious new agenda, World War II intervened and community efforts were diverted to cooperation of another sort. For some, it was a smooth transition from civic association board member to air-raid warden.

What could be the basis of Narberth's undisputed superiority over other nearby communities in matters concerning civilian defense? The appetite for such activity over a long period was insatiable in Narberth. When a formal organization meeting of Narberth's borough-sponsored "Home Defense Council" took place on a spring evening at Elm Hall seven months before Pearl Harbor, the group was the first organization of its type in the state. (During the earlier global conflict, Narberth had a sizeable uniformed force known as the Home Guard, already noted). Lower Merion quickly responded to the new initiative by gathering home-defense officers of American Legion posts throughout the township to plan a similar organization in its own municipality. The push for such councils was made possible by a

⁶⁶⁷ Telephone interview with William E. Clear, Jr., July 20, 1994.

⁶⁶⁸ Telephone interview with his sister Frances Frantantoni living on brick row, July 16, 1994.

recent enactment of the legislature, and it was hoped locally that the idea would spread to nearby counties and beyond.

Eventually, the alertness of the Defense Corps in both the borough and surrounding township was amply demonstrated in World War II by the “paper bombing” of the combined area on a Sunday afternoon in September 1943, when forty-two “pink bombs” (signifying high explosives or incendiaries) were reported to have been dropped. By then every block had its trusty white-helmeted air raid warden on patrol — an individual, often a local committeeman, who knew all the people in his district as well as they knew him. And those air raid wardens quickly reported for duty on that September Sunday during the simulated bombing, while the control centers went into action to render service as “incidents” were reported. Around the same time, the very patriotic Narberth and Lower Merion district far surpassed its quota, in the Third War Loan campaign. Lower Merion and Narberth were part of the Philadelphia air raid district according to plans worked out by the State Council of Defense, not the Montgomery County district.

By 1950, the governor appointed a politician (the president of the township commissioners) to organize a Lower Merion defense agency as a precautionary measure “in case action is taken against us from abroad during any further deterioration of the already serious foreign situation.” The Narberth burgess (Sterling H. Chain) was called in, and discussions ensued about the borough’s organizing its own civil defense agency to be integrated with that of the township.

The borough did organize a twenty-two-man Civilian Defense Council in September of that year. Led by a three-man steering board, the group comprised five executive members, eight division heads, and six qualified citizens.

Volunteer Medical Service

A “first” of its kind on the Main Line, the Volunteer Medical Service Corps of Narberth was organized in 1942 and chartered in 1944 as an offshoot of local civil defense efforts during World War II. (In the area of civil defense, Narberth never did things by halves.) This phalanx of first-aiders on wheels was intended as a means of delivering first aid if the Germans should ever bomb this country, as was widely believed at the time they might do. This founding group of first-aid providers - six men and twenty female nurses led by Tom Merkle and Edward Frankenfield - received its first-aid training from the Red Cross. The corps’ equipment was a 1932 Buick sedan and a borrowed trailer. Toward the end of the war they purchased a 1932 La Salle ambulance for a small sum obtained with loans from Narberth businessmen.

As progress was made, this group together with F. Munro (Doc) Purse, D.O., conceived the idea of ambulance service for the community. Doc Purse had become interested in the ambulance corps through a former medical student of his who was also located in Narberth (Doctor E. R. Disbrow at the time was an emergency room surgeon at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine). What convinced Doc Purse that an ambulance service for the community was needed was his realization that:

It seemed a shame to waste the talent and interest of the members of the corps and the equipment such as it was at the time.

So the group after its 1944 send-off, decided to accept a wider challenge of expanding its services. Moving ahead, these volunteers in 1947 replaced their old gear with a sparkling new (for a change) Cadillac ambulance fully equipped. Thereafter they continued operation on a twenty-four-hour basis, providing ambulance service to the Borough and Lower Merion Township as volunteers with three modern ambulances, their own garage and headquarters building. Their mission in those days: they basically gave first-aid and got people to the hospital. Their work continued in this fashion until Ed Frankenfield retired as chief of operations in December 1980. After that, phoenix-like, the old volunteer corps soared to new heights by re-defining its mission and offering-again a “first” in the area-advanced life-support services resembling those of a traveling hospital.

Among the many home front concerns of the war years, a special open meeting was held early in 1944 in Elm Hall to consider the advisability of setting up a day nursery in Narberth after many requests were received both from mothers working outside the home and from those with husbands in the Armed Forces. Of course the quarterly War Loan Drive campaign continued its methodical march, usually going over the top in reaching its quota for individual bond subscriptions in the Lower Merion- Narberth district with the canvassers fanning out all over their territory to sell as many bonds as possible regardless whether the quota had been met - all to keep enthusiasm at a high pitch.

Law enforcement felt stresses and strains locally during this time, a clash⁶⁶⁹ erupting between the borough council president and Narberth’s two magistrates over what he charged was lax enforcement in 1943. Also the local draft board was very active, headed by Bill Durbin who knew virtually every citizen by name. And as the list of war casualties marched on as well, Durbin was said to feel an especially deep personal loss⁶⁷⁰ at each report of a hometown soldier killed or wounded under fire.

⁶⁶⁹ Main Line Times, October 21, 1943.

⁶⁷⁰ Correspondence with Durbin’s daughter.

One of the greatest Narberth survival stories of World War II was about the harrowing experiences of Lieutenant W. Ridgely O’Sullivan, an Air Force pilot shot down in a bombing raid over Germany and listed as missing in action. A ham radio operator transmitted the first news that “Ridge” was alive but seriously injured in a POW hospital. The whole town lived the drama of Flying Fortress pilot O’Sullivan and his eventual triumphant return. Meanwhile, Ridge’s younger brother Bill, in the Navy like their father, survived the sinking of his torpedoed ship in the Pacific. Those three O’Sullivans — the father having served in both World Wars — marched in uniform at the head of Narberth’s first peacetime Memorial Day parade after World War II.⁶⁷¹

Fourth of July⁶⁷²

Suzanne Mueller reached out finally one more time – effectively to strengthen July Fourth patriots. The familiar menu of patriotic events on the Fourth of July that included singing of national tunes and speeches in the morning at a sandlot field with a parade followed by evening fireworks had begun in Narberth with a proclamation issued by the burgess in 1903.⁶⁷³ But by the early-1930s, the focus had shifted mainly to evening events — community singing, readings and speeches polished off by fireworks — that were attracting ten thousand people, and sponsored by our American Legion post (as of 1924), with J. J. Cabrey and Harry Simpson regularly in charge.⁶⁷⁴ Attendance at those community fireworks displays was clearly meant to help dissuade local residents from the then popular, illegal and always dangerous practice of setting off their own fireworks.⁶⁷⁵ As it turned out, the town’s full-fledged daytime observances of that holiday are of a much more recent origin.

Interestingly, Narberth’s lasting love affair with July Fourth daytime celebrations was in a way an ironic emblem of independence. For it was arrived at, not in tranquility, but by an eventual distillation after the clash of opposing thoughts about independent government vs colonialism.

By this buffeting backhand forth of notions, spontaneous and often contradictory about our nation’s first foray into colonialism at the dawn of the twentieth century in the Philippines - something she had encountered first hand - Suzanne Mueller came up with a substantial new idea about how to champion the cause of independence on the small-town level here at home.

⁶⁷¹ The O’Sullivan’s youngest son, Warren, eventually taught at West Point.

⁶⁷² Editor’s Note: in 2019 Narberth celebrated its 77th showing of fireworks for the Fourth of July!

⁶⁷³ By 1915, if more money were contributed than needed, it was donated to Holiday House at 20 Sabine Ave. Our Town, June 24, 1915.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 June 1933.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Her activities began here while the Independence-Day fireworks aspect was under direction of a committee appointed by borough council and assisted by Speakman American Legion post members and Narberth Fire Company, with J. J. Cabrey serving as general director. Under this same arrangement in 1940, only two Main line towns sponsored fireworks - Narberth and Bala Cynwyd - and the attendance figures were down substantially, with 1941 another slow year for the local festivities. But by the time a daylight-hours program was set in place a year later, nearly a dozen women's organizations would be newly involved and stirring things up, with one woman, president of the new Fourth of July Committee and a bundle of energy, in charge.

Narberth's full Fourth of July daytime activities program was started, it is widely believed, so folks housebound by rationing and other restrictions during World War II would have something to do on the holiday. The real reason, less prosaic, showed considerable wisdom and a commendably farseeing attitude about teaching children the meaning of democracy.

As Thanksgiving approached just before Pearl Harbor, Suzanne Mueller and her Voluntary Emergency Relief helpers were filling food baskets for distribution to needy families in Narberth. As fast as they would fill them, Bernice and Sterling Chain's red-haired son Rusty Chain and nephew Jack Piercy, a pair of four-year-olds who were raised by the Chains⁶⁷⁶ as brothers and dressed alike, delivered the baskets around town in their express wagons. Sterling Chain, officer of a large trust company in center city, and distantly related to the family of Narberth's Charles Chain whose grandson is family doctor Bill Chain Jr. here, was not yet burgess. Rusty - and eventually his son also - would graduate from the United States Naval Academy, while Jack meanwhile studied for the ministry.

Standing by, surveying the little express-wagon convoy, Suzanne Mueller grew thoughtful. Suddenly she declared to Bernice Piercy Chain:

When your two boys grow up, they won't know what the Fourth of July is all about. We've got to start something so that they will know.⁶⁷⁷

And so it began—as an effort to teach two children - which turned out to reach thousands. Civic volunteers were very important in America in the 1940s and 1950s. And there were so many of them in Narberth, that this project had an excellent chance of success from the start, given the strong initial leadership it had. So the patriotic character of the new organization was firmly set upon the strong foundation of the then flourishing national trend of volunteerism.

⁶⁷⁶ Telephone interview with Bernice Piercy Chain Weightman, July 17, 1994.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid. Bernice quoting Suzanne. (Telephone interview with Bernice Piercy Chain Weightman, 17 July 1994.)

Without a doubt, this new initiative bore the clear imprint of “civics lessons” Suzanne Mueller learned during her stay in the Philippines. There, just prior to moving here in 1920, her husband’s foreign service job of harbor-surveying was part of a public works program initiated by the United States government during a period of postwar colonial guardianship of that land.

That experience abroad among a population that had suffered much at the hands of powerful rulers including the Spanish certainly fueled her strong liking for the common people that defined her and was to have its full flowering here in her varied community-conscious Narberth activities. Suzanne surely would have known about the Philippines’ own great mix of peoples speaking different languages, and the fact that it was their late-nineteenth-century struggle for independence that had given them a new sense of unity. She would have empathized with their new independence movement in the making too, which took so much inspiration from our Constitution - the Philippines already by then having received assurances from our government that one day such hopes of theirs would also be realized.

Indeed American independence and the struggles of other lands to achieve similar freedoms were very much on her mind when she and her husband settled in Narberth fresh from their Pacific adventure. However, with so many other needs claiming her immediate attention here in the town, besides the effects of the Great Depression, considerable time passed before she got around to addressing the meaning of American independence, and to heralding its message in ways that could be understood by everybody, in what turned out to be her final - as well as her most lasting - contribution⁶⁷⁸ to a vibrant civic life locally.

The new group involved lots and lots of people and many groups in the town, dozens of them, including some within various churches, but Mrs. Mueller, now wearing a new hat literally (for at this annual event, she always wore a red, white and blue hat, white stockings and shoes, and a long white dress with blue sash) and her latest crop of committee workers did not want those participating groups to have to pay for things. So as the first item of business in launching the project, president Suzanne Mueller marched down to Narberth National Bank and borrowed twenty-five dollars from its president, Carl B. Metzger. With that modest bank loan, the new Fourth of July daytime committee was able to buy the food for the various local groups.

Meanwhile, a lot of the merchants also gave the committee things at low cost. That way, the project soon became a community effort. Favorite foods from the start included hot dogs prepared by

⁶⁷⁸ That Suzanne Mueller also participated in civilian defense preparedness was likewise mentioned in Bernice’s ‘94 discussion.

popular Joseph White wearing his professional chef's hat, and lemonade. And so the evening festivities of fireworks, one of the oldest and strongest traditions on the Main Line that began in 1903 and was strongly renewed on the southside in 1922, was extended to a day-long event for adults and children. The daytime program on Narberth playground grew with amazing swiftness. A tradition became firmly established whereby the committee never asked for donations from people, as Bernice Chain explained it. Instead merchants just gave. And of course the money made was turned back for children's recreational activities. By war's end, this program was flying high.

Tennis and Golf

The spread of tennis and golf in the 1950s in the United States, according to Tom Wolfe, occurred because people associated it with the had been a touchstone of prospering middle-class lifestyle in Philadelphia's Main Line suburbs ever since the new game of lawn tennis swept the country in the early-1880s. In Narberth, the emphasis initially was on finding ways to bring tennis to the people.

Here at Elm, lawn tennis had been enthusiastically introduced in 1889 by newly settled Quakers, namely the silverware-manufacturing Justice family which for two generations held large lawn-tennis parties on their grounds for friends and kin from the city. Meanwhile, their Quaker neighbor and friend Francis Forsythe, born here in 1896, remained a lifelong twice-a-week tennis regular (on clay courts); actually he died at eighty-plus on the courts while playing a singles game with his granddaughter. Publisher James Artman, Langdon Lea at "Edgewood," and insurance man William Jones each on private property built clay tennis courts used by their families and friends here well into the 1920s.

From all indications, tennis seemed to be extremely well positioned for growth in the town if a way could be found to meet the needs of a broader audience. This was done soon after the turn of the century when programs were set up at a quasi-public facility promoting local tennis activities. Far from being dismissed here in the words of the immortal P. G. Wodehouse as "outdoor Ping-Pong," tennis-playing became so widespread⁶⁷⁹ in the community that the Narberth Tennis Association was formed before World War I. This group initiated an annual tennis tournament tradition that lasted nearly a generation and drew its support both from serious players who thrived on the sport's competitive aspects, and from a large number of casual players who never had a lesson and participated for fun, exercise and to be with friends. So keen was the interest that by 1915 the would-be tournament

⁶⁷⁹ Main Line News, Narberth, 8 May 1914, p. 2, declared "Quite a number of tennis clubs are being organized throughout the borough." Today (2013) we have Julian Krinsky's Narberth Tennis Club. Currently also the Julian Krinsky School of Golf offers Indoor Golf Simulator lessons.

competitors, woman and men - the men clad in long white flannel trousers - practiced daily at dawn⁶⁸⁰ at the association's 210 Elmwood Avenue courts or on vacant lots before commuting to their jobs after a hearty breakfast. Participants cut across a wide cross-section of occupations ranging from newcomers with professional and business ties in Philadelphia, to the suburban offspring of families with roots going back a century or more as local farmers and craftsmen.

But it was the Pennsylvania Railroad's declared intention to build a major freight yard with cutoff on land it owned in Narberth that had stymied the local recreational officials as World War I loomed. How to prevent this dreaded railroad incursion and seize the opportunity instead to build a large playground on this unused turf? Even with the war over, the matter seemed totally unresolved. It was the most serious problem the borough had ever faced, and several years would pass before a solution was forthcoming. Meanwhile, save for the original notification⁶⁸¹ in the local press, there was official silence as the town fathers polished their strategies.

Narberth Tennis Association targeted 1921 as its year for new tennis courts and a club house. Having applied for a charter in 1927, it had even bigger plans for 1928 (dashed by the Depression) about expanding its membership under chairman Edwin P. Dold and building a new clubhouse. The proposed two-story building would have made it a year-round facility with accommodations for bowling, squash or handball as well as for social life with a large hall for dances and rooms for card-playing and billiards. Our Town editorialized that such a building

would fill a place that has been vacant since the demise of the YMCA, and would be happily free from the elements that brought about the Y's downfall [doubtless referring to frustrations it had while trying to address its own expansion needs].⁶⁸²

The editorial went on to decry the present "considerable dearth of proper recreation facilities in Narberth." It noted the then current popularity of bowling as a winter sport, there being eight active teams in the inter-church bowling leagues, but questioned how much longer this might flourish "with only the overworked alleys of the Baptist church to use."

The location of this new facility was to be on the grounds of the Narberth Tennis Club that had opened in 1924 in the borough at 610 Montgomery Avenue opposite General Wayne Inn on the site of the Federal Spring. This land, had been made available for tennis playing through the generosity of its

⁶⁸⁰ Interview with one of these early morning players, Linda Kirk Day who grew up at 307 Woodside Ave. in the house her father William Kirk bought for his family in 1913.

⁶⁸¹ Our Town, 23 August 1917, p. 1.

⁶⁸² Our Town, May 19, 1928.

owner, A. J. Loos. By 1928, the Pennsylvania Clay Courts Championship had already been held for several years on these courts, chosen for the tournament due to the excellence of the courts. The new building would further enhance the setting. And while the community-based Narberth Tennis Association suffered a disabling setback from the effects of the Depression, wiry and perennially-suntanned Frank C. Feise,⁶⁸³ the tennis club owner, did not. He prospered, and under his management Narberth Tennis Club lasted fifty-eight years, featuring six outdoor and two indoor tennis courts on three acres.

Gradually the grassroots fervor of this sport as it was played locally by many residents in their all-Narberth tournaments was lost when the Narberth Tennis Club took over many of the functions of Narberth Tennis Association and replaced it. By the early-1930s, the club's contests to win the Narberth net title were mainly fostering inter-club rivalries in the region, sometimes with participation by collegiate stars, and not any longer the intramural type of contests between local residents that had started things off.

But the rise of local tennis clubs had its tradeoffs. Bill Tilden, one of the twentieth-century tennis greats (he hailed from Philadelphia's Germantown section) gave lessons at Narberth Tennis Club, and local residents will never forget the thrill of seeing him play. Tilden, with Babe Ruth in baseball, golf's Bobby Jones and Jack Dempsey in boxing, was one of the fabulous "big four" in the halcyon sports days of the 1920s. His prime was 1920-25, yet he was still strong in his forties. The "John Barrymore of the courts," Tilden Americanized tennis, converting it from a leisurely country club game into a sport that attracted national interest and drew thousands of spectators. As anywhere else, "Big Bill's" announced appearance in Narberth was an assurance of a crowd. Many other widely-known professionals also spent time at this club while they were "tennis bums," not yet highly paid.

Still, the community tennis courts were not neglected during the 1930s. Those facilities were said by some citizens to have been "our salvation"⁶⁸⁴ during the depths of the Depression.

Basketball

In Narberth, high school basketball has long been an all-consuming passion rather than a mere pastime. In the winter of 1923-24, Narberth started an indoor basketball team that, within a decade had

⁶⁸³ Interview with Frank C. Feise who lived next door to his tennis courts. He became a nationally-known builder of Teniko, Teniflex and Corkturf tennis courts (billed as all weather, non-maintenance and fast-drying), with headquarters in Narberth and a branch in West Palm Beach, Florida.

⁶⁸⁴ Harry Berry and his wife, a very practical and down-to-earth couple, used that expression in particular.

advanced to participation in county tournaments. Originally, the aim of starting that team had been to offset the community's loss that year of a local basketball squad due to the closing of Narberth High School and the transfer of students to Lower Merion (Township) High School, as well as the loss of the YMCA teams in 1920. Creation of that "replacement" squad was doubtless a factor in putting Narberth on the map as a source of good players during the 1930s and early-'40s. So was the success in the early-1930s of a scrappy Narberth young men's indoor squad known as "the saints" in the then new Main Line Basketball League. This was a Saint Margaret's team that did not play in the church leagues. Its stars were Jiggs Torchiana and Matt Callahan, and Daniel L. Redmond is also mentioned in connection with its activity.

Crucial meanwhile to the formation of public-school players in the area was a pair of exceptional high school coaches, Bill ("Andy") Anderson and "Pop" Fowler. Guided by Lafayette College-trained Anderson, Lower Merion High School won its first state championship in basketball in 1934. Even then, Narberth had established itself as the source for the team's outstanding players. That year the team included Narberth's Raymond A. Stanley, who went on to play at Penn, became a college basketball coach there and at Lafayette and was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame.

For five years beginning in 1939, the Lower Merion team dominated basketball like no other schoolboy team in Pennsylvania before or since, clinching 111 of 117 games during that period. Between 1941 and 1943, the team won three consecutive Class AAA state championships, a record that lasted more than forty years,⁶⁸⁵ until Carlisle overtook it. Wherever Lower Merion played, it won. Once the team pushed Anderson's car four miles through a snowstorm to play a victorious game in upstate Hazleton, another time winning at the University of Pennsylvania's Palestra (est. 1927) when that hallowed place, famous in its heyday for its cozy neighborhood feel, was so crowded the police turned three thousand spectators away. Anderson had a 346 to 55 record (.863 winning percentage) in his eighteen seasons at Lower Merion. The only way he could get a worthwhile workout for his players was to arrange scrimmages against local colleges. College clubs coming to town to play a Big Five team generally scrimmaged Lower Merion first — a practice long since outlawed by the NCAA. Even today that Lower Merion team is acknowledged as probably the greatest high school basketball squad in Pennsylvania, aside from player Wilt Chamberlain's famed 1955 Overbrook High School team in Philadelphia.

⁶⁸⁵ Among the great high school basketball squads.

And Anderson's regimen was strict: afternoon naps for his players (and he checked with their mothers to enforce this). Also, he banned distracting romantic entanglements and would hound a player who got involved in one. These were the days of the two-handed set shot and the all-white teams (Lower Merion's champs had one black player from Ardmore). Height was important but not crucial for this squad. Andy's "signature" was a suffocating man-to-man defense so effective it sometimes held opposing teams to no points, except those gained from foul shots. Other trademarks were the Lower Merion team's weaving offense and almost mechanical efficiency. The upshot was that, while the emphasis on performing like robots got good short-term results with Anderson's high school players, none of them had exceptionally strong college basketball careers. Of course the interruption caused by military service in World War II may have made a difference in their college athletic potential too.

The heart and soul of this township high school team in its championship years were its numerous Narberth players, led by its Narberth captain (Greer Heindel who at the time was the league's only athlete ever to play on three consecutive Class AAA state championship teams. One of his teammates much later said of Greer:

He looked like a man playing with boys. He was more mature than the rest of us, physically and every other way.

No doubt about it, some of this molding of a champion team by Anderson had its impact beyond the basketball court and high school, by helping to forge the character of the players. Nearly every one of them became a success in life. Four of the five principal players in 1943 were from the Borough of Narberth. And the 1941 and 1942 champs had included another five Narberthites. The team, a dozen gawky youths wearing maroon sweaters and pleated pants met before every game at the Narberth corner drugstore (Shea's, which then had a soda fountain and booths). Even on the court, however, many miles away from this town, these were Narberthmen. Explained one of the team players much later:

We used to huddle and people would ask 'What is it you say as you lean over?' We were saying 'Let's win one for the burgess' [referring to Narberth's then new burgess Richard L. Miller, whose term was from 1942 to 1949].

Besides Anderson, the other key contributor to the formation of these young Narberth players as the lode-star of Lower Merion's teams during that five-year period was Pop Fowler, the Ardmore Junior High School coach. All these boys attended his summer basketball camp at Banger Lodge, Casco, Maine religiously. They also came into beneficial contact with an associate of Anderson's Gendell Reeves from Lafayette, who formed many future stars and was a strong disciplinarian.

Meanwhile, here on their hometown turf, Narberth's small army of Lower Merion state champion players in their heyday became "playground rats," a foreshadowing of the youthful interest in basketball in the borough on its community grounds that continues today full steam.

Those champs haunted Narberth's outdoor basketball courts to practice day and night. This was before those courts had any lights. So they improvised: the father of players Chuck and Ralph Viguers let his sons and their pals use the headlights of the Viguers family car to illumine the basketball court - until the battery went dead. One night after strenuous practice in the headlights, the champs cooled off by jumping unannounced, into publisher Walter Annenberg's outdoor pool nearby.

Pretty soon all these players went off to war, several of "Andy's Boys" joining the Navy and Heindel enlisting in the Army, earning a commission and serving in the South Pacific. On their return, a number of those exceptional players of various ages got together and formed the Lower Merion Vets team which won the Main Line Basketball League championship in its first year of league play, 1946-47. But already the stage was set for major changes in the way basketball was played in the borough—this time it would happen in the summer and under the (overhead) lights.

Baseball - (Main Line League Baseball) ⁶⁸⁶

The 1920s

The long drought in loop titles for Narberth after 1916 did not affect the popularity of the sport in the borough. Season attendance in Narberth in **1922** (the sixth straight year without a hometown title) had risen to 17,000. Finally the boroughites moved back into the league winners' circle again by beating Berwyn in **1923**. Putting sparkle into the final game of that series were the brilliant relief hurling of Bill Durbin and the hitting of Vernon Fleck. Berwyn had gotten to pitcher Yowell in the fifth inning, but the final score was 12-7. The champion players that year also included Davis, Townsend, Jefferies, Burns, Heckel, Ricklin and B. and H. Humphries and the other teams in the league were Bala Cynwyd, Paoli and Ardmore at season's end. In 1923 Narberth was playing some non-league teams too. By this time the Main Line baseball season was running deep into September, and later would stretch into October.

Twilight games were popular in **1924**, a year in which Narberth again won the Main Line pennant in early October this time by beating Bala Cynwyd. Apart from pitchers (of which Gibson is mentioned prominently), Narberth's line-up in every game of the series was infielders Dickie, Kane, Davis, H. Humphries, catcher Burns and outfielders G. and V. Fleck, Yowell and C. Humphries.

686 Editor's note: this section, long as it is, is an excerpt. The whole section is lost.

Narberth took first-half honors that season, and tied for the second-half laurels with Bala Cynwyd. In the league standings, Wayne was runner up, followed by Berwyn, Paoli, Oakmont.

By **1925**, Narberth was settling into a habit of winning titles in streaks of three in a row. After capturing second-half championship by lacing the first-half victor Berwyn by an 11 to 3 score, those two teams played a three-game championship series. Before a crowd of 5,000 fans at Narberth, the home team drew first blood by winning the first game 10 to 8. The boroughites did all their scoring in the early innings, coming from behind to tie up the winning lead. Berwyn started strongly by pounding Charlie Townsend, the Princeton southpaw, for three runs in the first inning. But Narberth kept pecking away at Bobby Paist, and in the fourth and fifth innings, scored three runs in each, putting the game on ice. Berwyn rallied in the ninth by scoring two runs. But Townsend nipped this in the bud. He struck out twelve and held Berwyn to nine hits while his mates were collecting 15 safeties from Paist's deliveries. It was the batting of the two Princeton stars, Jack Jefferies and Charlie Townsend, that cost Paist a victory. Jefferies obliged with five hits for five at-bats including a double, triple and homer, his circuit rap coming in the fourth inning with two on-base. Townsend had three hits, two of which were doubles. Between them, the two Princetonians accounted for eight of Narberth's runs. Other striking features of that game were the fielding of Keyes and of Berwyn's Paist and Dorsaneo, that catching of Burns and the hitting of Dorsaneo. The Narberth lineup for that game included Vernon Fleck and his brother George, Hart, Dickie, Burns, Jefferies, Yowell, Davis, Keyes and Gilfillan.

Harry Berry,⁶⁸⁷ who was a 12-year-old Narberth fan in 1925, recalls that the impressiveness of the collegiate players Townsend and Jefferies on the baseball diamond "made me an instant fan of Princeton." Townsend was the first baseball player Berry ever saw who was a switch hitter, in that Townsend pitched left-handed but batted right-handed. John H. Jefferies, Jr., who also played with Reading and New Haven in the Eastern Baseball League saw service in the South Pacific during World War II as a Navy Lieutenant Commander.

Bill Crowell's Narberth club won the 1925 title by defeating Berwyn 9 to 7 in a thrilling contest. The local team jumped on the offerings of Bobby Doyle on the mound for Berwyn, and by smashing six hits, including doubles by Fleck and Yowell and Fleck's triple, together with three bases on balls, scored eight runs in the second inning to win any game. Replacing Doyle, the veteran Bobby Paist went into the box. He held Narberth to one run and seven scattered singles during the rest of the game. Meanwhile, Berwyn had been pecking away at the offerings of Charlie Townsend, the former Princeton star, scoring

⁶⁸⁷ Editor's note: resident of 27 Narbrook Park.

one run in the first and again in the fourth rounds. Briefly Townsend lost control, giving up unearned runs, but then he tightened up again and prevented further scoring. Vernon Fleck led the offensive for Narberth with a triple, a double and a single, while Jack Jefferies, another former Princeton star, got three safe drives, two of which would have been home runs except for ground rules. The work of Dickie at second base, and also Paist and Dorsaneo shone in the field. Paist also led this team in batting with four hits. The home team included the usual players, along with the addition of Gilfillian. The Phillies team was in the cellar that year.

Narberth made it to the post-season game in **1926**. The home team played its last game of that series against Autocar with a team consisting of pitcher, ?, and G. Fleck catching for him, infielders Heckel, Jefferies, Davis, Gill and outfielders Yowell, Hanke, Turner and V. Fleck. These were the years when there was a very big industrial baseball league in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. If a man were a very good player, those teams would see to it that such a man got a job. That way he could play for them.

As the **1928** season wound to a close, Narberth by virtue of a doubleheader over Newtown Square, 16 to 4 and 9 to 5, was within one game of first place. Some of the players unfamiliar from earlier title-winning years included Gillespie, Lindsay, Carter, Babb, Willis and McMonigle. On September 15, Narberth scored an impressive 9 to 2 victory over Berwyn before the largest crowd of the season and thereby sewed up the second-half race in the league. Every man on the winning team contributed one or more singles, Mckenna the pitcher leading with three safeties. Narberth won that final game, and in those years much was made of the winning of the first and second half honors. In that late-September contest, Narberth pitcher Bill McKenty was opposed by Griffith, former pitching ace of Villanova College. Players were the usual ones, with the addition of Sullivan. The team had reached its full stride by this time (1928 and 1929). This was confirmed the following year.

The 1930s

For Narberth made it three straight championships by winning again in 1930. The team rallied to win that title series from Paoli after losing the opening game. Paoli also drew first blood the next year when the two were again paired for the championship series and Paoli went on to take the series. Narberth came back in force in 1932, winning the title after vying with Eddie Hare's Upper Darby team which had been a half-game behind Narberth for second-half honors ... At season's end the new champion again played Bryn Mawr and lost in a benefit game to assist former Villanova College player Johnny Highfield who two weeks earlier had been seriously injured in a Main line League game and

required leg surgery. In 1933, Narberth made it to the playoffs against Media, that's all. The local team at the time included Francis, Walker, McGregor, Powel, Brennan, Carlsten, Young and Reynolds. By mid-September Media and Brookline were slugging it out, Media winning the third game in the Main Line series 7 to 4.

Narberth recaptured the title in **1934** by beating Berwyn in three straight games, each time before a crowd of 4,000 spectators Johnny Jackson, the former U of P. and Phillies hurler, dominated the series for Narberth, sharing the limelight with such other players as Umbach, Rubincam, Pieper and Eachus. The puzzle to Berwyn was the disappointing performance of their right-handed pitcher Phil Wagner, who had been voted the Leagues ace hurler by the league managers in a recent poll. Narberth only southpaw Danny Glass was one of the league's top players that season.

In **1935**, Narberth's feat was to have won two games in a single September weekend that decided the championship quickly by ending the series in three games for the second straight year. Brookline, the second half champion, was the loser. Going into the **1935** championship series, Brookline was rated as having a vastly superior pitching staff of all right-handers including their "big three" pitchers Georgie Severn with a record of five straight wins, curve-baller Frank Malseed who hailed from Nether Providence and had a four in seven record, and the brainy veteran Morris Tabbutt. Supplementing them were Harold (Bing) Miller, Jimmy Connor and Walt Azpell. But their batters, reputed to be sluggers, did not hit, and Narberth made a streak of it. The championship pitchers of Davis' "money team" that year were Nick Lyons, Bill Reynolds and Al Hermann and others held in reserve including Jimmy McKee, Charlie Simons and Oak Smith. The Narberth pitching staff had not performed outstandingly during the regular season but Reynolds was considered the smartest one of them and although he had trouble going the route in 1935, he usually was trouble as a relief man. The way it turned out, Davis made brilliant use of three pitchers in the series, surprising the fans each time – first Nick Lyons with a four-hit game, Bill Reynolds with his six-hit shut-out and finally Al Herman with a five-hit performance.

Al Hermann, the big right-hander, was credited with pitching Narberth into the **1936** "Little World Series," as it was called locally in the final game of the regular⁶⁸⁸ season with a 7 - 6 win against Coatesville which had its ace "Perk" Smith on the mound. Next day, a Sunday at three, Narberth started the series against Eddie Hare's Brookline team, winners of the first half of the season. Narberth's enviable record at the time was seven league titles in the past nine years. The cagey Bill Reynolds, a former West Catholic High and Dayton University right-hander nicknamed "Fidgety Bill," turned in one

⁶⁸⁸ Or was it a mini-playoff?

of his best performances in years for Narberth in the first game of that 1936 series. The one-sided score was 5 - 0, and fast fielding by Harry Fox saved the shutout. Reynolds' opponent was former Nicetown player and ace right-hander Georgie Severn. The same pair of pitchers dueled again in the second game, Reynolds nosing Brookline out 1 - 0 before a crowd of 3,000 at Narberth. Brookline was never threatening in that game. But Reynolds was "poison in the pinches," and received fine support. Tanny Ralston led Narberth at bat with a double and two singles. The remaining games, played in early October,...

At its start, the series had seemed like an anti-climax coming just after the hard-fought three-game contest with Coatesville over the second-half honors. Certainly Narberth entered the second game of the series seeming to hold the whip hand after coming through in great style to grab two important victories (Coatesville and Brookline). But its eventual title did not come easy.

With the second of two last minute protests waiting in the wings, the Main Line Baseball League rang down the curtain of its regular season with defending champ Narberth finishing in first place. That is how it looked according to the standings but a Brookline protest on top of a two-week-old protest by Gladwyne made for a delay in putting that tally in the league record books. In any event, the four teams to participate in the playoffs were decided – Narberth, Gladwyne, Brookline and Paoli. Coatesville had narrowly been edged out of the running. Brookline manager Eddie Hare's protest was based on a play in his team's final game of season that it lost two Narberth 5 - 4. The incident occurred in the sixth inning when Brookline's Dick Baker hit a ball into the parked cars in left field in Narberth. Hare, who was planning to step down from his job after this season, charged that a spectator retrieved the ball and tossed it to Narberth leftfielder Herb Ogden, whose relay held Baker to a triple. Hare claimed it would have been a home run if Ogden were not assisted by the spectator. The protest, if (it had been) allowed, would not have improved Brookline's league standing, but it would have aided Gladwyne's position place. Gladwyne's protest against Upper Darby would, in turn, have given it undisputed possession of first place. Order of finish in season play gave certain advantages: the team finishing first got a greater percentage of the receipts in the playoffs. And it also determines the pairings for the preliminary playoffs. Brookline would stand a better chance against Gladwyne than against Narberth, which has jinxed them in the past. Paoli was the dark horse of those playoffs, but it had a strong hope in Johnnie Jackson who used to pitch for Penn, the Phillies and Narberth.

With the disputes amicably settled, Narberth in **1937** became the first team to win four consecutive league championships when Davis' powerful array crushed Gladwyne 8 – 3 for a clean sweep of his third straight win of the series. A crowd of 3,000 watched as pitcher Walt Masters a former

University of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Phillies hurler, handcuffed manager Jim Keyes Gladwyne team until the seventh when he began easing up a little, giving a single. Masters also pitched the first game, and he replaced Hermann in the second game. Fisticuffs almost popped in the wild ninth inning of that game over a disputed decision at home plate.

The **1938** season started off with eight teams that seemed quite well-balanced. The previous year the league had 10 teams. By 1938, Narberth had lost Walt Masters, and ace pitcher and Herb Ogden had gone cavorting in the Cape Cod League. The southpaw pitcher Glass was with the West Phils that year, not a title-winning season for the Davismen. Narberth's long reign as league champion was brought to an end when a fighting Manoa nine nosed out the borough tossers 3 - 2 in the Shaughnessy eliminations at Narberth. The local team bowed in the third game of the preliminary three-game series, a team which was playing its first season in the league. Walter Aspell, outstanding pitcher of the circuit, got the win for Manoa against veteran right-hander Al Hermann. In what had been one of the bitterest pennant fights in league history, the teams that finished in first and second place (Narberth and Gladwyne) were eliminated. It turned out to be a Manoa versus Berwyn contest. During the 1938 season Narberth skipper Gene Davis had a nearly fatal bout with typhoid fever, and the team was managed by Jack Jefferies.

The year **1939** brought back this victory. Seven other teams were unable to halt Narberth's methodical march to the title. The newspaper (Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, Sunday, September 3, 1939) that carried headlines of England's September 2 declaration of war on Germany also told of the Main Line Baseball League playoffs, set to begin that afternoon Narberth had finished first in the league and on its home field it met Ardmore in the Shaughnessy playoff game that afternoon. I'll never forget the strangely mixed feelings with which my worried father attended that game with me and we sat in that grandstand in a slightly stupefied frame of mind, as if a close family member had died. In the championship series, Narberth defeated Frank Matthews' Manoa team, the defending champ, in three straight games. In the second game, Bill Caldwell, hero of the first game, got a screaming triple and other Narberth players such as R. Myers, Bud Walker and what Roger Malseed performed memorably, winning 3 - 2 at Manoa before 2500 fans. Jean Davis was back as manager this season.

The 1940s

In the **1940** playoffs, it was Manoa at Gladwyne and Narberth at Ardmore, with Narberth and Gladwyne gaining the finals. Narberth, the defending champ, won victory by defeating Gladwyne in the fifth and final game by a score of 8 - 5. The next year it would be Manoa over Gladwyne in the fourth

game of the series. George Babb was coach and Jimmy Dykes, Jr. played with the team this season, before moving into the Ardmore lineup.

By **1942** the draft was in effect. Holdovers from last year included La Salle College catcher Lou Bonder, former Lower Merion High athlete Harvey Cook, Al Herman and second baseman Tony Bonder. Question marks among the returnees were veteran hurler George Jefferies who was available until he would be called up by the Naval Reserves while Penn's Frank Reagan was expected soon to do his catching for the Marines. Newcomers were southpaw pitcher Johnny Piconie recommended by Phillies talent scout Patsy O'Rourke, youngster Boots Kamen of the Eastern Pennsylvania League, durable little Jake Young from Stonehurst Hills, ex-Villanova athlete George Gazella and to third-base candidates, Joe Burns of Ardmore by way of Oklahoma, and Russ Hermann. 1942

In August, as the 1942 season drew to a close, three teams were tied for first place in the Main Line League. They were Manoa, Gladwyne and Narberth. Manoa was the eventual victor, in five games, over Narberth. Sports writers declared that, not in all of the Main Line League's 39 turbulent seasons, had there been a more "natural" championship series than the contest between Manoa and Narberth in **1943**. On that occasion, the arch-rivals met for the second straight time in the finals. It was their third meeting in the finals since Manoa joined the circuit in 1938. In that year, Manoa had eliminated Narberth in the preliminary playoffs, while in 1942, Manoa bested Narberth in the fifth game of the championship series. Narberth in 1943 was competing in its 14th championship series since 1918 and was seeking its 18th League pennant. Unquestionably, Narberth was top dog in the league until Manoa put in an appearance. But the scene abruptly changed when Manoa became a league member, Narberth winning only two titles since then. In 1943, Manoa managed by Bill Getty, one of the club's three organizers in 1923, its proxy since '33 and still an active player at age 38, was gunning for its fourth pennant in six years and its third in a row.

But Narberth steamrolled through the series with three straight victories (game three was 4 - 0) pitched by Jimmy Craig, a lean 32-year-old letter carrier from the North Penn League who had joined the Davismen during the stretch drive. It was a season of record-setting for Craig: 1) he became the first pitcher in the league's 39-year history to pitch the first three series games and win all three (Walt Masters also won three straight for Narberth against Gladwyne in 1937 but he pitched only 19 innings, working the second game that year in a relief role; 2) he pitched 24 consecutive scoreless innings; 3) he allowed Manoa only 15 hits in three games, a new low for series effectiveness; 4) tied the record of Bill Reynolds and Johnny Jackson, two former Narberth hurlers, by pitching two shutouts; 5) became the first pitcher to make a clean sweep of both the preliminary playoffs and the title series. (Before

mastering Manoa he had pitched Narberth to three straight over Brookline in the preliminary eliminations.) Craig fanned 15 Manoa batters meanwhile, walked only eight and made nary a slip as he handled 15 changes of field.⁶⁸⁹

For the first time in the long street of Main Line baseball, the league in **1944** had co-champions. The two top contenders, Narberth and Manoa, shared the title. Exceptionally cold late-October weather halted the longest sandlot series in the district as the boroughites tied the chicks at 2 - all. Their enthusiasm frozen by dwindling crowds and frigid disapproval of the weatherman, Manoa's pilot Chick Matthew and Gene Davis decided enough was enough after the Sunday, October 29 game. The air became so biting during that fourth game that the two arch-rivals concluded that sharing the laurels was the only sensible thing to do.

In **1945**, Eddie Hare and his Brookline baseball club finally reached their long sought-after goal of becoming league champions. The pennant that had eluded them in a near miss so often in the past, was finally secured to the mast when Brookline walloped Manoa A. A. in the fifth and deciding game of their championship series with a decisive triumph. The heroes of that contest were unheralded southpaw pitcher Jack Creany and the Hares' team captain Barney Umbach. The first half of the season had been dominated by Manoa, the defending champ.

The favored veteran Drexel Hill nine lost the **1947** championship series three games to one to Mickey Gavin's Wayne Raiders team. Wayne had previously won the title in 1922. Twenty-five years later this young underdog of a club emerged victorious because it played the series as a tightly knit team, had fine pitching and timely hitting. Wayne's key pitcher in those games was Harry Desert who had lately been voted the most improved player in the league.

The 1948 season saw a streamlined MLBL with the number of clubs paired down from eleven to eight. Media and Glenolden grabbed most of the votes for positions on the Main Line League's **1949** All-Star team. However, Narberth's ace right-handed pitcher Bill Kares was the leading vote-getter with 53 out of a possible 55. He had posted a 7 - 2 record that season and led the league in strikeouts with 51, winning the league award as the outstanding pitcher that year. Although a close battle for all-star first base position was waged between two players, the ageless Buddy Walker was only one vote behind them. The outfielder Albie Becker was another large Narberth vote-getter.

⁶⁸⁹ This list of five records is verbatim from MLT - 10/14/1943.

At season's end, Narberth narrowly missed becoming champ when it needed only one win to cap a strong victory drive. But Wayne, described in one account as a team of Italian Americans, rallied and captured two games (6-3 and 5-2) from Narberth to win the 1949 title four games to three. Narberth went down fighting. Wayne had eliminated Manoa in three straight games in the preliminary series.

Careers of some of the Narberth players

Besides having people on the team who could win games for it, Narberth baseball club had over the years its share of "prospects" – promising players who moved on to higher things in baseball after being shaped by their sandlot and semi-pro experience. This being the case, talent scouts from the major leagues were often present in the grandstands at the thrice weekly Narberth games looking for young players. This added zest to the fans' enjoyment of the national pastime. Here at the community playgrounds, unless you arrived early, you did not get a seat. And large groups of people also used to travel to the neighboring locations of Narberth's games. Word spread quickly through the crowd here whenever a big-league scout was on hand. Meanwhile, among the numerous city and suburban semi-pro leagues of that era, competition to obtain ballplayers was fierce. So much so that many businesses in cities and towns across the country (including Narberth) would hire some people for jobs because they were primarily good baseball players.

Prospects upon whom the scouts smiled included Walt Masters, a pitcher with the Narberth team in the early-1920s while it was still playing "down in the field" on the southside. Masters went to the Washington Senators after he was discovered playing locally and also hurled for the Phillies and Penn. Numerous players went to the minor leagues from the Narberth team, and some returned to their hometown lineup. One of these was Masters, who was with Narberth again in 1937. Another was borough resident John H. (Jack) Jefferies, Jr. (brother of another local man, theatrical promoter J. Norman Jefferies) Princeton class of 1923 where he captained both the baseball and basketball teams during his senior year and later coached football, basketball and baseball teams there before going to work for a major life insurance company in center city and eventually (when he moved just over the borough line) serving as chairman of the Lower Merion Township commissioners. A skilled first baseman, pitcher and catcher, Jefferies played in the minor leagues for the Reading baseball team in the International League and the New Haven team in the Eastern League.

Eventually the advent of top-class baseball programs at major universities would provide young athletes with such a big stepping stone toward a full chance at the major leagues that it enabled many to bypass the minor leagues altogether. But Jefferies is a good example of a college-trained player who

made his mark both in the minor leagues and in the sandlots. Another borough resident, Charley Townsend, came right out of Princeton to pitch lefthanded for Narberth (and he batted right-handed) during the same period as Jefferies, perhaps starting a bit earlier.

Johnny Jackson, right-handed hurler for the Philadelphia Phillies in 1933, and formerly a pitcher for Narberth, insisted that pitching in the big leagues was easier than on the sandlots. Mickey Gavin, a Narberth player, was drafted by the Chicago White Sox in 1935 and batted against such baseball legends as the Boston Red Sox's Wes Farrell and Van Mungo of the Brooklyn dodgers during Spring training in Richmond, Virginia. After an accident the next year left him with one leg, he returned to the Main Line League.⁶⁹⁰ The Phillies acquired the six-foot Narberth catcher William Anske in 1943. Around this time, Frank Yeager who had been with the Chicago White Sox two years, was playing second base for Narberth. It was a back-and-forth experience for many of the players in those years.

Commonplace too in the Main Line League was the experience of a Frank J. Arnone, Narberth third-baseman) who was signed in the early- 1940s by the Philadelphia Athletics and farmed out to its Eastern Shore Minor League team where he played until he entered World War II military service. Narberth second-baseman Tony Bonder was hired by Connie Mack to play for a Philadelphia Athletics farm team, leading an on-the-road life for two years before becoming head of the Philadelphia Police Department's narcotics unit for a decade under police commissioner (and later mayor) Frank L. Rizzo. Jack F. X. Henry, a leftfielder for Narberth in the late-1940s, entered the farm system of the Cleveland Indians after Cleveland scout and former major league umpire Edward J. McLaughlin spotted him in the local games. Dick Fitzgerald, a Narberth resident and lefthanded pitcher for Lafayette College, was signed by the Baltimore Orioles and sent to its San Antonio club.

Modern baseball as Americans know it began in 1921, and not so many of those changes were reflected in Narberth. Just consider the fact that, for as long as the Main Line League lasted, passing the hat was the chief source of revenue for the various teams at their games. And yet the career of the semi-pro Narberth town team can be seen to encapsulate two histories--its own, and that of pre-World War II American neighborhood sporting activity, for it coincides with and summarizes many of the issues central to recreational activities of the period. In that sense, the Narberth team's is a highly "representative" career, one which registers with barometric efficacy the demise of the town team in America, and the schismatic questions posed after World War II, as public attentions began to be

⁶⁹⁰ Editor's note: There is an article in the October 23, 1936 issue of Our Town describing the purse that was raised to pay for Mickey Gavin's medical expenses, listing the many contributors to this fund.

channeled, to the exclusion of so much else, on major league sports activity. Narberth semi-pro baseball flourished when this pastime was still a folk game, not a fully commercialized sport that has since been radically altered by corporate culture.

Of course, times do change. With the major league baseball strike in progress early in 1995 and apparently nowhere near a settlement, a local newspaper proposed that fans take heart and consider attending the games played by the Narberth team in the Delco Baseball League. That team, set to start the new season under its general manager Angie Falcone, belongs to a league characterized in the article as the last bastion of real baseball in America.⁶⁹¹

Frictions: July Fourth Mayhem

In the heyday of Main Line League semi-pro baseball, Narberth's Fourth of July home game was always planned as a special drawing card. But during Prohibition, and while the playing field was located on Narberth's south side, the illegal drinking of some spectators at baseball games greatly increased the likelihood of fights breaking out in the crowd and turning into mayhem—the threat of this being greatest on the Fourth of July holiday. One such fight among working-class people broke out on the Fourth of July in 1921 or 1922 in the small grandstand “down in the field,” as that diamond was called. This was a time “everybody was breaking the law” about no liquor in this locality. And supposedly old man (Daniel J.) Hill, the constable, “could not catch a dead horse.” Nor did Hill wear a uniform. That day somebody had an automobile with liquor in it parked near Bowman Avenue (just over the borough line in Merion), and spectators were taking advantage of this convenient source. The fight began with one man in the grandstand agitating a man he knew. The next minute those men with one or two blackjacks were hitting each other, and they eventually washed their bruised and bloody heads in the spring nearby. The ultimatum that one neighborhood youth, an eye-witness to the fight, afterwards got from his south side uncle who raised him was straight to the point: “Harry, at future Fourth of July games, if a fight starts, you come home.”

⁶⁹¹ Main Line Welcomat, Feb. 22, 1995, p.4. “Lipschtick” feature, edited by James Cordrey. Headline “Cause It’s Root, Root, Root for the (Narberth) Home Team.”

Chapter 7 - Ethnic Makeup, Divisions, Different Social Groups

A Railroad Town.....	361
Interactions of Employer and Workers	364
Penny-Pinchers: Employers and Merchants, Others.....	366
Workers: The Penny-Grabbers	369
The Percival Saga.....	369
Bridging Gap to Upper Class	371
Other Populations: Gypsies.....	373
Other Populations: A “Hooverville”	374
Servants in Federal Census of 1900.....	375
Attitudes toward Blacks and Segregation	377
Big House/Little House Mindset	381
Owner-Renter Mindset.....	382
Apartment Construction.....	383
Two Celebrated Local Artists	384
Margaret Harshaw.....	384
Dolly Diehl Maguire	384
Small “Red light District,” Speak-Easy, and Sexual Politics ‘20s	384
Frictions between and within groups: Hooded Politics	389

A Railroad Town

Narberth is a railroad town. Or it was a railroad town. That is still the single most popular perception people have of this community - local residents and others alike. Yet it certainly was never a railroad town in the classic single-dominant-industry sense like the great upstate rail center of Altoona, which was founded as a rail town in 1849, became a major train builder and the nation's great train repair center employing 15,000 people in the 1920s. Nor is our community even like a smaller upstate town such as Lehighton where the railroading atmosphere is pervasive. However, Narberth did attract railroad people to live here in quite large numbers starting with a trickle in 1881 until the end of the Pennsylvania Railroad era some ninety years later.

Popular perception above all links Narberth with the lunch-pail-toting crowd of rail employees, which is supposedly an argument that Narberth is not a typical Main Line town since it lacks the snob appeal of neighboring communities such as Bryn Mawr, Haverford or Devon. But that view is slightly skewed.

In fact, the first people involved in that industry to live here were four heads of household who belonged to the railroading elite - occupying large houses, which the first three of them considered their summer homes.⁶⁹² Two of these men (one internationally famous) were involved in steam locomotive manufacture. The third one was responsible a bit later for electrifying rail service in the region, was a patented inventor of a noteworthy rail improvement, and he also interceded at a crucial moment on the townspeople's behalf when his company, the Pennsylvania Railroad, was about to make a move to create a freight yard on grounds the town wanted for a playground. The fourth man, before he put up a stone house here for himself, had headed the corporation that built the "railroad to nowhere" linking Philadelphia and Atlantic City, the New Jersey resort he initially owned and had been developing from scratch.

Not until the turn of the century did the lunch-pail-toting "deadheads" and the uniformed conductors and trainmen start arriving as small rental housing units became available—initially the 100-block Conway Avenue which as late as the 1930s was known locally as the neighborhood "where the Gandy dancers lived," referring to an old railroad expression for crews of rail-laying workers. Such turn-of-the-century workers were rugged immigrants who relied on hand tools, muscle power and had to

⁶⁹² Editor's note: These individuals were described in Chapter 2 – Samuel Vauclain, T. Broom Belfield, Alexander Capie Shand, Sr., and Samuel Richards, respectively.

adopt a distinctive hopping gait to walk the oddly-spaced rails. Their tools were forged by the Gandy Manufacturing Company, Chicago.

So the group of railroaders living here was three-tiered: first came a handful of the elite heads of industry in big houses built for Price's "Lady's Book town;" next the working-class people who included laborers, mechanics, technicians and uniformed personnel who first rented then bought houses; and the last-to-arrive white-collar office workers, largely home-buyers who began coming before World War I but had their biggest influx during the 1920s, when a main Pennsylvania Railroad office facility was relocated from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia around 1924; and by decade's end personnel from the Wabash/Pennsy merger came. The Pennsy's purchasing department had already moved here to the same centralized location from Chicago around World War I initially attracting its share of new Narberth renters—both railroaders and also some of their freshly transplanted Midwestern suppliers of items such as lumber, who moved East when the purchasing department did, to protect their business interests. Though they were the latest railroaders to settle here in large numbers, the free-pass-toting (or "deadhead") white-collar office force, attracted by the convenience of a short commute to their Thirtieth Street and Thirty-Second and Market streets offices from nearby Narberth, seem to have been by far the largest layer of the three.

Thus, by the early-1930s Narberth was a Pennsylvania Railroad town in the same sense that such other Main Line towns as Berwyn, Paoli and Malvern also were. Taken together, these places had thousands of railroad workers and their families living in them. The difference for the personnel living at Berwyn, Paoli and Malvern was that their jobs were centered at the big rail yard and maintenance facility at Paoli, while the majority of Narberth jobs plugged into West Philadelphia's Thirtieth and Thirty-Second Street office complex with its adjacent railyard. Nonetheless, like their co-workers from Berwyn, Paoli and Malvern, many Narberth rail employees belonged to the "Big Four" labor organizations of the Pennsylvania Railroad's service: The Brotherhood of Conductors, Engineers, Trainmen and Firemen. Money was never plentiful among these workers, all of whom, for example, were asked to take a fifteen percent wage cut when living conditions were already tight in 1932.

The tract of modest Harris-built houses that spilled over from Narberth across Montgomery Avenue into Lower Merion for several blocks in the Brookhurst Avenue vicinity and which has a Narberth postal address, not only looks like the borough because of its flock of Narberth-signature houses; the district also was haven to an enclave of rail employees in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s who thought of themselves more as Narberth people than as township residents. Just the 500-block Brookhurst Avenue alone had about seven such families each headed by a Pennsylvania Railroader -

these men all holding office jobs at varying levels except a Mr. Taylor who, as a conductor on the Philadelphia-New York run, always walked the mile from his house to Narberth station to his job sporting a Derby hat and business suit.

Keeping the local railroad tradition on track, as it were, as the very active, senior member of the town council - he completed his twelve years of public service at the end of the Centennial year - was Chester C. ("Chet") Tyson, Jr., a retired supervisory employee of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Conrail. A second-generation Narberth railroader (and like his father a Narberth Presbyterian Church elder), Chet Tyson clocked forty years with those rail companies.

Popular perception has fastened onto two other links between our town and the railroad. For one thing, it tends to accept unquestioningly the familiar account that a Pennsylvania Railroad president chose Narberth's name along with others of Welsh origin for the names of stations strung out along Philadelphia's Main Line between Overbrook and Paoli. What that Pennsy rail official actually did, in Narberth's case, was merely to confirm a name that had originated within the community itself and had been in use by a sizeable proportion of the local residents for several years before he re-named the station Narberth, dropping the name Elm.

On another point, popular opinion has uncritically accepted over many years the vague supposition that the Pennsylvania Railroad may have been involved in developing the town, or portions of it. To date, not a shred of evidence has yet come to light in support of this view, and I strongly doubt that it ever will. That railroad did own a large undeveloped tract in town, consisting mainly of the eventual Narberth playground site (See Chapter 6).

Of course, all sorts of people lived in Narberth besides railroaders. These included city folks migrating to the suburbs, also the sons and daughters of small-farmers (usually less than a hundred acres) and artisans from nearby Penn Valley and Gladwyne who so often became pillars of the local Methodist and Lutheran church. Early-arriving Italians lived in an enclave but most newcomers here did not. Large houses segregated some other persons much more conspicuously than social class ever could in this cozy, friendly town, while the simple fact of being either a renter or a homeowner was category enough for many of the others. Numerous residents commuted to their jobs in Philadelphia, while a smaller number could walk to work just around the corner. Especially from those ranks of the locally-employed have come generations of Narberth volunteer firemen, who are honored as an elite when they march in the annual Memorial Day parade, a reminder of their dedicated service to their own and neighboring communities.

Set forth in this chapter will be a profile of the various social groups as they are found in the Federal Census of 1920, with an accompanying numerical tally, and supported by cross-references from other sources. This period, rather than 1910, has been chosen because it captures a sense of the town as the social divisions of its then twenty-five-year-old municipality were coming into clear focus, and just as it was embarking on its first great spurt of population growth. Here and in the following chapter many of the differences among the people of the town are to be underscored through interviews, correspondence, other long interviews summarized as narratives, and newspaper accounts from the period.

Interactions of Employer and Workers

Narberth always has had a number of residents with old upstate country roots. One of these was fair and honest William Henry Hartman of old German ancestry who formerly had a shop upcountry in Pottstown that built and painted carriages. Hartman first became acquainted with Narberth when he rode horses through here on his way to horse bazaars — places where horses were bought and sold in Philadelphia. He was a man of physical strength and even temper who inspired ready confidence. Hartman sealed his business transactions with a handshake, not a receipt. One wintry day early in 1909 he had two or three horses with him on such a trip when he stopped at General Wayne Inn and was hired on the spot as manager of its stables by owner Odell. Hartman moved his family into a rental property at 610 Montgomery Avenue, a still-extant house with what they noticed was chestnut trim and “German siding,” next door to the stables and a stone smithy. His work branched out until eventually he had his own express and hauling business. “Hartman,” as he was invariably called, wore black shirts all his life.

He soon also became a man of all work for the neighboring Nicholas Thouron family. The genial stockbroker Thouron would say to his wife: “Mother, what days are you going to have Hartman - Tuesdays and Wednesdays? Well, can I have him on Thursdays?” The walls of their big Victorian house were covered with pictures including French Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt’s portraits, Nicholas Thouron being a brother of a prominent artist/faculty member at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. So, Hartman spent much of his time adjusting the position of those pictures by lengthening and shortening the wires, as Mr. Thouron sat leaning upon his cane, intently supervising. One such time, meanwhile, when Hartman sent his young son and assistant, Lester, out to get red carpet on the truck, Mrs. Thouron, who always wore black, raised her lorgnette eyeglasses into position for a closer view of the lad and cried out: “Just a minute, young man,” ““What’s that?” He replied. Whereupon Mrs.

Thouren snapped back: “Haven’t you ever been taught to raise your hat to a lady?” Telling this story he remembered so vividly at age 81, Lester confided: “I felt as low as the underside of the red rug. “

Over the years, father and son prepared that grand household for changes of season from summer to winter by putting down and taking up thirty-six-inch matting and thirty-six-inch carpet and putting it into a twenty-five-foot-long carpet box that was four by three-feet deep and that took two men to open its four-inch lid. They put up awnings and window shades, all kinds of things.

Then one day Hartman startled his son by declaring to him: “I can’t go back there.” Thourens’ staff of servants had been complaining that everything now is: “Hartman this, Hartman that.” They were jealous and resentful of him as an outsider on whom their employer increasingly relied. So, to keep peace and be fair to all concerned, he gave up his job with those star customers of his. But the Thourens did not forget Hartman. When they acquired their first automobile, a 1914 Model-T Ford station coach closed in back and open in front called a “town cabriolet” with brass headlights and lanterns, the Thourens gave Hartman their two horse-drawn vehicles—the smaller station-coach and the fine two-horse black Victoria carriage with leather top and upholstered in broadcloth with rubber tires and wheels with twenty-four inch square lamps with candles in them. These two carriages subsequently remained in the Hartman family for seventy years. The Thourens also would gladly have given Hartman their two beautiful horses, but Mrs. Sadie Hartman demurred: “Too many mouths to feed.” (They had six children, five living). Eventually son Lester had his own auto body business in Ardmore for forty-eight years.

The work rules that Elmer’s father taught his children made a lasting impression on them. Hartman’s credo was: No lying, no cheating, no stealing. He always said that, on a job, if you go to a place, knock at the door. If no one answers, knock some more. Then go in and call at the stairs. If no answer, do your job and leave right away.

Before moving to Narberth, Hartman had been a carriage painter in Pottstown with tiny tot Elmer assisting him. Hartman got six dollars for painting a carriage that must have taken a month. He would raise the carriage up on ropes, and as he painted the wheels, Elmer would keep them spinning. “When the wheels got varnish, the boy would have to spin them even faster.

Around 1913, Hartman, among other things, used to dig graves at Merion Friends Meeting by hand, with the help of Elmer. That year a woman was buried in the cemetery, and there had been a controversy about her. Due to apprehension that some member of the deceased’s family would want her to be dug up, Elmer’s father was asked to put a six-inch thick concrete slab on top of her grave, which

he and Elmer together did. As an old man, Harry Elmer Hartman was hoping to take a walk in that graveyard again someday. And he bet he could pick out the spot.

Penny-Pinchers: Employers and Merchants, Others

Nicholas Thouron traveled a penny-pinching route to work at his brokerage firm in center city Philadelphia even though he was rich. Just after the turn of the twentieth century, he used to have horse-handler/expressman William H. Hartman of Narberth drive him in Thouron's smaller of two carriages (the station trap, pulled by one horse) to nearby Merion station. There he boarded the local steam-engine train bound for the city, got off at the next stop, Overbrook on City Line. From there he took the Number Ten trolley and exchanged onto the Market Street elevated train. Incredible to think of doing this today, though those same public transportation routes are still available.

By 1914, the era of autos mainly for sport and for long-distance touring was almost over, and cars started being used for business, pleasure and convenience. Clear evidence of this was the example set by the town's Alexander Shand, the Pennsylvania Railroad's chief engineer, a high-profile advocate of electric-powered vehicles on road and rail. A thrifty Scot, Shand was a familiar sight driving his light-weight, moderately-fast electric auto, one of thirty-seven thousand such vehicles operating in America at the time. Though such cars were expensive, experts Thomas A. Edison and Dr. C. P. Steinmetz, addressing an electrical industry convention that year in Philadelphia, proclaimed these to be everyman's cheap affordable car of the future.

All the while, pessimists in the carriage and wagon trade were painting a bleak picture nationwide that horses were doomed to extinction by autos. At least at the time, this was a widespread popular perception at odds with the facts. True, city driving and carriage horses were rapidly disappearing. But far more draft horses were in use in city streets and country roads in America than ever before. Horses were maintaining their numbers, even increasing because draft horses were pushing these figures up both in America and abroad in countries like France. As a result, the cost of draft horses was sharply rising as the demand grew. To mend matters, the United States Government was funding a study (at Iowa State Agricultural College, Ames) to come up with an all-American gray draft horse that could withstand local climate conditions better than the imported Percheron and Belgian work-horses long in demand in this country. Unwittingly caught up in the supply-side economics of the heavy-duty equine market, Nicholas Thouron and one of his beautiful well-bred horses became innocent victims of penny-pinching by a Narberth merchant, who apparently was unwilling to pay a high price for the kind of workhorse he needed. Initially Mrs. Hartman in 1914 had vetoed her family's acceptance of the

proposed gift from the Thourons of their pair of fine horses when Mr. Thouron was buying his first automobile. Consequently, he found someone who would put the horses out to pasture on a farm. And that was that, or so he thought. Not for him letting those beloved steeds be macerated in a horse-hide factory, as had lately happened in Philadelphia in a notorious incident when a thief stole a horse and sold it for the price of its hide.

Then one day Mr. Thouron got off the commuter train at Narberth, and sauntered across main street in the vicinity of McIntyre's Grocery, a chain store. As he passed by, a horse whinnied its greeting. Nicholas Thouron was astonished to see that the horse attached to McIntyre's Grocery wagon was his. He regretted this, and later said he would have made other plans for the horse if he had known. Ironically, although Thouron's imposing mansard-roof mansion is long gone and only its carriage house remains, a "memorial" of sorts to those beautiful carriage horses can still be seen: the block-long red brick paving of Merion Road's steep incline at Montgomery Avenue put there by Thouron to give them sure footing.

Around this same time, local shopkeepers practiced plenty of austerity. Hyman Ricklin, founder of Ricklin's Hardware (by the 1920s being touted as "Narberth's largest store"⁶⁹³ and until 2018 a Main Line landmark on our main street) was once asked by W. H. Hartman: How come you keep the big cans so far apart where you display them? Ricklin's answer was candid: I don't have money enough to fill those shelves so I spread the cans out.

Also, at this time, C. P. Cook's coal wagons had been painted by the Hartmans brewster green (one of the original Ford Motor Company colors) with a black stripe and yellow gear. That coal yard's first wagon was marked "No. 23," not because Cook had twenty-three trucks but because "it makes you look bigger than you are" and because he was twenty-three years old when he started his business. John Long hauled buckwheat coal and rice coal from that coal yard to the huge Sisters of Mercy motherhouse in Merion for a dollar a ton, and there was plenty of economizing done in the use of it, the nuns who had lived there at the time used to tell me.

Lots of recycling went on in those days too. The big Sisters of Mercy convent in Merion had a Black Maria, a big bus with its top raised so you could walk into it. Walton Brothers who had a livery stable here eventually bought that vehicle and operated it as a Narberth station taxi. Two big horses pulled the Mariah which had an express body on it, no commercial inscriptions and it had four seats on each side and a ninth passenger seat next to the driver. The fare for each local rider was twenty-five

⁶⁹³ Narberth's largest store" in 1927 – Narberth Hardware Co., Inc. (Ricklin's), 230-232 Haverford Avenue.

cents from the station. A full load meant total revenues of two dollars twenty-five cents. Walton also moved furniture and trunks. One time on a trunk-transporting rum back to Percival Roberts, Jr.'s palatial estate "Pennhurst," a black fellow in Roberts' employ expressed to the driver his yearning to drive the Mariah, and the young driver said all right. The vehicle had big wooden brakes featuring a big foot brake. You had to push it up to slow down and push it down to go fast. That particular driver was always scared going down the Essex Avenue hill from Price Avenue (where the transit authority buses still travel every day, and that used to be blocked off for sledding). Due to the tremendous weight of the thing, you had to be careful of the horses. So the driver let Roberts' man drive the vehicle that day, and sat beside him. The Mariah turned over on the steep grade, making a mess. They switched off the motor. Meanwhile, the regular driver's father was summoned for a look and said matter-of-factly: "We'll have it fixed and ready for the next run at the station." They did.

Apart from belt-tightening measures experienced by working-class individuals and others stepping up to the lower-middle class by opening their own shops, some persons of a higher station from comfortable backgrounds were also feeling the pinch of limited resources and consequently were economical in spending their money long before the advent of the consumerist society. These "genteel poor" have always found Narberth a hospitable place to live unpretentiously among down-to-earth people. Here they are relatively free of contact with persons needing the prop of prestige to be gained from a fashionable home-address such as Haverford, Bryn Mawr or Wynnewood. Such penny-wise people of refinement mix more comfortably with the working class than with the nouveau-riche. One of several Narberth High School graduates (class of 1916) who also graduated from Bryn Mawr College recalled that there were "a lot of 'genteel poor' living in Narberth at the turn-of-the-century and before World War I." This descendant of colonial Philadelphia silversmith Philip Syng was referring to her birthright Quaker family of five including her younger sister, also a Bryn Mawr College graduate. While her father's more prosperous older brother had built his own large Victorian house for his family, hers lived a more Spartan existence in an equally imposing stone house that architect Hobbs had designed for Samuel Richards several blocks away. Seconding her former school-mate's comment about the numerous "genteel poor" a woman, also of old American stock (kin of the distinguished American architect Wilson Eyre) and from a Baptist and Presbyterian heritage besides, mischievously, interjected: "We hope we were genteel."

The general impression of that period before World War I in Narberth was that everybody was happy, but not much money was around. If a father got seventy-five cents an hour, and if the rent wasn't due, a boy helping his father might get a quarter. If the rent was due, the son got nothing.

There were exceptions, of course. One of these was Alexander Shand, Jr., son of the chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Just beginning a long career as a builder/developer, young Shand who lived here employed a number of local men. Shand in those early days kept his checkbook in his shirt pocket, and according to people who worked for him at the time, was always ready to pay before a job started. Some of his employees would say to Shand, whom they liked enormously: No, wait until it's done.

Shand's chief carpenter one time accepted an automobile as payment for his work on a new house (at the southeast corner of Essex Avenue and Stepney Place here). The informality of the relationship between employer and employee early in the century in the town made such exchanges commonplace.

Workers: The Penny-Grabbers

And then there were the penny-grabbers. Narberth's then two-hundred-year-old smithy opposite General Wayne Inn, when the inn finally sold that appendage, was owned and operated by an Irishman in the decade before World War I—a man renowned as an exceptionally skillful blacksmith.⁶⁹⁴

One of the star customers for general horseshoeing at this facility at the time—this was the same shop where General Cornwallis had his horses shod during the Revolution while the British held Philadelphia - was Pennsylvania Railroad president Frank Thomson of Merion's "Corker Hill" mansion, the grounds of which, true to its name, every spring were ablaze with thousands of yellow crocus blossoms directly north of Merion station (where a high iron fence now surrounds those subdivided grounds). Unbeknownst to Thomson, his head coachman Jim Nolan had a long-standing arrangement with that Narberth blacksmith benefiting them both at Thomson's expense. Nolan would regularly bring in Thomson's horses each needing two shoes, not four. But four shoes invariably would be put on: "so Jim Nolan would get his wages." A third Irishman did the shoeing.

The Percival Saga

The saga of the Percivals of Narberth adds a surprising twist to the family networking trend that featured close kinship of many families throughout the town during the first half-century of independent rule, and that was a key factor in the rapid build-up of cohesiveness in our community. This was a prominent family surrounded by uncles, aunts and cousins.

⁶⁹⁴ ? Vicky's page here was incomplete (Editor's guess – "skillful blacksmith")

Elizabeth Smedley has always felt that the tale of the George Jones Percival family, who resided here for nearly a decade until about 1911, had the ingredients of a novel. And Elizabeth may be right. Certainly, her own family occupied a front-row seat as the story unfolded. All three of the Percival children had been born in Narberth and were under six years of age when the family left town without ever paying any rent for the house at 19 Elmwood Avenue where they had been living for a year or more. So their landlord, Elwood Smedley, repossessed everything they had in the house. He impounded their furnishings and family papers including a meticulously kept record book of all of Mrs. Percival's purchases (they did all their shopping for furniture and clothing at John Wanamaker's). And that young matron even recorded the little gifts she bought for newborn babies in her extended family network in Narberth. There were also many unpaid bills, some receipts and lots of correspondence including love letters written by head of household George Percival to his devoted wife Sarah Virginia Dothard while he was away (mostly in Maine) seeking legal recourse for his sudden penniless predicament.

Amazingly, Elwood Smedley's daughter Elizabeth has kept that trove of Percival possessions in storage all these years, and even has advertised for descendants of the Percival family to be aware of the existence of this unusual "archive," which Narberth Historical Society hopes eventually to acquire (copies of some of the documents already have been made for its files).

One receipt was for a shipment of Lehigh coal sent to Mrs. George J. Percival's door on a December day from C. P. Cook's coal yard by Sarah's brother and neighbor, Robert Dothard, then an aspiring architect embarking on a career that would take him into the upper echelons of Pennsylvania Railroad management.

Various Dothard kin also supplied her with food. Hard to ignore are the numerous unpaid bills from grocers in the city and suburbs including Narberth's most expensive one, McIntyre & Company where the Percivals had a charge account they always used. Also, a bill from a bakery of fancy cakes for parties, a milk bill from Peshurst Farm Dairies (delivered by George Markel), bills from Howard B. Davis for delivering the daily and Sunday Philadelphia Public Ledger newspaper. And a bill for a magazine subscription to The Teacher (Sarah, eldest of seven children of a millwork-plant owner in Philadelphia, had been a kindergarten teacher before her marriage). And there was a notice of non-payment of dues from the Jersey shore's Island Heights Yacht Club. There were Christmas and New Year's greetings, party invitations for the children, a birth announcement. And notes from a Narberth Sunday school official and from the headmistress of Miss Sayward's School in Overbrook saying how much they missed the Percival children during their recent absences from school. And then there was the inevitable letter from lawyers full of menace about a lawsuit to be instituted against the Percivals in

order to collect a certain large sum of money they owed. Nowhere in the stockpile were any copies of Sarah's own letters, although her husband had praised the beauty of her writing. Besides his letters to her, he sent picture postcards to his two older children.

So, what caused Percivals' terrible financial distress? For Elizabeth Smedley, this has remained an impenetrable mystery. A cliffhanger. Nor was she aware what became of this young family. However, additional information recently came to light: George J. Percival was a principal heir to the Food Fair fortune at a fairly young age. Unwisely he soon invested heavily in a speculative venture about gold mines south of the border. Overnight he "lost everything." Early in 1911, the destitute couple moved out of our immediate area. But the hard knocks did not derail their marriage, and they went on to have six children, all told.⁶⁹⁵

Bridging Gap to Upper Class

Bridging the gap to the upper classes called for a certain amount of ingenuity. After all there were very few of them and a lot of us in Narberth. Amelia Heindel knew about such things. She was a romantic woman, her time filled with personal domestic activity centered around her gentlemanly, Georgia-born husband and athletic son, captain of Lower Merion Township High School basketball team that had lately won its third State championship in a row. There were those dreamy and distracted kindnesses of hers for neighbors' children and jobless strangers, so many of whom had knocked on suburban doors here during the 1930s Depression. Vagrants could always count on a free meal at Amelia's. There was something magnolia-scented about it all. The Caldwell girls (she and her sisters never lost their Southern drawl) had been known as "the most beautiful girls in Gadsden County," referring to the immediate environs of that Alabama city of Gadsden, which is actually surrounded by Etowah County.

In retrospect, what was intriguing though was the way Amelia reacted to the news that close kin of a socially prominent Pennsylvania governor (a rich New Deal Democrat, in office 1935 to '39, the first State Democratic governor in forty years and the first Main Line resident in history to be elected governor) had moved into her block. Besides, former Governor George H. Earle 3d, Roosevelt's minister to Austria in 1933 and recently returned from an ambassadorship to Bulgaria, himself became a regular visitor, sometimes with his second wife. He arrived from his Grey's Lane, Haverford home like clockwork on Sunday afternoons wearing his familiar bow-tie and driving his impressive car. A Lincoln

⁶⁹⁵ Phone conversation with W.I Dothard, Jr. 7/6/1995: "He phoned the author and said these things."

Continental that had set standards for motorcar snobbery all over the world when first introduced two years earlier, this sleek number from Detroit also turned heads because it was gleaming white when few cars of any make were white. This car was like an icon, its shimmering surfaces an emblem of the easy liberal optimism of the New Deal reformers with whom Earle had hobnobbed. He drove over to see his tiny grandchildren and hear news of his son. At the time George H. Earle 4th was flying PBV seaplanes for the United States Navy, had been searching for enemy submarines in the Atlantic and Caribbean and now in 1943 was being transferred with his squadron to the Aleutian Islands where Earle led bombing and strafing missions over Japanese-held Kuril Island.

Young George's wife Mary Pearson Earle, a Chestnut Hill native who wore her naturally-blonde hair upswept in a plait encircling her head, was a considerable beauty, who often had been sought out as a debutante to do modeling at charitable events. Mary represented an innocent and serene ideal of beauty popularized a generation earlier when it was symbolized by the female figure of Liberty, Peace or Civilization, so often portrayed both by artists and makers of silent films inspired by World War I. Such images of clean-limbed allegorical goddesses reflected a "Greek Revival" at fever pitch in the popular arts including modern dance in the early decades of the twentieth century. As time passed, however, Mary's "child of nature" style of beauty, although outdated by flashier modes, was still cherished by her parents' generation because, by then, it seemed in retrospect to preserve the spirit of the nineteenth century, the time of their youth.

Amelia adored natural beauty, the "right" connections, family heirlooms and "background," and Mary Earle was young enough to be the daughter Amelia never had. Amelia would later endure her son Greer's brief engagement to "just a little Irish girl," and cheered his eventual (happy) marriage to a woman with a family crest. A "genteel poor" Episcopalian, Amelia developed a bold strategy for meeting her prominent new neighbors: day after day in hot weather she did something she had never tried before. She waded barefoot in the stream in a grassy common directly in front of Earle's rented house at #37 Narbrook. Padding along to and fro, staring into the water, picking up an occasional small stone that caught her eye in the stream bed. How successful a ruse it was is unknown. Mary Earle who liked to attend Narberth semi-pro baseball games had rented the stone house while her aviator husband was off at war. And much later, virtually all the environmentalist and retired banker George H. Earle 4th could recall about their having lived in Narberth was the enormous repair bill he paid to remove stains left by wet drinking glasses on a rare New England lowboy, proud legacy of the wife of the austere Baptist minister who owned the house. For Amelia, the episode suggests that she was trying to find ways to marry her personal visions to a social landscape, now that the planter aristocracy in the South

that her family had known was gone, and her only child had enlisted in the Army and was headed for the wartime Central Pacific.

Other Populations: Gypsies

Vividly remembered by some are Gypsies. Sightings on streets of a major city such as Philadelphia or Florence (where in the early-1950s I felt right at home to see a Gypsy organ-grinder strolling along the Lungarno accompanied by his small child and with a costumed monkey holding a tin cup) were fairly common in these two sister cities, even after World War II. So were Gypsy fortune-tellers in Philadelphia. But fear often gripped local residents encountering Gypsies here on suburban turf. And such contacts being sporadic, there were scant opportunities to build up trust between them and us. This produced many a stand-off.

The Gypsy presence in the area was nothing new. There had been a Gypsy camp on the banks of the nearby Schuylkill River at Manayunk as early as the 1860s - a famous horse from there having run at the Belmont Driving Club here. Also, Mariann Stephenson Olden's reminiscences about her Merion childhood in the 1890s mention her surprise and fright at seeing a Gypsy caravan on East Wynnewood Road. Her reaction was preconditioned rather than spontaneous: she ran and hid.

Gypsies also used to camp for brief intervals with their tents in the 1920s on Old Gulph Road at Montgomery Avenue, in full view of any Narberth public school children who happened to stay after school to play in the schoolyard directly opposite. One such onlooker from the playground recalled with a hint of disapproval in her voice the distinctive way Gypsy women in that encampment would move their hips "as they slinked along." Far more often in her childhood, however, the same observer saw lots of Gypsies each time she accompanied her mother, an avid maker of wardrobes for herself and her two daughters and a sewer of patchwork quilts, to buy yard-goods at Fourth and South streets, a Philadelphia market district known as "pushcart row."

During the Great Depression, Gypsies, hard-hit too, sometimes came door-to-door in our Narberth neighborhood asking for handouts or to sell things. One sultry summer day in the mid-1950s, as I was helping my mother iron family clothes, we heard an odd noise at our cellar-door entrance and went to investigate. There we found a Gypsy woman trying to break into the locked screen door. Startled and annoyed to see us, the intruder muttered something and quickly fled the scene with an empty sack and her small child, about my age, in hand. My artist mother (from the American Academy in Rome) who once had a Romanian sculptor beau pursue her across the Atlantic to seek her hand in marriage, felt that, with all due respects to Albin and the colorful heritage of the various ethnic groups that made up

his native land, her experience two decades later with the Gypsy intruder here (whom she somehow assumed was Romanian) confirmed, for her, a then popular stereotype that all Gypsies are thieves.

Ian F. Hancock, in correspondence with the author, states that the Gypsy community encamped at Manayunk in the 1860s probably was Black Dutch or Romanichel. The Black Dutch were the Gypsy populations, believed to be Sinti, that the Germans had deported to Pennsylvania by 1758. Professor Hancock, himself a Gypsy, explained:

They came to be called the “Black Dutch” Gypsies, but have disappeared as a distinct group, through intermarriage, principally with Romanichel (British Gypsy) groups here. They have also lost their own dialect of Romani and now speak the Romanichel dialect. Some Romanichel families, such as the Schwartses, are quite well aware of their non-Romanichel origins in the ‘Black Dutch’ Gypsies.

As for the caravan seen on East Wynnewood Road in the 1890’s, Hancock’s “reading” of it suggests that these people might have been of the same stock as the above. Or they could have been the Bashaldé or Musician Gypsies who started to arrive in Braddock (Pittsburgh area) and elsewhere in the 1870s from Slovakia and Hungary. Organ-grinders, he noted, are to be found among the Romanichels. As for the campers in tents opposite Narberth public school in the 1920s, he sent data that suggests they might have been any of the above groups, or perhaps Balkan (more strictly Vlach) Gypsies who began to come to North America in the early-1900s. [More than likely] the fifteen-year-old girl whose gravestone in nearby Havertown’s Saint Denis Cemetery reads “Minnie Stanley, an Egyptian, 1889-1904” and is thought to have been a Gypsy from a band that camped along Cobbs Creek, may have belonged to Pennsylvania’s “Black Gypsies” in the period after they had intermarried with the Romanichel (British Gypsy) groups, to judge by her English-sounding surname.

At least eight other states had larger Gypsy populations in 1980 than Pennsylvania, when the number of Gypsies nationally was estimated at more than a half-million. Yet Pennsylvania today has a “very large” Gypsy population, especially Philadelphia—Gypsies having begun settling in large numbers in major cities of this country after the Depression, leaving the countryside.

Other Populations: A “Hooverville”

In July 1932, during Herbert Hoover’s administration, when the “Bonus Army” people marched on Washington for jobs and proper housing, the president got a soldier named Douglas McArthur [to take charge of the situation] and they burnt the squatters’ hovels. Before those protesters (World War I

veterans), reached Washington, however, they camped in makeshift “shanty towns” along the route. One such place they gathered was on the Schuylkill River bank near the Art Museum in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park where they piled their belongings, strung a clothesline from trees at the water’s edge, washed their clothes and rested. At the same time there is believed to have been another, smaller “Hooverville shantytown of brief duration on the southwest side of Narberth on the edge of town or just over the corporate boundary in the Shortridge meadowland property where the East Branch of Indian Creek flows into Lower Merion Township. One unconfirmed report claims that Narberth townspeople marched on that encampment to set it afire, and police quelled the disturbance.

Servants in Federal Census of 1900⁶⁹⁶

[As mentioned in Chapter 3,] the Federal Census report of [1900] provides an unusually vivid picture of the startlingly high figure of ninety-two live-in domestic servants employed in Narberth borough at the turn of the century. By then, most of Narberth’s large houses had already been built but there were, as yet, very few small dwellings in which domestic workers might live independently.

The traditional local servant population, jump-started a decade earlier here when three major housing subdivisions were built, was by 1900 experiencing strong competition simultaneously on two fronts. It was faced with a rapid increase of Southern blacks migrating north to major cities after the Civil War, and was also reacting to the latest wave of Irish immigrants lapping at our doors.

In the 1900 Census, Narberth’s white servants in 19 households had just slid down into a bare minority of 45. Among that live-in group, Pennsylvania-borns were still a substantial number - eight men and eleven women.

The foreign-born white segment reflects dominance of female Irish domestic workers. Eleven households employed fourteen fairly young Irish-born women who had emigrated in the nineties and one Irish-born married couple. At the same time, eight other households employed an Englishman, an English coachman, a Scottish gardener, two Scottish women, a Danish couple, a Belgian man and one German woman.

Meanwhile, the town was home to 46 live-in black servants in 42 households. These were overwhelmingly Virginia-born women, most born in the fifteen years after the Civil War. In all, they comprised 29 Virginia-born women and four Virginia-born men including two coachmen. Most of the

⁶⁹⁶ Editor’s note: Much of this information - originally in Chapter 7 - was also in Chapter 3. Much has been removed from this chapter but is available to the future researcher in the author’s papers for this book. The reader is urged to refer back to Chapter 3 for the statistics the author compiled.

other live-in black servants also were women— three born in Maryland, two each in Pennsylvania and North Carolina and one each born in Delaware, Georgia, New York and Washington, D.C.—plus one coachman each from Delaware and West Virginia.

The numerical dominance of Virginia-born domestic workers in Narberth in 1900 is not unique in the metropolitan area at the time, for there was a similar large population of them in Philadelphia's Eighth Ward. Nonetheless, this was the era of the enclave of Baptist ministers and their families here - something that in itself has contributed a cohesive element to this town. And it is quite possible, though difficult to prove, that there was a link between, say the Reverend Robert G. Seymour and the presence of so many of these particular women in jobs here. For Seymour headed the Baptist Publication Society home mission program which was then devoting much effort to training young black women in domestic science service at three schools in Virginia. And job referrals from those schools handled through Reverend Seymour's office are a definite possibility. This minister employed a Virginia-born domestic here in his own household.

Occupations of Narberth people employing live-in servants ranged widely, and many of their jobs in 1900 required commuting to the city, presumably by train. Commuters included physician teachers at medical schools and administrative (Baptist) clergy as well as merchants, manufacturers and lawyers. Among Narberth families employing servants who also lived under their roof were two "capitalists," two bankers, two attorneys, two manufacturers, an importer, ten brokers (commercial, commission, real estate, insurance), ten merchants including one of steel and one of dry goods, a utility company official. Also four managers, two physicians, four clergy including an evangelist, three publishers, a professor, three clerks including one with four servants, two women heads of household, a hotel keeper, a railroad official, two railroad ticket agents, five salesmen, an agent, grocer, teacher, architect, engineer, a building contractor, carpenter, retired head of household, a milk dealer and a tailor.

Two independent black households in the borough at this time (1900) were that of a Massachusetts-born day laborer⁶⁹⁷ active here through the 1920s, the other a childless couple⁶⁹⁸ of early middle age from Virginia. After that day-laborer Henry Allen (called by some "Nigger Henry") bought the first Star sports model touring car in Narberth in 1924⁶⁹⁹, posting an election-day sign on the back of it "Vote Women Vote," nobody else in town would buy one because in their minds it was a black man's

⁶⁹⁷ Henry Allen, born 1864 of a Massachusetts father and a Virginia mother, rents his house (Federal Census, 1900).

⁶⁹⁸ George T. Mercer, born in Virginia 1868 and wife Sadie, born in PA 1874 of Virginia-born parents, married five years. (Federal Census, 1900).

⁶⁹⁹ Our Town (date not indicated)

auto.⁷⁰⁰ The only other household of “people of color” was that of the town’s Chinese laundryman⁷⁰¹ (this family or its successor remained in the business district until perhaps 1940, although an attempt was made by one such shopkeeper to locate more prominently on mainstreet in 1924 and he was refused⁷⁰²). The two black households were in an old building inconspicuously set far back from the road in a residential section while the laundryman on the bridge lived adjoining his shop.

Only whites lived in the largest rental district then available for people of modest means. It featured a corridor of sizeable, closely set new twin houses in the 100-block Conway Avenue, that initially attracted such occupants as a carriage painter, two railroad conductors, a mason, carpenter, agent, coachman and day laborers of various nationalities by 1900 - the same block that would soon see Wynnewood’s philanthropic Miss Mary K. Gibson purchasing a new house there (#116) for a couple from her staff of household servants, namely her cook.

Two black women from Virginia with the same odd last name - probably they were sisters - worked for families on opposite sides of town, as if⁷⁰³

Attitudes toward Blacks and Segregation

Live-in domestic servants of color were surprisingly numerous here in the town at the turn of the century.⁷⁰⁴ [However,] ... none of these domestic workers put down roots here in the town where they were comfortably employed [as it was said to be the custom that] all black servants were supposed to be gone from here each day by dusk. Once Our Town editorialized about the need to provide a room - perhaps at the Y - for Sunday evening meeting for blacks doing domestic or other work in Narberth.⁷⁰⁵ A black evangelist was to consult with local pastors about this but nothing came of it and the matter was dropped.

This desire of people here to distance themselves from unnecessarily close or sustained contact with blacks is also shown in the recollection of one Narberth man that any time Philadelphia’s Colored Giants club or Ardmore’s Autocar Giants, a semi-pro black industrial team, played baseball in Narberth in the 1920s, which was the zenith of black baseball in America he was forbidden to attend the games. Possibly because his family had heard about rowdyism and related problems caused by less than

⁷⁰⁰ From a 1/5/1995 interview with Elizabeth Smedley

⁷⁰¹ Lam (Daniel?) Lee, born in China of Chinese parents 1865, immigrated 1888, an alien living in a mainstreet rental unit. (Federal Census, 1900).

⁷⁰² Circa March 1, 1924.

⁷⁰³ Editor’s note: pages lost. Vicky’s note – “connect this”

⁷⁰⁴ Editor’s note: Refer back to Chapter 3 for further detailed information on this topic.

⁷⁰⁵ Our Town. Editorial, Oct. 26, 1916, p.2.

“respectable” fans at the black baseball parks in Chicago and New York that had inadequate security. Or, they might have been pondering what a bitter pill it was then for a white team to be beaten by a black team, and worried about the friction this could cause. The same man, a Presbyterian with ties to the local congregation, also had observed personally that the few blacks who might attend movies or church services in Narberth while he was a teenager in the 1920s, had to sit in the back of the Presbyterian church and the back of the movie theater.

Bearing this out, a blue-eyed black woman employed as a domestic servant for many Narberth families since 1927 mentioned her own experience in the matter. Still a part-time maid here now at age ninety-two, Ellen Cosby worked in the same capacity in the household of Narberth’s first burgess (mayor), and on her ninetieth birthday received a special honorary citation from Narberth’s latest mayor. Long ago the family of doctor Edwin C. Town, one of her employers, gave Ellen a ticket to a movie The Young Mister Lincoln (TCF - Kenneth MacGowan, 1939) playing in Narberth and said: “We want you to see this.” Ellen’s immediate reaction: “Where shall I sit? The unhesitating answer came back: “Anywhere you please” - an indication that several years had elapsed since the aforementioned observations about that same movie theater.

Thus, by the 1930s, the local custom of sitting in the rear (at the movies, for it was abolished in the churches) was still something that vaguely crossed the minds of blacks, as Ellen’s comment suggests, but they no longer felt obliged to honor it.

Millionaire sportsman Clarence Dolan who did not like having blacks around him, in the early-1930s added a second kitchen to his Narberth house (in the basement) so black members of his household staff could work there, out of sight, while white servants manned the first-floor kitchen.

Late in the thirties, a black domestic worker in the household of a teacher for an exclusive Main Line girls’ school brought her small son with her to work one day. No sooner had she sent him off to play at the nearby Narberth playground than he returned. He had been refused entrance and chased away.

Shortly after becoming a day-worker for various families here, Ellen, a superb cook of Southern dishes, and such staples of an African diet as black-eye peas, okra and sesame along with her specialties of chicken, turnips and apple pie, began her employment for the family of Narberth’s first burgess on the day that Burgess Mueller’s Indiana-born wife Flora was “laid out” for her viewing at home, as was the custom, before her funeral. One of this Georgia-born maid’s other clients, a prominent and abrasive citizen known for her caustic comments which she would blurt out and then sometimes apologize for,

overheard a daughter of the burgess say to Ellen, “Come and see how nice mother looks laid out.” So the outspoken neighbor called that bereaved daughter aside and offered her this sage advice:

Be careful. Colored folks are superstitious and afraid of dead people, so you better not pay Ellen full wages today, or she might not come back to work for you again.

Overhearing this, Ellen, slender and keen, the granddaughter of slaves whose father had been born at Brunswick, Georgia the year after Emancipation and whose mother hailed from Charleston, wheeled around and, demonstrating her marked ability to stand her ground yet get along with all kinds of people, prickly ones included, fired back in a droll fashion:

It’s not dead people I’m afraid of, but some of the living.⁷⁰⁶

And then there was the uncommon courtesy one black man unfailingly received from the Narberth postmaster. Whenever hardworking Henry Allen, the day-laborer and local resident, stopped by Narberth post office to pick up his mail (always addressed to him in care of general delivery), postmaster J. Bertram Nesper, very active in local GOP politics, enthusiastically greeted the arriving customer as follows:

I see you haven’t brought your glasses, Mr. Allen. Would you care to step into my office so I may read those letters to you?

“Yes,” the illiterate Allen always replied.

Then one day Nesper walked into the post office just after the black man had received his mail; and postal workers had seized the opportunity to treat Allen with disrespect and ridicule over his inability to read it. As soon as Allen left the premises, all hell broke loose; the postmaster admonishing his staff for neglecting their duties. A Quaker who belonged to Merion Friends Meeting, Nesper was a kindly, compassionate and warmhearted southsider with strong feelings about justice toward his fellow man. But he also had a very hot temper, and for that reason many people disliked Nesper who supposedly was destined for a high position at the United States Mint in Philadelphia had President Hoover won reelection instead of Governor Roosevelt’s garnering an overwhelming victory at the polls in 1932. Occasionally Nesper would ask his nephew Harry, whom he was raising, if he had seen Henry Allen that day. Informed that he had, Nesper would then inquire, “how did you greet him?” Hearing the

⁷⁰⁶ Ellen repeated this on 10/18/1993 and subsequently too.

youth say, “as Henry Allen,” he would then correct him: “Haven’t I told you to call him Mr. Allen?” Though they had none of their own, the Nespers had a good way with kids.

Interestingly, the local Presbyterian church had given up pew rents in 1912 which put them ahead of the local Catholic church. Not until shortly before World War II were the last vestiges of the practice of charging pew-rents for front center-aisle pews (carrying name plates) abolished here at St. Margaret’s. And this was much sooner than this same practice disappeared in Boston area Catholic churches. In Catholic churches both there and in the Philadelphia metropolitan area at the time, where most congregations were all-white, such levies were economically, not ethnically or racially, divisive. Even so, this long-time practice in Catholic churches did assure that no housemaids would be kneeling beside their employers in church.

In August 1944, I rode with my parents on trolley cars in West Philadelphia that had armed National Guardsmen aboard, and other such troops camped at major intersections, to maintain order and keep the trolleys running during a paralyzing public transportation strike called by white trolley operators to protest any intended hiring by the city of its first black motormen. Army troops had been sent in by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to get things moving because the strike meant that defense workers could not get to war plants. At issue was an order from the federal Fair Employment Practices Committee saying that the then Philadelphia Transportation Company (PTC) should not discriminate on the basis of race in hiring and selecting drivers - an order the PTC had defied in January of that year, claiming it would violate seniority rules in union contracts, and causing a dispute that simmered all summer before erupting in an August strike.

Today in white Narberth the most sizeable black presence is the continual stream of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) bus drivers and rail-division trainmen and conductors—now predominantly black men and a few black women — who travel the roads and rails in public vehicles every day and night through this town. Among them are at least two transportation workers (one black bus driver, one white trainman/ticket-collector) who invariably wear mementos very proudly and prominently showing their military service with Uncle Sam in the Vietnam War. The driver keeps a cap with military insignia of his infantry outfit draped over the back of his driver’s seat; the trainman wears a large and elaborate belt buckle in high-relief showing a helicopter gunship in action over the jungle, with slogan. Both men have better-than-average friendly rapport with their riders, though in general the relationships between these operators and their customers are as positive now as they ever were in the “old days,” when so many of the metropolitan area trolley and trainmen were Irish

- men from Eire's County Clare having had an apparent monopoly of Philadelphia's trolley car jobs in the early-twentieth century, at least out of one of the depots.⁷⁰⁷

Big House/Little House Mindset

If there is a single attitude (a "princess and the pea" attitude of hauteur, such as was expressed in the old Andersen's fairy tale) that could be described as quintessentially Narberthian it is the big house/little house mindset. "Big" in this context may mean simply: noticeably bigger than my house or than his house. Of course, a number of the early owners of Narberth's big houses had been listed in the Philadelphia Blue Book as living here (more so than in the Philadelphia Social Register, which over the years has contained only very sporadic listings for borough residents).

But even long-time later residents of Narberth's big Victorian houses that remained single-family have long been regarded as a kind of elite. This is easily recognized even by the most egalitarian among us, since house size is the determining factor in belonging to this "elite." Thus, families living for a couple of generations in those spacious Narberth houses, say sixty years or so, became anchors for their neighborhood. Now and then (in the 1960s and 1970s) a member of one of those families would declare that Narberth had been "ruined" by the construction of too many small houses because, it was implied, this brought in riff-raff. Or, as another person claimed in an arch fashion, that certain tight cluster of small houses near her larger one was "the bane of my existence."

This entrenched attitude toward the perceived negative impact of blocks of small early twentieth-century single or twin houses changed dramatically in the early-1990s, however, when an architectural historian with the National Park Service (local resident Dennis Montagna) began touting these very same small houses as a fine asset and an endangered species. For although formerly plentiful across America, such unblemished tracts of small houses as ours have been disappearing fast in most other places. Yet here they survive, looking neat and well cared for. He suggested therefore, that we protect these and the surviving larger houses by putting the whole town on the State Register. Such praise from an unexpected source especially for small houses of the teens and twenties greatly surprised even the borough councilmen, one of whom had publicly stated that Narberth has no historic buildings and nothing worth preserving.

Meanwhile regarding other assets, a reference sometimes heard to North Wynnewood Avenue's "gold coast" applies neither to big houses nor to rich people living there, though some very prosperous

⁷⁰⁷ Luzerne.

and distinguished people did live there in the past. Instead the expression refers to the large deep lots that, by the postwar era, were seen as a pot of gold for future development purposes.

Owner-Renter Mindset

Further echoing the big house/little house dichotomy is a very pronounced owner/renter mindset in relation to living quarters. The popular perception has always been that renters are far less involved in the community because they have less at stake in a place than a homeowner. Moreover, Narberth gives the impression of being a community of homes, and renters do not seem an essential element in that picture. Philadelphia has the highest rate of primary home ownership - seventy-five percent, tied with Cleveland - in the nation, compared with places like Los Angeles, where only fifty-seven percent own their own home (many rich people in Southern California renting lavish estates for a long time). So it is quite a surprise to realize that the current ratio of owners to renters is nearly even at fifty-five percent owners and forty-five percent renters. Many people find this equation hard to believe. Yet this ratio is nothing new, just routinely hidden from view. One close observer declared the “invisibility” of our town’s very high proportion of renters in a metropolitan area famous as the “city of homes” to be a tribute to Narberth, inasmuch as it is very difficult to perceive any transitory look about the community. Indeed, Narberth appears to be a very settled place where people put down roots. (Narberth has about five hundred rental apartments and an unknown number of rental houses among its 1,492 taxable properties).⁷⁰⁸

Something else perhaps equally surprising is that a significant sampling of Narberth’s renters are quite involved in local community activity year in and year out. The current mayor,⁷⁰⁹ for example, was in office a decade before he bought a house in Narberth. Also, one of the defeated 1993 candidates for council was a renter, while still another candidate was in the process of switching from renting to buying a house.

And it is not at all unusual in Narberth for the renter of a house or apartment, after becoming familiar with living in the town, to next buy a house within the same block. Offhand, I can recall two recent instances of this, where a couple in a large apartment complex and a house-renting young family suddenly realized a suitable place was available a few doors away, and they quickly bought it (in one case, the day after the sign went up). People already owning their own home here often “buy up” into a

⁷⁰⁸ Editor’s note: The editor in 2021 does not know the date of foregoing statistic.

⁷⁰⁹ Editor’s note: Again, the editor is not sure which mayor to which the author refers.

larger house, a quieter street and so on, thus showing their satisfaction to stay in the borough. This is especially true of young professionals at the present time with a growing number of children who need more space.

Apartment Construction

Narberth has had quite a few close brushes with apartment-house construction-projects that never materialized. In 1915, there were two such proposals - one to be a three-story structure with four apartments on each floor replacing the Richards/Justice house on Narberth Avenue opposite the present parochial school (William D, Smedley, builder) and an apartment house (Cowin & Caldwell, builders) for the southwest corner Essex and Elmwood.

But, there it was in Our Town: acknowledgment by the opinion writer, The Spectator, that times were changing irrevocably in Narberth because apartment houses were starting to go up here. He was bracing people for things to come. The first big one of these apartments - sixty-unit Narberth Hall - would become a reality in 1929, with what is still this community's largest apartment, one hundred-ten-unit Montgomery Court, to follow in 1939. An abundance of small houses lately had been built. But this? That journalist saw house-construction (presumably both large and small dwellings) as a "conservative" type of development, while apartment construction, the wave of the future that he envisioned, was more "liberal." To wit:

There is no doubt that Narberth has made a complete turnover during the last ten years, and we will have to agree that everything which has occurred has not been the best thing for the borough from a residential viewpoint. Nevertheless, the place as it is now will attract more people and furnish a wider market for real estate than a town of more conservative development and we may expect a gradual replacement of the original population and a greater emphasis of the apartment abodes.

He reminded his readers further that:

The convenient sections of Philadelphia have long since succumbed to the more "liberal" way of living and the original settlers who continued to stress the home plan had to move to other and less accessible neighborhoods. So it is also with our own convenient suburbs, and a very decided change in things may be expected here during the next five years.⁷¹⁰

⁷¹⁰ Our Town January 7, 1928.

Two Celebrated Local Artists

Margaret Harshaw

Margaret Harshaw, the great Metropolitan Opera soprano, grew up in her family's Narberth house on Conway Avenue on the southeast corner of Windsor and Conway. As a teenager capturing the spirit of her dreams, she would walk home from her classroom at Lower Merion High School in Ardmore along Montgomery Avenue, soon turning southward onto North Wynnewood Avenue. There she breathed deeply to full capacity walking beneath huge overarching branches of rows of tall Chestnut trees. She straightaway sang out with all her strength as if she were already on stage.

And indeed, she became a widely acclaimed soprano at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. And with several memorable star turns, it was a daunting house to fill, and she did it.

There was a party-line telephone where Margaret's mother had moved later to 25 Narbrook Park to live with another daughter. And a neighbor at 9 Narbrook Park, one of the Goldsboroughs, picked up the receiver of the party-line sometimes and heard Margaret trying out a sample of what she expected to sing that day or the next at the Opera.

Dolly Diehl Maguire

Dolly Diehl Maguire was a professionally trained Narberth artist (Moore College of Art graduate) and the inspiration for two generations of her own children pursuing the arts in many far-flung places. Three of her children including Barrie Maguire are painters (he likes Irish subjects and has a gallery in Galway, Ireland) as well as five of her grandchildren.

[Dolly's ancestor was] an Irish immigrant [who] became the chauffeur of the horse-drawn carriage of Narberth publisher George Barrie, best remembered today for having left us Barrie Road where he had lived off Essex Avenue. The chauffeur's family of Maguires for generations now are identified with Narberth's southside and 207 Chestnut Avenue in particular. Dolly's son Barrie Maguire claims to have presented a book George Barrie published and a decorative base from George Barrie's yacht to the borough for its collection. All these Maguires and their spouses are involved in the arts in some way.

Small "Red light District," Speak-Easy, and Sexual Politics '20s

Narberth's claim to a piece of the "roaring twenties" rests on the saga of Esham Manor. The origin of Esham Manor is shrouded in mystery in some ways. Who were these "fancy people" who,

according to local lore, decided to move an “English village” from the Sesquicentennial Exposition, the 1926 World’s Fair that Philadelphia had hosted, to Narberth as a club? According to the neighborhood version of the tale, Wynnewood’s nearby “English Village” housing tract (1925) had been successful. For that matter, so had its predecessor, an “English Village” tract development that had opened for occupancy in October 1923 at Twenty-second and Saint James streets in downtown Philadelphia. And consequently, other entrepreneurs decided to do it here, with remnants of the Sesqui. So they bought Narberth’s existing Ellis mansion, Bel-Bryn, and half-circled the rear of it with a horseshoe-shaped road. Around its rim on both sides they built a tight cluster of fourteen brick houses with steep slate roofs and no kitchens. The plan was that guests were to occupy the cottages and have dinner at the Victorian manor house.⁷¹¹

Well, a check of contemporary accounts clarifies several points. There is no known Sesquicentennial connection at all. The development, called Brynwood Manor from the start, was launched by a Rosemont developer, Thomas C. Haydock acting as the Merion Corporation and working with his architect William A. Young. It was constructed in 1926, at the same time the pair reportedly also was working on a hotel project in Rehoboth, Delaware. Young had designed Overbrook’s Pennbrook Apartments (1923) facing the rail station.⁷¹² The idea at Brynwood was to improve the property where the long-vacant Ellis house, Bel-Bryn, stood. The interior of the existing mansion was to be adapted to the “Old English” style with murals of characters from the Canterbury Tales painted half-life size by Philadelphia artist Torchy Cole. Under supervision of a prominent Philadelphia hotel man as maître D, the dining room was to seat 150 persons while fourteen bedrooms and eleven baths were also planned for the inn, with a basement grill seating fifty patrons. The cluster of detached dwellings were to be heated from the inn’s central heating plant and supplied with servants from the inn, like janitorial apartments. Those houses were designed with six to eight rooms and one or two baths, the smaller houses being equipped with dinettes and kitchenettes. And each house had a garage. The development was said to be of a type that had become popular in the West, especially California, where a group of bungalows surround a central inn, and the occupants of the houses take their meals at the inn or not, as they please. A thirty by seventy-five-foot open-air swimming pool was allowed by the borough on the stipulation that its use would be restricted. Besides that swimming pool behind the manor house, there

⁷¹¹ Our Town, Aug. 28, 1926, p.1. (Editor’s note: not sure of the intended location of this reference.)

⁷¹² Biogr. Dict. Of Phila. Architects 1730-1930, Athenaeum of Philadelphia, 1985, p. 893.

were also tennis courts. Bryn Mawr Trust Company is said⁷¹³ to have been involved in the construction of this project, which in its final phase encountered financial difficulty.

The flourishing period of Esham Manor, which next occupied this building complex, evidently was 1928 and 1929. The promotional postcard view of this facility shows a sign out in front that reads “Esham Manor, every room with bath,” mentioning also luncheon, dinner and supper, while an oval sign advertises the Esham Manor Grill. Miss Esham’s club operation of these buildings soon evolved into a “red light” district and speakeasy. Whether that was the club’s original focus, or things just got out of hand – a taste of wild abandonment and Dionysian revelry in an era that was politically and socially conservative – is unclear. That such a pleasure pavilion did exist on the site in the late 1920’s was confirmed by interviews with persons unacquainted with each other who were then, and in some cases, still are, living in the vicinity. Each had a slightly different perspective on the situation. And it is from piecing together their accounts that the history of Esham Manor emerges.

In the words of one local resident who remembers the place in full operation:

Esham Manor was ‘sin city.’ It catered to two-hour couples upstairs, and every kind of sex. Some people were trying to get of that at the time. The restaurant was pretty good, and in the basement of the manor house they had the best bar I’ve ever seen. It had an Italian bartender who could hardly speak English and a Spanish manager, and the two of them were always fighting. Later a man took it over and made a nice restaurant out of the place, calling it Wynnewood House.

Meanwhile, at Esham Manor in its heyday, street hookers were on the prowl, causing one irate, socially prominent Wynnewood father from an old Quaker family in the paint business for six generations to instruct his young son to avoid passing the complex. Able Wetherill even forbade his son Reeves (later a popular public figure, socialite, and also for thirty years clerk of Philadelphia’s Free Quaker meetinghouse) to go anywhere in Narberth because the brothel in his eyes gave the whole town a bad name.

A den of iniquity, is what the clergymen of the local Protestant churches considered it, and eventually it was they, not the police, who – with a little help from the Depression – put it out of business. The police, after all, had been customers there, it is said.

The speakeasy going on at Esham Manor in a “dry town” during Prohibition was another inflammatory feature that gave ammunition to the opponents. More people were aware of the illegal liquor sales taking place there than knew about the prostitution aspect.⁷¹⁴ Among these, the family of

⁷¹³ Author’s interview with George M. Harding, Jr. 2/25/1987,

⁷¹⁴ Author’s interview with G. M. Harding, Jr. 2/25/1987.

mural painter George M. Harding at the time living directly across the street at “Boxwood,” the old Hansell farmhouse at 1231 Montgomery Avenue, recalled seeing people being carried “dead drunk” out of Esham Manor. Not just mainstream Protestants, but also many Quakers with their tradition of temperance dating back to the seventeenth century when local Quakers denounced the practice of selling liquor to the Indians, would have been offended by this bootlegger-supplied speakeasy on Narberth’s front street.

The Esham Manor episode occurred during the anti-prostitution revival of the early-twentieth century – a time when the chief ones punished under the law were the working girls themselves, although the target was the prostitution maintenance system. Various pressures were brought to bear to suppress prostitution in this instance, and these eventually succeeded, Narberth style. Whether any local suffragettes were involved in the “clean-up” effort is unknown at this time, but suffragettes nationally were waging a sizeable war against the abuses of this activity. And memories were still fresh about the evils of the “working-girls” lifestyle and the health-hazards involved, as spelled out in many United States government posters during World War I. Even if local feminists were involved in ridding the town of Esham Manor, they may have expressed their opposition through the local churches. Certainly one clergyman doing battle must have been Narberth resident Reverend Dr. Palmquist, on the Philadelphia mayor’s crime commission, who is believed to have crusaded at one time to close down Philadelphia’s leading burlesque house, the Trocadero.

As for Esham Manor, all Dr. Palmquist would have needed in order to swing into action would be to hear about its street-walkers, and realize the police were doing nothing. Generally the police pay more attention to street hookers than call-girls because not only are they easier to catch but also because they are more likely to disrupt neighborhoods, attract drug dealers and violent criminals.

After the sensational phase of this development, its brick cottages were sold individually, and resumed their original collective name: Brynwood Manor. The swim club had been patronized by many Narberth families.⁷¹⁵ But after two drownings there, the borough blew up the pool, and it became a dump, the eventual site of “victory” gardens during World War II, with each cottage owning a piece of that former pool turf. In 1953, a huge truck with a load of dirt asked the borough for a place to dump it, with the result that thirty-seven loads of dirt from the construction site of Wynnewood’s John Wanamaker department store branch, later Hecht’s, found their way to that former pool site. Call it

⁷¹⁵ Author’s interview with Peg B. Thomas, 11/28/1996.

Reeves' revenge, if you like – or John's. (Reeves Wetherill, [as mentioned earlier,] the youth forbidden by his strict father to go anywhere near Esham Manor, had become a high-ranking executive in this chain of stores, established by devout conservative Presbyterian layman and merchandising dynamo John ("Pious John") Wanamaker, founder of four churches of that denomination and appointed postmaster general by President Benjamin Harrison).

Narberth was still very much a Protestant community in the twenties. Even a thriving bordello (ironically in the heart of old Libertyville) that briefly gave Narberth the reputation of being a libertine town could not overshadow that reality for long. Indeed, when a solution finally did materialize for this problem, it proved to be a typically Protestant remedy. After all, this was a battle the Protestant church people had to win. Flourishing in their midst was a bee-hive of commercialized sex that traditional morality would like to suppress in a residential neighborhood. Esham Manor made its neighbors uncomfortable with the ways this club exposed its "members" and people in the surrounding community to vice. By its blatant operation outside the law, Esham Manor compelled people to question the limits of what was appropriate club activity.

But it should be emphasized that when the local religious people got together and put an end to it, they did so above all quietly, and without making waves. Until then, some local residents patronized Esham's restaurant without realizing other activities were going on there. So, when forty junior members of the Women's Community Club of Narberth staged one of their well-attended major events, a mothers' and daughters' dinner at that location in 1932 while Prohibition was still going on, the place, empty for a while, had reopened under new management. The "problem" had been solved without screaming headlines and even without the unsavory character of Esham Manor's ever becoming common knowledge in the town.

But quite apart from its prowess in battling against vice, the Protestant tradition was a dominant force in a much less focused and more pervasive way that touched the lives of all Americans, namely through the Blue Laws against worldly activity on Sunday, put forth when no one questioned the divine sanction (Fourth Commandment) that Moses had received to keep holy the Sabbath. Pennsylvania's Blue Laws date from 1794, and this commonwealth held onto them (until 1978) longer than almost any other state, giving rise to the well-worn vaudeville joke "I was in Philadelphia last weekend, but it was closed." Within memory of all heads of Narberth households before World War I, working on Sunday was a crime punishable by a five-dollar fine for each offense.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁶ Public Ledger, May 22, 1915, "Girard" column.

A national save-the-Sabbath movement, begun in 1888, also joined forces with Prohibition (1919) to keep the lid on things.⁷¹⁷ By 1920, Sabbath crusaders began to aim their criticism at leisure-time activity that violated Sunday observance. Thus it was no surprise in 1939 when neighboring clergymen (Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian) at a meeting of the Main Line Ministerial Council protested the “thoughtlessness” of local businessmen. The offense? They had chosen a Sunday for a forthcoming all-day special “Main Line Day” sight-seeing excursion via the Pennsylvania Railroad to the New York World’s Fair. The event was being lavishly promoted as the greatest cooperative excursion ever staged by the Main Line. Some fifteen hundred-plus people were⁷¹⁸

Frictions between and within groups: Hooded Politics

Tensions often existed between Narberth’s various ethnic factions in earlier times. And religious strife with direct political ramifications occasionally surfaced. Nativist political events and religious attitudes of the 1930s period are best summed up in what went on here, and in neighboring towns, at the close of the national Democratic presidential primary in 1924, and again during the 1928 summer and fall presidential campaign.

In Narberth, as in several other communities in the surrounding township, the Ku Klux Klan was a viable force in 1924. That year the Klan boasted of an all-time high membership of more than six million members across the country. That year too, our crossroads town was caught in the crossfire of a march and cross-burning that still haunts the night for some who witnessed it personally. And even for some others who were first told about it by their families or, as in my case, by a high school sophomore civics teacher Sister Mary Josephine a generation after the event.

Narberth’s incident, and the four or five similar occurrences the same evening in neighboring Lower Merion communities, were a chilling reminder of a great national Klan victory several days earlier. On that historic occasion, the Klan had made a successful bid to block New York governor Alfred E. Smith’s nomination for president on the 1924 Democratic ticket at the national convention in Madison Square Garden. No Catholic had ever been nominated to that high office, much less elected.

⁷¹⁷ Prohibition Act, Dec. 1918, ratified by the states Jan. 1919.

⁷¹⁸ Editor’s note: remaining text is missing - p.p. 115 and 116 of the author’s manuscript.

And the Klan conducted a strident campaign against the nomination of this nationally popular politician, putting up its own candidate, William G. McAdoo. One hundred-three ballots and sixteen days of convention rhetoric later, a compromise choice, colorless John W. Davis, was nominated and Calvin Coolidge defeated him easily in November.

The July 3, 1924 KKK cross-burning and procession - "When they marched down Narberth Avenue" - left indelible memories in the minds of Narberth residents specifically targeted by Klan ideology for hate and intimidation -- namely Roman Catholics, who at the time were very few in number here. Undoubtedly it had been a great source of irritation to Protestants that the local Catholic priest lately had bought a private house, taking it off the tax rolls, and had opened it as a parochial school with forty-five pupils in anticipation that he would soon welcome 102 pupils when he constructed a parish school on the same (cleared) site in 1925. Surely the town fathers had gotten wind of the high-powered professional fund-raising drive for that project then poised to begin - an indignity if there ever was one for local Protestants who loved their public school next to God and country.

The subject of that particular Klan march, and the marches in the surrounding towns the same night, remained a hot topic for many years in some local households. Conway Avenue's Mrs. Mary Ann Clark Callahan "talked about it quite a lot," according to her daughter Alice Callahan. And so did the large Gerald Lynam family of Brookhurst Avenue that had a son a priest. They lived across the street from Albert Miller, one of two policemen shot in a KKK march that same July third evening in Haverford. The events of that spine-chilling summer's night in Narberth I have pieced together from the recollections of many people, the majority of them Catholics who witnessed the parade from sidewalks or front porches. One eye-witness, a Protestant child then living in a rented "Brick Row" house along the parade route, still vividly remembered standing transfixed in front of the fiery cross and watching it burn at close range.⁷¹⁹

For this Narberth march, the Klan members gathered first around the Narberth firehouse, located then on Forrest Avenue below Windsor. Begun while it was still daylight, the march was conducted in full Klan costume. And some people joined in on the event just for kicks, like the soda jerk who ran out from behind his counter untying his apron as the procession started a few doors away. He and others tagged along.

⁷¹⁹ Harry Hartman

Ann Phillips, a legend as our town's long-time movie cashier and a forthright person with a genuine interest in people, saw the marchers begin their trek. Heading down Forrest, they veered westward onto Haverford Avenue past the Station Circle where she stood. Declared Phillips:

I was horrified, when I showed my dismay at the sight, another onlooker turned to me and said: 'How would you feel if it were the Knights of Columbus marching?' I interpreted that remark as either coming from a Klan sympathizer or simply as a bigoted remark.

Around the corner Elizabeth Gilroy stubbornly surveyed the ghostly tide of advancing marchers through distressed eyes from high atop her front steps at 211 North Essex Avenue.⁷²⁰ Pale as parchment anyway and blonde with a naturally aristocratic air about her, Elizabeth was just back from finishing school. Her lawyer father, experienced in local politics in upstate New York before settling here in 1906, had run for Narberth burgess shortly before 1912 and lost - defeated, it was generally conceded, because of his religion. (He had received a congratulatory letter on that try from a German-born Protestant neighbor, Frederick H. Harjes, a commission broker. Long treasured by its recipient, the letter became a Gilroy family heirloom.)

Almost certainly the first Roman Catholic to run for public office in the borough, John Gilroy was a New York judge's son whose Irish forebears had arrived through Canada at New York's Finger Lakes region where they prospered growing hops, as had the Irish family of John's strong-willed wife Elizabeth Lyon. John Gilroy and his bookish wife headed a Narberth family of great readers who cooperated in putting together what was perhaps the town's most formidable private library in its day. Besides the second-floor-front library they all shared, the four Gilroy sons and two Gilroy daughters each had a wall of books in his or her own high-ceilinged room. Not surprisingly, several of those children became college or community librarians, most notably Eugene Gilroy who headed Saint Joseph's College Library for many years.⁷²¹

That bit of history about her father's brave try at entering local politics here gave John Gilroy's third child, Elizabeth (first of his brood to be born in Narberth where she lived most of her ninety years), a kind of edge. She felt almost an obligation to be standing out there at the appointed hour, dusk, waiting. Elizabeth had this to say about her vigil on what turned out to be, for some other watchers of a Klan parade and cross-burning nearly three miles west of here, the deadliest and darkest of nights:

While the Klan parade surged up Essex past my door, I stood on the front porch watching

⁷²⁰ Interview with Elizabeth Gilroy July 4, 1985

⁷²¹ None of the children ever married.

as if to defy the march. My father wasn't home or he would have been out there with me. His sister visiting from New York and my mother were hiding in the kitchen - hiding from a display of triumphalism that appalled them.

Elizabeth went on:

I grew up with so much anti-Catholicism. Very few of that faith then lived in Narberth. So, I still wonder if the Klan deliberately marched past our house. Along that straight stretch, nobody stood on the sidelines watching. Nothing was said. But it was a very grim feeling. The marchers carried the American flag flat, not waving. There was one contingent of about a hundred in sheets and hoods with only the eyes visible - about ten across and ten rows long. I heard the clump, clump sound of feet marching, but otherwise silence.

Elizabeth Gilroy offered an anonymous quote that she had kept a long, long while because it most captured, for her, the feeling of unrest of those times: "It was that haunted feeling - all rumors all around you. You didn't know who was friend or foe."

Seems eerie, but those were virtually the identical sentiments expressed more than three generations later by several New Orleans blacks being interviewed on Ted Koppel's ABC-TV News "Nightline" program on the eve of election day November 1991. At the time, ex-Klan wizard David Duke was running for Louisiana governor in a tight race. (Over the past two years, Duke ran and lost for the Senate and governorship in Louisiana. Then he ended his bid for his Republican presidential candidacy after a poor showing in the April 1992 South Carolina primary, thus effectively killing his hopes of being a factor in the '92 presidential race.)

Along the parade route, some residents pulled down their window shades against the "intrusion" of the march, while others like the Joseph L. Kelley family, 205 Price, turned out the lights so as not to be seen looking out the windows at the KKK.⁷²² Joseph L. Kelley, who eventually became the town's postmaster and chief air raid warden and whose son "junior," Joseph L., also served as postmaster here, knew very well that the local Klan members included a number of prominent businessmen in the town.

The marchers continued uphill along Essex Avenue's straight stretch, possibly past Price Avenue as far as Sabine Avenue before making their eastward turn toward Narberth Avenue where my

⁷²² Elizabeth D. Kelley, 205 Price (born November 22, 1922) says seeing that parade from her window amid the excitement of the moment is one of her earliest childhood memories. Interview: Feb. 2, 1995.

eyewitness account resumes. Tensions in the community rose to their peak as the KKK march advanced southward down North Narberth Avenue toward the Roman Catholic Church of St. Margaret of Antioch.

That Klan walk-by was especially menacing, for two reasons at least. Narberth had not welcomed the foundation of a Catholic parish church here with open arms in 1900. This became abundantly clear when no corner site was made available to it. St. Margaret's is one of the few middle-of-the-block churches you will see anywhere. The borough has five churches, and even the Lutheran church, built considerably after St. Margaret's, occupies a corner. Narberth used to be the same way about parade routes. It was always a badge of honor locally when the Memorial Day parade passed your church. Often the minister of the congregation stood out front to greet marchers. But as the custom evolved here, the parade always passed in review at only four of the churches, avoiding St. Margaret's. It became an ingrained practice, an invisible slight that no one ever questioned. At least, until Narberth Civic Association drafted Bob Keller, a Catholic lawyer, to run the Memorial Day parade in 1976 and 1977. Both years, Keller simply changed the route so it would go past St. Margaret's. And it has been done that way ever since.

So there was uneasiness as the hooded throng approached the Papist church. Its pastor, a frail, gentle of speech kindly man with an unassuming way, was also known to be undeviating in his spiritual standards and scornful of intolerance.⁷²³ Daniel J. (Mike) McGarry, Jr., a borough councilman in the mid-1980s and a second-generation plumbing contractor whose father started that business here in 1910, recalled the event:

I stood with my father and our whole family outdoors as the procession came down Narberth Avenue. Father Richard F. Cowley, then St. Margaret's pastor, was standing outside on the grass watching it too. He had the church lights on at the time. But as the marchers neared the church, Father Cowley turned the lights out.

Later that night a number of men of the parish - including Gerald Lynam (whose link with the pastor was that both men came from the same place in Ireland), Henry Sexton and Henry P. Carr - got together and guarded St. Margaret's church all night. In all probability, this group also included Fred J. Hipkiss, S. A. Rudolph and Charles H. A. Chain. They would have come forward to offer their services either as individuals or as members of some Catholic lay group such as the Knights of Columbus.

⁷²³ Cowley – gentle, etc. Our Town, September 18, 1926, p.1.

Dick Blessing, then a new employee of Narberth Post Office starting a long career as a letter-carrier here, and with a keen eye for the passing scene, stood with several other youths along Haverford Avenue. There they watched the Narberth parade amble down Narberth Avenue, making a left turn eastward coming in their direction. Blessing recalled:

It was quite a group - they marched three abreast, twelve or fifteen rows of them. It was no secret the Klan was planning that march in Lower Merion the same night.

Blessing stood at an intersection the Klan had staked out as its own for there, on main street at the northeast corner of Haverford and Narberth avenues, the KKK had its membership booth for enrolling new members and distributing Klan literature during the 1920s. At the time, the Narberth Klan unit is believed to have been run by a Mr. Gregory who, with his brother, had a sausage and scrapple business (no kin of the Gregory paving contractors now active locally). Like other such groups, Narberth's Klan may have had a women's auxiliary. If so, they would have been heavily involved in preparing the good and plentiful food available at the annual Klan summer picnic at the old Fairview Sunday School site in Penn Valley - the scene always decked out in plenty of red, white and blue bunting. This popular event had ice cream that was extremely good and very cheap, recalled one man who as a lad of ten or eleven (once with a concealed blackjack in case he had to defend himself) attended those picnics in 1923 and 1924, although expressly forbidden to do so. He liked to "crash" those picnics to get his fill of good food.

The eventual passage of the Narberth parade through the "Brick Row" neighborhood at Iona and Woodbine avenues was not without incident. Many Irish-born Catholics lived there at the time in rental housing. And a steady influx of first-generation Italians to the district had just begun. This volatile mix of residents, openly resentful of the march, came out and pelted the marchers with raw eggs. Peters with his portly wife Bessie (sparkplug of the business) long had a mom and pop grocery in that immediate vicinity at 332 Woodbine (he was policeman Booty Peters' father) drew a particularly heavy barrage of eggs because of his bow legs. Visible beneath the white robes, they were a dead giveaway who he was. Peters suddenly became the scapegoat for the whole ignominious event, as far as his neighbors and some customers were concerned. Not only Peters, but also other businessmen who marched that evening in Narberth are said to have suffered boycotting as a result.

Growing edgy by now, and eager to set their cross ablaze, the hooded band lurched forward hastily on the last lap of its journey to the major intersection where little Anne Roesler (now Anne

Berry) patiently stood waiting. Reminiscing about that clear summer's night, Mrs. Berry, a dedicated volunteer at Peter Wentz Farmstead and lifelong Narberth resident, said:

I saw the Narberth cross-burning. And it made an indelible impression on me. I can still see it. The flaming cross stood thirty to forty feet back from Montgomery Avenue on the northwest corner of Woodbine Avenue, and facing Montgomery. I stood on the borough side directly across Montgomery Avenue from it, watching it burn.

The cross was set up on land belonging to a Protestant family, the McDowells, promoters of the local race track. The Klan apparently got around borough ordinances or verbal objections by burning the cross in an open field just outside the town limits, but in full view of the people in a section of town it wanted to intimidate.

That cross may have been made by the same man who made the Haverford and Gladwyne crosses burned that same evening. He was Ardmore's Joseph ("Boydie") Boyd, one of the four men arrested in the KKK shooting of two policemen, one fatally, in Haverford that night. Boyd's crosses were made at home of two-by-four pieces of lumber, some burlap and some iron bolts he had procured at the Autocar automobile plant in Ardmore where he worked as a mechanic.

Anne Berry explained further about what she saw when the cross was set ablaze that evening at 10:15 at Woodbine and Montgomery:

I remember feeling shock, but only because all of the adults of the area were loud in their show of disgust. I didn't really understand what it was about until another incident of cross-burning occurred - at the Fairview Sunday School on Fairview Road in Penn Valley. [In that instance] some people were upset about the humane [sic?] attitudes some whites gave the blacks.

As for the third of July 1924 killing of one Lower Merion policeman and the wounding of another [that same day!], both at Haverford, those officers had been dispatched as a two-man squad to the scene of that cross burning in response to a citizen's complaint. Residents of a black neighborhood bordering the eastern end of the campus of Haverford College, a Quaker institution (founded 1833), phoned police to complain that Ku Klux Klan demonstrators were causing property damage to their homes by throwing rocks and firing guns through windows. Both of those policemen, shot on arrival, were from ethnic backgrounds deeply resented by nativists jealous of their job advancement. The survivor of the attack was a German immigrant who had been rising up rapidly in the ranks of the township police force. The younger officer, the first Lower Merion policeman to lose his life in the line of duty, was a handsome and popular Irish Catholic cop, a bachelor living at home with his parents and

sister. With a priest as his witness, the mortally wounded officer from his hospital room made a solemn written deathbed identification of the shooters, men he knew including a positive identification of a fellow township policeman (Lattimore MacGroury) who was a KKK member. The suspects were subsequently brought to trial for their lives in Montgomery County, a locality believed less friendly at the time to the Klan than neighboring Delaware County according to contemporary accounts.

The November 1924 trial, one of the most sensational in the criminal history of Montgomery County, was bristling with unusual features from start to finish.⁷²⁴ In perhaps the strangest twist of all, the judge took it upon himself to quash a murder indictment, removing it in the middle of the trial from the hands of a jury. Without that deathbed testimony as evidence, and with the judge refusing to admit the statement as such, the Commonwealth's case became one of mere suspicion. On that basis, Judge Miller rendered a verdict of not guilty, stating that men's lives should not be placed in jeopardy on mere suspicion. Then he discharged the three accused men, sparking a tumultuous outburst in the courtroom. According to Our Town, the consensus of opinion of lawyers attending the trial was that if the Commonwealth had been able to introduce policeman Roy's dying statement, conviction would have been probable. Within two years after their acquittal, the three suspects were still under a cloud of suspicion, despite their release. But at least they had their names cleared by the confession of two black men who, during that post-trial interval, came forward and confessed to the slaying of policeman Francis X. Roy, and were sent to jail for several years. End of story? Probably not. For the surviving Lower Merion policeman, who was shot in the leg and was placed on the witness stand during the November 1924 trial, could give only a vague description of the men in the group of Klan demonstrators standing where the shots were fired. But he was positive about one thing. Albert Miller, the cop whose parents were German-born Narberth immigrants, was absolutely certain that the slayers were white men.

There is reason to believe that the records of those two trials - the sensational one, and the later one involving the "confession" of two Ardmore/Haverford black men - long believed destroyed - may in fact still exist in an obscure storage facility in Norristown.

Part of the bitter harvest of those contentious, hate-mongering years was that some Lower Merion Township policemen are known to have felt unfairly discriminated against in their career advancement prospects because they had been members of the KKK in the 1920s. One such embittered former Lower Merion cop, a Narberth resident, just could not seem to put the painful episode behind him. In failing health, he died shortly before he was to be interviewed by this reporter. He and another

⁷²⁴ Our Town, the KKK Trial – November 20, 1926, p.3.

former member of the Klan locally, are said to have joined it because at the time “It was the thing to do.”

A striking perspective on 1924 Ku Klux Klan activity in Narberth is also provided by someone who watched that early-July parade at the age of nine and vividly recalls one white-clad figure in the line of march in particular -- A lady holding a bible and looking very sanctimonious.

The same observer, whose extended family network in Narberth were Methodist, was aware that “quite a few” Narberth Methodist church members were members of the KKK. This was amply demonstrated that year when a procession of hooded Klansmen marched into Narberth Methodist church, interrupting the Sunday worship service to make a formal presentation of a “Christian flag,” a blue one that hung for at least another seventeen years in that church.⁷²⁵ Such demonstrations by church-going Klan members are believed to have been fairly common while Klan power was at its zenith. They were usually intended as a surprise tactic, but it is a matter of speculation whether the presiding minister knew in advance of this friendly “intrusion.” Around the same time, a Goucher College graduate in the same Methodist congregation was denied permission by her father to wed the man it is said she loved because he was a Klan member and, it is said, that as a result she never married.

By 1928, Ku Klux Klan power and influence had passed its zenith but was not a spent force by any means. This great “Invisible Empire” made its weight felt in a number of narrowly religious and racial matters that year during the presidential campaign of Herbert Hoover versus New York governor Alfred E. Smith, a Catholic. Religious frictions here more so than racial ones remained close to the surface. Locally:

People didn’t speak to one another on the street, and friendships were broken during Al Smith’s campaign that year.

Such tensions took their toll on the kids of the town. Thus, one day in ‘28, a nine-year-old girl was accosted and “horribly beaten up” by a group of children while walking on a public sidewalk in downtown Narberth a block from her home. Her offense? She was wearing an “Al Smith for President” campaign button in her lapel. This oldest of nine children of the comfortably middle-class family of a Philadelphia stationery manufacturer never held a grudge about her painful ordeal.

Her paternal grandfather, living under the same roof with her family here, used to talk about a 1928 Klan cross-burning that took place either in front of Saint Margaret’s Church or in front of its

⁷²⁵ Interview with Elizabeth Smedley, January 6, 1995.

Forrest Avenue parochial school, directly opposite their house. He used to say that the Gladwyne Klan was responsible for that incident. In all probability, such a cross-burning would have taken place without the preliminaries of a march, considering the hostility of township and borough police authorities toward the Klan ever since the Lower Merion police fatality during that one night of Klan mayhem four years earlier.

Little Betty's Catholic family (the Beckers) believed that the Klan powers-that-be in Gladwyne at the time of her ordeal here were a family in the lumber and coal business in the immediate vicinity of the Victorian house that then housed both Saint John Vianney Catholic Church and its rectory, founded in 1927. Still standing as the rectory, that mansard-roof residence was the birthplace of General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, one of only seven five-star American military leaders in World War II, and known as the father of the modern Air Force. According to another Narberth source, the Gladwyne Klan considered so powerful was definitely based either in old houses along River Road or else in the rented clubhouse at the Odd Fellows lodge hall. Still another report refers to Klan activity in that vicinity during John F. Kennedy's election campaign, and an incident of vandalism during construction of a parish school facility in 1963.

So, for a Catholic pastor to be stationed in Gladwyne in the 1920s (even the late-twenties) was equivalent to be living in a war zone. People who knew him well said the Reverend Augustine Schulte was definitely the man for the job. In the version of the story told to me by the pastor of the neighboring Catholic church who was a local historian, one summer's night in 1928, Father Schulte was awakened by a noisy cross-burning on his Gladwyne lawn amid shouts of "We don't want you." This vigorous, athletic man, a former game hunter, leaped up, grabbed his gun and with the aplomb worthy of General Hap Arnold himself, fired two cartridges from the rectory window over the demonstrators' heads and dispersed them fast. (His nephew, Bishop Francis B. Schulte, stationed at Saint Margaret's in Narberth in the 1980s, and now Archbishop of New Orleans, is of a milder temperament, and on one occasion seemed almost embarrassed to be reminded of the frontiersman qualities of his crusty uncle.⁷²⁶)

When her grandfather, Albert J. Becker a fourth-degree knight died, Betty recalls that he was carried in his casket on the shoulders of other Knights of Columbus men from Becker's' house all the way around three sides of a block and into the church. (They could have taken a short-cut through a back entrance, but they "went public" all the way, perhaps to make a statement, she said.) Catholics especially in the 1920s were warned to avoid Protestant establishments. It was totally off-limits for Catholics to

⁷²⁶ Author's interview with Bishop Schulte in Narberth, July 19, 1981.

become Masons, to join the YMCA, or even be seen there. So Catholics had their own groups. The Knights of Columbus, for instance, were regarded as the Catholic counterpart of the Masons - the Masons at that time having quite a few close ties with the KKK, even in Pennsylvania. The Knights of Columbus, moreover, were no pussycats, as some (myself included) had supposed. Betty Becker Sexton (who survived her beating during the 1928 Smith/Hoover presidential campaign) explained: The Knights of Columbus seemed to attract the type of men who were willing to stand up for things.

Two noteworthy local events - an unprecedented display of Catholic triumphalism on the ecclesiastical home front, and a far more low-key and thought-provoking project launched by a Catholic layman and that had far-reaching effects - challenged the anti-Catholic Klan bigotry that resurfaced during the 1928 Smith/Hoover campaign for the American presidency. In the more attention-grabbing of the two events, a multitude of people assembled to attend the dedication of an enormous new building complex (church with hundred thirty-seven-foot bell tower, cloister, classrooms, dormitory and infirmary) to re-house the seminary for the priesthood of the Philadelphia Catholic archdiocese, located within easy walking distance of Narberth.⁷²⁷ That June 10, 1928 ceremony was the largest gathering of any sort ever held in Lower Merion Township up to that time. A long list of dignitaries and notables attended. Some sixty thousand men marched in procession outdoors, led by twenty-five marching bands and many drum and bugle corps on parade. It must have been an insufferable day for the Lower Merion/Narberth Klan.

On the sidelines, meanwhile, watching and hearing all that had transpired locally with Klan activities in 1924 amid promises of more to come during the 1928 general election campaign, stood an advertising executive and Saint Margaret's parishioner, Karl H. Rogers. Son of the former Phillies baseball team owner Colonel Rogers (another of whose sons, Ned, founded the Philadelphia advertising agency Grey & Rogers, and whose daughter Catherine married a Biddle), Karl had been with the flagship of Philadelphia advertising agencies, N. W. Ayer. (The nation's oldest advertising agency - founded Philadelphia 1869, moved to New York City 1973 - N. W. Ayer pioneered the concept that agency worked for a client not a publisher, introduced radio advertising (1922) and used fine art in its work. Its slogans included "A diamond is forever" for De Beers, "Reach out and touch someone" for AT & T, and Container Corporation of America's campaign "Great Ideas of Western Man".) Recognizing that bigotry and ignorance flourish together, Karl Rogers saw a need for his services as a volunteer. He

⁷²⁷ Editor's note: St. Charles Borromeo Seminary.

responded by establishing the “Catholic Information Society of Narberth,” also called the “Narberth Movement,” in 1929.

The goal of that apparently unique organization was not to proselytize but to make the Catholic Church and its teachings known to persons not of that faith. Rodgers started by sending out a questionnaire to many expected to climb aboard the railroad’s “Main Line Special” trains to attend. And during those tough economic times, many who did have jobs worked on Saturdays.

From plentiful replies sent in, he compiled questions. He then wrote and regularly issued question and answer pamphlets, gathering answers from the faculties of the nearby seminary and the (Saint Joseph’s University) Jesuit college. Topics ranged from “There’s Something Wrong with Catholics” and “Is the Catholic Mind Hide-Bound?” to “Is the Pope Pro-American?”

Rogers and his staff of Narberth volunteers also separately prepared brief texts that he offered to newspaper editors as information on timely topics intended to defuse hot issues and serve the best interests of local communities. During the first year of publication, those Narberth articles were carried nationwide in more than 150 secular newspapers as well as in a hundred plus newspapers published by Catholic dioceses.

After Rogers’ death in 1948, the project was taken over by the Washington, D.C.-based National Council of Catholic Men (there occupying the next-door office to renowned preacher Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, whose Tuesday evening program of televised talks, with a peak audience of 30 million, had lately buried Milton Berle’s comedy hour competition). There they employed Rogers’ former project secretary, Narberth-born Nancy Brennan McGarry who vividly remembers when working-class Catholics were barely tolerated walking on Narberth pavements past Protestant houses on the way to church. This work of Rogers and his Narberth team was later taken over by the national office of the Knights of Columbus. During World War II, the Narberth publications were mailed each month to more than 15,000 non-Catholic homes in this country. Branch societies circulated the pamphlets, meanwhile, in fifteen foreign countries. Still continuing as an outgrowth of the “Narberth Movement” are capsule messages of information about the Catholic religion that the old nemesis of the Klan, the Knights of Columbus, publishes in various periodicals across the United States.

In an example of how the nucleus group of the “Narberth Movement” outlasted the 1920s and 1930s by reinventing a public relations role for itself as war clouds gathered, Karl H. Rogers in August 1940 declared to Pennsylvania’s senators and congressmen that the Catholic Church would fight the military draft unless priests, seminarians and members of religious orders were exempted. Almost casually, as was his style, Rogers explained:

As you probably know, the Catholic Church has never advocated pacifism, but on the contrary teaches patriotism as an obligation before God.

And he went on to quote the catechism. The nation had 21 million Catholics by then, and Rogers was one of American Catholicism's most effective early spin-doctors. His activities were unusual in being totally self-propelled and, as such, a source of ongoing edification and amazement to local Catholic clergy and laity alike at the time. He was a happily married man (his wife, Florence White, a daughter of the S.S. White Dental Manufacturing Company family, her fashion signature being pert shirtwaist dresses purchased at Best & Company specialty shop in Ardmore, was an agnostic who late in life had a change of heart and after her husband's death, became a nun in a semi-cloistered convent in Virginia). And Karl H. Rogers had a strong distaste for censorship of any kind. He once took to task a Narberth Protestant minister who was trying to ban a book from Narberth Community Library because the subject of homosexuality came up in it.

When Pennsylvania modified its 1794 Blue Laws in 1959 by getting down to specifics on precisely what could and could not be sold on Sundays, it also stiffened the penalties for violations. Fielding questions on local enforcement of those recently amended Sunday Blue Laws, police chiefs from four suburban municipalities reported that all was quiet on the Main Line front, the Lower Merion police superintendent declaring his officers would make arrests if and when violations were found.

In 1961, Pennsylvania passed a law allowing the sale of alcoholic beverages on trains on Sundays. This meant that the long-distance trains from and to the Midwest and West Coast did not have to close their club cars while passing through Pennsylvania (and Narberth). Certainly, post-war suburbia, with its proclivity for people on Sundays to mow lawns, wash cars, hang out the wash, do gardening chores, have garage sales, visit real estate open-houses and go shopping at malls, gradually put an end to the traditional American Sunday as we knew it. By 1970, the old-fashioned Sunday was dead. Even within the living memory of many people, the American Sunday had undergone vast changes - from a day of rest to a time when few any longer honor Sunday as a special day. Yet in Narberth perhaps more than in many other places there is still some survival of the old ways when people for church-going wear their "Sunday best" clothing, go on Sunday drives and gather for family dinners on Sunday.

Even as Protestant advocacy of Sabbath observance appeared to slacken nationally in the 1960s, Narberth was still on the horn in a sense about the demon rum. For in 1966, devout Methodist Henry A. Frye who had been Narberth burgess during the Esham Manor caper, was elected president of the Pennsylvania Temperance League (formerly the Anti-Saloon League) a post held earlier by his Narberth

uncle and mentor Harry Chalfant. The group had chosen that occasion to announce its new name: Pennsylvania Council on Alcohol Problems Inc. – those name changes reflecting altered public perceptions about alcohol abuse. A can-do attitude was replacing a shrill outcry approach. By this time, Narberth had two of the busiest State liquor stores on the Main Line (an over-the-counter store on Montgomery Avenue, since closed partly because the rent was raised, and a self-service store on the town's main street), besides its share of saloons and eating places with liquor licenses.

The unanswered questions that remain about the Esham Manor episode include what kind of politics of prostitution was being practiced in this case? Was there any kind of dilemma of the reform tradition at work here?

Chapter 8 - Narberth Lives

Narberth Lives.....	404
The Churches, Religions: Catholic Church.....	404
The Irish	409
“Little Italy”	410
The Germans and a Lutheran church	413
Jews	415
Distinct School Populations	419
A Girl Graduate of the Narberth High School.....	426
(Distinct school populations) - Permanently Expelled at 15	429
Courtship and Marriage: Going Public	430
Houses, a Debutante, a Bride’s Room	433
Baffled Beau	435
A Polite House Call.....	436
Ballroom Dance-Team Era	436
Leisure Time Activities: Dancing: for those in school, out of school	439
Leisure time activities: Sleigh Rides.....	439
Sothern & Marlowe.....	440
Ethnic Celebrations	441
Leisure Time Activities: Home-Town Fun.....	442
Smoothing things over Conway Avenue style.....	445
The Auld Sod for Narberth. Servants: Maybrook.....	446

Narberth Lives

The middle class and the working class - they slide off the tongue together as easily as Mutt and Jeff, in a place like Narberth where the two groups have mingled easily and constantly. There is an air of small-town America about the place. It has not gone grand. And yet there are many differences in the lives people lead here, and that they have led during the present century.⁷²⁸

These differences are especially noticeable if one considers two sizeable groups of comparatively late-arriving residents: the Roman Catholics (mostly Irish and Italians) and the Jews. To a considerable extent and often in very subtle ways that are not easily discernible, these are the residents who have been writing “finale” to the long period of Protestant cultural dominance of the area. The period of peak Catholic cultural influence may already be on the wane, while the Jewish phase is definitely growing. Interwoven with their tale is that of the late-arriving Germans who were able to consolidate with persons of longer established local German heritage sufficiently to found a Lutheran congregation in the rapid-growth years of the 1920s. Also intermingled here are glimpses of what it was like to live in a Protestant town, a dry town, one where Protestant ministers were revered public figures who considered all the townspeople “their flock.”

Differences also can be seen in the many different co-existing school populations, in the courtship customs, in the leisure pursuits, and in the sometimes intense frictions that can flare up between opposing groups of people over the years.

The Churches, Religions: Catholic Church

To the pluralism of religious voices in Narberth at the turn of the century was added that of Roman Catholics in the waning days of the year 1900. Before 1800 only four Catholic churches had existed in Philadelphia and the majority of the city’s early Catholics were German. But by 1842, this figure had dropped to one in four Catholics being German. For the Irish had begun arriving in large numbers between 1830 and 1860. And having suffered oppression under British rule, they brought with them a style of worship that reflected their own experiences and was an expression of cultural nationalism. Activity in and around the church played a big part in the lives of these immigrants. Their response to Philadelphia’s nativist riots of the 1830s and 1840s and the continuing discrimination they

⁷²⁸ Editor’s note: 20th Century

experienced was to establish their own social institutions, their own network of parishes, each with its own parochial school so children could stay out of the public-school system which Catholics tended to regard as Protestant. Meanwhile, Catholics founded the most extensive network of diocesan high schools in the country here, and individual religious orders of priests, nuns and brothers established a number of local colleges, several of which are now universities.

So Narberth gained a parish in the all-encompassing Irish mode, although the Church of Saint Margaret here began life with a decidedly French cosmopolitan accent - its chief patron and benefactor for many years being a prominent man of French ancestry. The parish's founding-day Mass with new parishioners in attendance was celebrated on Christmas Day 1900 at "Derlwyn," the nearby twenty-room mansard-roof Victorian house of banker and broker Nicholas H. Thouron and his wife Anna Dutilh Smith, daughter of University of Pennsylvania medical professor Francis Gurney Smith. A merchant importer's eldest son, Nicholas was a great-grandson of Pierre Thouron, a general in Napoleon's army whose son, a political refugee became a rich Philadelphia ship owner. Nicholas was an arbitrage broker, one of those traders who dealt in the simultaneous purchase and sale of securities on the same or different markets in order to profit from price discrepancies. Long before the practice became commonplace, he had been the only such broker who dealt between the New York and Philadelphia stock markets, scalping the eighths between the two cities, and reaping large profits. Habits of thrift had made him a rich man in his own right, and he never forgot those early lessons learned.

In the same spirit, if the Thourons liked one particular first name, they stuck to it in all its variations - the name Margaret, for instance. Nicholas Thouron had a rash of Margarets in his family - his grandmother, mother, sister, his only child. Even his wife's best friend was a Margaret. The parish church in Narberth has memorials to them, tributes Nicholas personally solicited within his family. And one large window portrays an episode from the life of Saint Margaret of Antioch. There is definitely the suggestion that, with the Thourons around - they had lived in the neighborhood since 1880 - it was virtually inevitable that the new parish would receive the name it did. Never mind that the church's stained glass followed the Catholic norm of that time, which favored importing stained glass from Germany. Evidently Thouron did not try to intervene on behalf of American talent to design those windows.

For the Thourons were steeped in art and music, and their word would have mattered. Nicholas' brother, a prominent artist, painted the ceiling murals at Philadelphia's Catholic cathedral. Nicholas collected art, was one of the founders of the Orpheus Club and of the Merion Cricket Club, as well as

being Saint Margaret's choir director. The presence on the local scene of Nicholas Thouron, whose family has ties with the DuPont family of Delaware, is a reminder **that perhaps no other religious body contains within itself as much ethnic variety as the Catholic population. Yet the popular perception here has always been that local Catholics were either all Irish or all Italians, with little or nothing else in between. Of course, there is one bit of biography that suggests why Nicholas Thouron may have gotten on so well with Saint Margaret's Irish-born founding pastor: Thouron's mother was Irish.**

When the local church was founded, the town's heavy influx of Irish had only just begun as a trickle, with a few renters and various live-in maids. Increases were stepped up with the construction of smaller houses just before and after World War I, which was very disturbing to the Protestant groups. After World War II, a virtual "explosion" of Catholics moving to the suburbs particularly from sprawling residential areas of West Philadelphia included many second and third-generation Irish families so that today, among some of the older residents, you will see some people able to rub elbows in Narberth with the same neighbors they had, say, in Saint Francis de Sales parish in West Philadelphia at an earlier period of their lives. For Catholics, this first began to happen in small doses between the two world wars, and it has been very evident during the past forty years. The white populations, both Protestant and Catholic that moved here in such large numbers from West Philadelphia, however, are an ageing group, and their old neighborhoods have long since been occupied by black residents. And now that there is a shift in population here, with many new young (white) families moving in, it will be interesting to see where they are coming from.

Back in the 1930s and early-'40s, when the list of "announced Masses" read by the priest at Sunday Mass long before the parish had weekly printed newsletters, seemed brimming over with the names of first and second-generation Italian immigrants, either deceased persons or others being prayerfully remembered, the "Italian neighborhood" in the town was at its most cohesive, its residential district and specialized shops such as the shoemaker, tailor and barber doing well. Some of those names were read aloud from the pulpit so often (especially the then late Justin Casavecchia) listeners felt they knew those people even if they did not. In actual numbers, the Italian presence at the time was a ripple effect upon a pond. But the changes in parish population in the 1950s and 1960s were, by contrast, enormous. They were reflected in the construction when the parish, had

grown to about fourteen hundred families of a new and greatly enlarged parochial school⁷²⁹ (1968, Henry D. Dagit & Sons, architects) - a school with a first through eighth-grade enrollment of 288 by 1980, 235 students in 1990, and with its own school board formed in 1989. Also shown by the addition of several assistant priests to staff the rectory as well as additional priests (typically from the nearby archdiocesan seminary faculty or the Jesuits from their nearby college) to work in the weekend ministry, necessitated by the large number of Sunday masses scheduled to accommodate thousands of worshipers.

Also symbolic of this growth and the fact that Saint Margaret's has a strong track-record in support of various fund drives the archdiocese has had over many years, a bishop was assigned to reside at the church rectory as pastor of this congregation as well as serving as an auxiliary bishop to the local cardinal-archbishop. A comparison is apt here between Narberth's Catholic parish, begun modestly at the turn of the century, and which by 19xx through 19xx had grown so large and active that it was given a bishop for its pastor, and a West Philadelphia Catholic parish such as Saint Francis de Sales, founded in 1890. De Sales' huge congregation built an enormous Byzantine church (1908) where an unbroken succession of auxiliary bishops were posted as pastors (busloads of church members used to line up for blocks around that church bringing people to Sunday mass and to evening devotions as late as the 1940s), until the congregation dwindled drastically during the 1950s, the result of widespread white flight from West Philadelphia, felt by churches of all denominations. Many of De Sales' worshipers moved to the western suburbs, especially to nearby Delaware County and also to Montgomery County.

The very rapid expansion of Saint Margaret's flock in the postwar era is also clearly reflected in the multiplication of parish organizations so that these now include dozens and dozens of groups, many for charitable purposes, another devoted to peace and justice, but also a remarkably large number duplicating types of organized activity that already exists both in the town and the surrounding township, especially in the area of sports for children, scouting, and recreation for adults and older adults. These duplications, like the continuance of a parish school, separate troops for scouts, a large separate sports network for children and the perpetuation of teenage basketball leagues, are a legacy of Philadelphia's nativist riots of the 1840s, when area Catholicism charted a new course of creating its own separate institutions. Up until the early- 1990s, the only Catholics who have found a place on the town council during the period of all-Republican rule have been those closest politically to the traditional ruling group of Protestants here. Some Irish Catholic Republicans came aboard the town

⁷²⁹ New school was started when c. 1400 families – Main Line Chronicle, Nov. 9, 1967

council in the 1970s, more of them during the 1980s, and by 1990, both the mayor and the council president were Catholic - a “first” for the town. Now the second consecutive council president is Catholic.

Considered by some to be America’s most conservative state on abortion (the twentieth century’s most explosive domestic issue), Pennsylvania is also home to a powerful pro-life political network, which anticipated an all-out campaign to deliver votes for two underdog pro-life candidates for governor and United States senator in November **1994** . At the time, Pennsylvania, with two moderates in the Senate (the junior senator, a Democrat, up for reelection), had not yet played host to any conflict-resolution dialogues such as those being led by the group Common Ground Network for Life and Choice, which has tried to get the pro-life and pro-choice factions in Buffalo, Cleveland, Denver and Baltimore to stop screaming at each other, and work together. Such intervention is overdue in this metropolitan area.

Certainly the local Catholic cardinal, whose rapid rise in the hierarchy and assignment to the five-county Philadelphia jurisdiction may have been due in large part to his very vocal anti-abortion stance, chose a vehement pro-lifer as his point man on abortion. That young theologian with working-class Germantown roots who also edits the archdiocesan weekly newspaper (transformed now into a crusading anti-abortion sheet), regularly says Sunday Mass at Saint Margaret’s, preaching here. So, the topic of abortion comes up often, and finding a middle ground in the debate seems to be the last thing on his mind. Apparently that priest’s ardent advocacy of the pro-life cause is met face-to-face with coolness only rarely, if the congregation’s verbal exchanges with him here on the church steps after Mass are any indication.

Far more often today than in the past, Catholics are to be seen outside their churches docilely crowding around tables to sign petitions as a means of political action - most recently one Sunday (August 1994) in this archdiocese signing some 200,003-part postcards to their congressmen about removing abortion coverage from the health-care bill in Congress. Reflecting a national trend, Saint Margaret’s parish (now headed by a scholarly pastor known for his outstanding homilies) undoubtedly has produced far more pro-life demonstrators at clinics than civil rights protestors in the **1960s** . But it also produced at least a few participants in the anti-Gulf War marches held in Washington, **D . C .** and Philadelphia.

The Irish

[As indicated earlier in Chapter 3, t]he popular perception that Narberth had only two kinds of Irish – “lace-curtain” and “shanty” Irish - before World War II is a great over-simplification. Narberth already had several streams of Irish-born persons maintaining independent households by 1900, including prosperous ones, quite apart from live-in Irish servants.

All these persons, attracted to a new suburban town beside a race track - an Irishman’s dream of paradise, the love of horses being an ingrained trait carried over from the old country - had immigrated to the United States considerably after the Emerald Isle’s late-1840s “potato famine” years of high exodus. Starting then, Philadelphia became a city where the Irish clustered in great numbers, there being few opportunities for them in groups at any period to colonize the American countryside, an exception being Dennis Kelly’s village of Kellyville in Delaware County’s Upper Darby Township near here. This informal settlement by 1843 had fifty stone houses and more than five hundred workers clustered around his textile mill at Darby Creek. Kelly also built Havertown’s Saint Denis Catholic church that was the parish of record for this locality before Saint Margaret’s was built.

The very large modern-day Irish Catholic population of Upper Darby Township and South Ardmore had its origins in Kellyville. Thus it is easy to see why the nickname “Fishtown” (with its Catholic connotations of people who eat fish on Friday) attached itself to the Ardmore semi-pro baseball team when it played its great rival, Narberth (“Hungrytown”), and fans shouted those nicknames and scrawled them in graffiti upon walls.⁷³⁰

But like many of the early-arriving Italians, the Irish-born working-class families have tended increasingly (when they did not move away) to put down roots in more scattered areas of the town as opportunities arose - something the middle-class Irish-borns and others of Irish ancestry whose roots in Philadelphia went back to the mid-nineteenth century had done upon their arrival in Narberth, feeling no constraint to stick together. There was some attendance by children of the borough’s Irish families at exclusive private schools on the Main Line including Baldwin School during the 1920s, but more typically the local Irish children placed in private schools in the twenties and thirties attended those with religious affiliation, the rest attending public or parish schools.

⁷³⁰ Editor’s note: See Chapter 4.

The bulk of the strikingly large Irish Catholic influx in the post-World War II era migrated from densely settled West and Southwest Philadelphia neighborhoods, coinciding with a much larger migration from there to Delaware County's Upper Darby.

“Little Italy”

“Little Italy,” “Brick Row”, the “Bowery” - that Narberth neighborhood did not start out Italian but made a sharp turn in that direction by the late-1920s, gaining full stride by the thirties. What is unusual about this self-contained immigrant community of the thirties is that it has survived beyond one generation. And some people seemed to leave it, only to return there at a later date, as is fairly common elsewhere in Narberth too. Returnees will often say: “Glad to be back.”

Narberth's first crop of Italians were young single men hired as construction workers by a Narberth builder who housed them here on cots and bunk beds in large dormitories (some of which still stand, recycled as apartments) - these hired hands living with no indoor plumbing on the second floor above stables for the boss' many dreyhorses. Mostly met on their arrival direct from Italy at the Philadelphia docks by their German-born sponsor/employer Theobald Harsch, these workers started arriving here just after the turn of the century, during the peak period of immigration to Philadelphia from Southern Italy that had increased from a trickle in 1850 and made an impressive rise during the '80s and '90s, reaching just over 17,000 in 1900 and nearly 77,000 by 1910.

The saga of these Narberth Italian laborers and artisans, who were mostly from the rugged Abruzzi mountains like their compatriots who settled thickly in Ardmore Park along County Line Road and in the general area of Saint Denis parish (some before but mostly after World War I) and also in suburban Wayne, followed a pattern of “chain migration,” with one family member or villager sending for others. Philadelphia attracted them because it was known as the city of homes, and these immigrants sought permanence.

One of these Narberth dormitory dwellers was young Antonio Giuliani who worked from sun-up to sundown six days a week for a dollar-fifty a day driving horse-and-wagons. Heavy loads of building stones sometimes required teams of six or eight horses to pull wagons from the West Manayunk (Belmont Hills) quarry to a construction site. And he once hauled the whitish Avondale stone for Saint Margaret's Church from Narberth freight station. Like Harsch's other workers, Giuliani was not paid on Sundays. He used that free time to do his own mending and also to wash his clothes in the only available way - in Indian Creek, where today it flows through Narbrook Park. One Sunday in 1904, while

kneeling at the creek doing his week's wash, the twenty-one-year-old had a good cry. It was a hard life for him, a struggle. The work was difficult and he was so young. Antonio asked himself, tearfully: What am I doing here?

Three years later he returned to Abruzzi, married there and brought Luisa back with him to Narberth, where he had already sent two of his brothers. Settling in "Brick Row" and still illiterate, Antonio became a successful contractor, raised a family and was a strict disciplinarian. He always was the boss of his own household, set an eleven o'clock curfew when his children were teenagers, and tolerated no shenanigans. In the early-1920s, he used his two-cylinder Autocar truck to haul the Narberth baseball team around to its games.

His life was the stuff of which popular American themes are made - that in this country hard work and perseverance can assure a measure of success. His son Dominic showed the same kind of courage about building up a life as his father had. Dominic and the other neighboring Italian kids had a reputation for being tough. They liked to box (in a local parking lot), play baseball and other sports.

In 1929, when Dominic was twenty, he persuaded a grocery chain to agree to a ten-year lease if he could buy land on Brick Row and erect a white brick building there from his blueprint, something he had learned how to produce in drawing class at public high school and also put in practice working for his father. To his father's astonishment, Dominic obtained a bank loan with surprising ease, and then the youth carried the project (which included modest living quarters for the (Giuliani family) through to completion. The grocery moved in, but the chain went bankrupt in 1933, just as Prohibition was ending.

Again, seizing an opportunity, Dominic on April 6 that year went to Philadelphia and bought fifteen cases of Esslinger's beer in anticipation that at one minute after midnight, it would become legal to drink beer. Word of this got around. So, when he returned in his 1928 Dodge at a late hour, he was surprised to see the lights still on in nearby houses. As soon as the neighbors heard him coming, out they all came. He never got that stuff into the building and sold everything out of his car - at ten cents a bottle and a dollar-fifteen cents per case - making a week's wages in a couple of hours. So, Dominic decided to go into that business. That "first night" beer, he explained, was three and two-tenth's percent alcohol. But by December, they made the kind we have now, he said, and that same month they began to allow whiskey to be sold again. (Giuliani's Cafe a short time later became entirely an Italian restaurant and continued to 1996 operating in the same building Dominic originally built for the grocery chain). Although run then by Dominic's sons, the restaurant still displayed portraits of Antonio and Luisa Giuliani that looked down upon diners, together with mountain views of Abruzzi and the Marches.

Dora Giuliani was also one of the organizers of the Narberth Italian American Citizens Club (founded 1932, chartered two years later), a project sparked by an interest in the Italian sport of bocce. Around 1930, Dom and a friend spent a pleasant afternoon as unexpected (and victorious) participants playing in a bocce tournament in suburban Paoli. They came home jubilant and decided to start a bocce league which turned out to include such Main Line teams as Bryn Mawr, Wayne, Strafford, Downingtown, Coatesville and Narberth. The league's contests took place every Sunday in different towns and the players made new (Italian) friends that way. Narberth's bocce games were played in the same block with what soon became the Italian club.

Perhaps the crucial factor pointing to a genuine need for such a club, however, was that public sentiment for neutrality was growing apace in our land as the war clouds seemed to gather in Europe. And meanwhile, two sharply opposed and contentious groups of Italians, including both recent immigrants and naturalized citizens, were rapidly forming in Narberth. One faction strongly supported the rise to power of Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, while the other strongly denounced him, reflecting official United States policy which soon would overwhelmingly oppose Mussolini's conquest of Ethiopia (1935). Consequently, ways were being sought to bring those two warring local factions together in peace and harmony. And the Italian American Citizens Club was just the ticket.⁷³¹

Similar to many other such organizations founded around the same period in city and suburban neighborhoods before the days of Federal assistance, Narberth Italian-American Citizens Club was chartered by men who paid ten-cents-month dues and got in return: interest, sick pay and death benefits. This group, which was a focus of activity for single men as well as family groups, bought and presented a large bell to Saint Margaret's church, as well as three crosses for its school. The club opened its newly constructed 309 Iona Avenue headquarters on March 5, 1949. In front of this hall it erected the Italian war memorial where a salute to veterans is fired each Memorial Day during the parade. The flourishing period of this organization was just after World War II when it offered good food such as steak and shrimp dinners and sold drinks for fifty cents. By the end of the 1970s, a power struggle had ensued among young and older members. Soon after the latter were expelled by the insurgents, the club died.

Narberth's first-generation Italian residents prepared all their own wine and pork products in labor-intensive traditional ways, either individually or collectively. This Italian "colony" was mainly

⁷³¹ The author is indebted to Elizabeth Smedley for pointing out to her (3/5/1995) the perceived peacemaking peacekeeping mission/mandate of this local club in Narberth.

made up of Abruzzi people, plus some from the neighboring Adriatic province of the Marches, and very few from Sicily. The borough's Italians who share similar backgrounds have been closely knit. And by custom they have had a long-standing close rapport (and some intermarriage) with the Italian community in West Manayunk (Belmont Hills). An unusual feature of the Italian ethnic heritage at Belmont Hills in Lower Merion Township is its sizeable settlement of Albanian-Italians, that is, descendants of refugees who fled Albania in the 1400s because they were being invaded by the Muslim Turks. They settled in Calabria, Italy but spoke their own language which they call "Arbresht." Mainly during the decade before World War I, an Arbresht-speaking colony migrated to Belmont Hills from a cluster of Calabrian villages in Italy - people with family names including Minisci and LaPera. Until 1970, Saint Lucy's, a Catholic church named for one of Albania's patron saints, served this community. Also, street processions twice a year carrying a statue of Saint George were another reminder of this congregation's roots in Albania.

Italian immigrants of the laboring classes were not accepted in every area they tried to settle locally. Consequently, in one instance a "shack town" of eighteen bungalow-type houses was built within a quarry employing many Italians at Conshohocken State Road and Rock Hill Road in Belmont Hills to accommodate these would-be settlers. Those "houses" were removed about thirty-five years ago.

Even in Narberth, some boys from other neighborhoods in the town were forbidden to go near Brick Row for fear they might get into fist-fights with Italian boys. And one student at a nearby convent school when she was about thirteen around 1942 or 1943 and traveling from the city by train during one of the all-night Civil Defense blackouts that were so much a part of life for people on the home front during World War II, was terrified because she had to walk through the Italian neighborhood in the pitch dark to reach her Brookhurst Avenue home. Lots of people at the time thought that all Italian-born Americans carried stilettos.

The Germans and a Lutheran church

Today one American in four is of German ancestry, according to the Census Bureau (1992). They are the nation's biggest ethnic group, with 57.9 million persons. But people of German heritage had plenty of detractors here during two world wars. Even Narberth borough's founding families of German extraction were not spared this sharp criticism of all things German. Frederick H. Harjes, a commission broker of wool and lecturer in Asian affairs, had arrived from Germany in 1886 with his

wife and two children, and four years later he bought a new Late Victorian turreted house at 201 Forrest Avenue.⁷³²⁷³³ During World War I, his son Frederick Junior confided to a neighbor that the deep prejudice he had experienced during that war had caused him and his family to move away (so he bought a large farm in Valley Forge, later deeding it to the national headquarters of the Freedoms Foundation, nonprofit conservative patriotic and educational organization that has increased its influence, lately built a six million dollar endowment, and aims to bring an “emotional experience” of history - and with it patriotism - back to America).

Also, around the World War I period, a prominent advertising executive residing here and an elder in the local Presbyterian church as well as an eventual borough council president, when he experienced anti-German pressure, responded by legally changing his name from Fuchs to Fox. His business in Philadelphia underwent the same name-change. A large-scale building contractor (Theobald Harsch) [mentioned earlier] had immigrated in 1836, settled here, built a large house and raised his family. The Harsches experienced plenty of discomfort during wartime, even though their sons served in the American armed forces (and expected to be fighting against their own close relatives in battle).

Similar attitudes of resentment toward people of German ancestry resurfaced again during World War II. The young family of a science teacher at an elite boys’ prep school was targeted with a rock thrown through the living room front window of their modest house at 222 Forrest Avenue. An attached note threatened stepped-up reprisals if the family’s grammar-school-age only child, a boy, did not stop playing with a neighborhood child with a German-sounding name. The boy did stop.

Across town the young tow-haired son of a German-born local scientist would sometimes demonstrate to other small children outdoors the Nazi-style “goosestep,” teaching them how to do it, to the consternation of onlookers. It was a chilling sight to see the little group of children strut by. Around the same time, several Japanese servants employed here in a large house lost their jobs due to the war.

So, between the two world wars, it must have been quite a morale-booster within the German-American community when the drive was launched here to establish Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, involving many people of German ancestry among Martin Luther’s modern-day followers. This effort encouraged considerable healing of old animosities. The project got under way in autumn 1921, when

⁷³³ Harjes: his N.Y. Times obit. Nov. 8, 1947.

eighty-five charter members came forward, the first service taking place at the YMCA in December, followed the next month by a formal enrollment of ninety members. The first pastor, Reverend M. E. McLinn, arrived a year later. Overcrowding was noticed at the “Y” and a building committee formed to purchase land. Some evangelical meetings in a tent were held around that time on the open grounds the church purchased. A 1924 groundbreaking and 1925 dedication was held for this hilltop Gothic church of gray stone, one of at least fourteen Lutheran churches designed by architect George C. Baum.

During the twenties, this church sponsored a popular annual “sauerkraut supper” that was attended by the whole town. One of the Harsch daughters always made the sauerkraut for it. At the time, the church received its support from the Philadelphia-based Lutheran synod and from contributions from members because it was not yet self-supporting. So, such special attractions as the supper were important stabilizers, and they also spread good will. When the first minister became ill, the next pastor arrived straight from his seminary training in 1927, and found here a bare church with no chancel or organ. He spent his entire ministry of thirty-six years here at Holy Trinity, his wife Florence Kautz Senft active meanwhile as a professional singer. That pastor, the Reverend Cletus A. Senft, believed in regular contributions, not money-raising activities by the church. So he abolished the popular tradition of the sauerkraut suppers. The great period of expansion of this church came after that pastor’s return from his service as a Navy chaplain with the Seabees at Okinawa during World War II. Peak years of membership were 1959-61, with 552 persons. By the early-1980s, fifty-three percent of the members lived in Narberth, and an unusually large percentage of them had long-time association with this church. A decade later its ageing congregation was without a minister for a couple of years after the death of the fourth pastor. Meanwhile, although the early-’90s saw Lutherans struggling like other mainline Protestant denominations with a shrinking membership base and dwindling finances during which time eight Lutheran congregations closed and two others merged in the five-county area, the Narberth church survived, gaining a new pastor in 1994.

Jews

Put-downs of Jewish people over the years from both Protestants and Catholics have been commonplace locally. Those complaints - most recently that a rising tide of Jewish residents might adversely affect volunteerism here in the borough - seemed to come from people who had only the most superficial knowledge of Jews and were quick to settle for stereotypes. This was true when very few Jews were living here, and it is still true now that their numbers are steadily increasing. It used to be

very common in Narberth to encounter mixed marriages in which the husband was Jewish, but rare to come across Jewish couples living here. The impression of this persisted until about 1980. Since then, Jewish couples are becoming much more plentiful.

About the “mixed marriages” mentioned, one assumption was that those Jewish heads of household had lived here because their wives liked living here (reminiscent, for me, of English artist Eric Gill’s old adage about the necessity of going out of your way to live wherever your wife felt most comfortable). At the root of this perception about local mixed-marriages between Jewish men and Christian women was the common assumption that Narberth was not fashionable enough to attract Jewish people. (Implication: those particular fellows were marrying old-fashioned girls, in which case the stereotype still held true, until lately). For Jews are widely perceived as being a stylish people, often the first to sign up to live in a prestigious new place, whether it be a luxurious apartment tower in the city or a tonier address in the suburbs. It is a perception, however, that no longer sheds light on what is happening here now that Narberth is becoming a destination for a sizeable number of prospering young Jewish families.

A Wynnewood builder who attends church in Narberth, referring to current trends in luxury housing construction in the township’s Gladwyne and Penn Valley areas, noted: Jews all want a double-door, as if something in their religion required it, a circular driveway, and a very expensive car to be placed, not where I would put it - in the garage - but sitting out front in the driveway where it can be seen.⁷³⁴ (Circular driveways are nothing new on Philadelphia’s Main Line. Its late-nineteenth century estates often had them, as did Narberth’s largest houses of that era. A good example of medium-sized luxury housing constructed with circular driveways between the two world wars is on Curwen Road, Rosemont. The present trend favoring this luxury feature is actually a revival).

Jews in 1991, according to the City University of New York poll, comprised the largest non-Christian group in the nation, with more than three million adults. In 1860, there were an estimated 15,000 Jews in Philadelphia. By 1920, more than 80,000 Russian Jews alone had arrived. At first a large religious and cultural gulf grew between Philadelphia’s Americanized German Jews and the newly arrived traditionalist (or ghettoized) Eastern European Jews. Economics and educational disparity caused disunity, but gradually this eased (the great American architect Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974) was

⁷³⁴ In an interview on June 11, 1994, with the author, this very well-heeled devout Catholic conservative builder, Bill Niegringhaus, noted that he had in his garage two big old-model or vintage luxury American cars.

of this Eastern European contingent, arriving in Philadelphia as a small child).

Wynnefield, the nearest section of West Philadelphia to Narberth, is located just across City Line Avenue from Lower Merion Township; it extends to the old Centennial Exposition grounds in Fairmount Park. Wynnefield between the two world wars acquired as part of its second generation of densely settled residents a large concentration of Jewish inhabitants. They tended to be German Jews, often prosperous ones, whereas Russian Jews (like the “Russian Orthodox Christian groups) had settled to the north of center city and were gravitating further north and northwest into the Eastern Montgomery County suburbs, across the Cheltenham Avenue city limits. (In the pre-World War II era, the immigrant pronunciation “Vin-feelt” was often derisively imitated by area people of other backgrounds.) After World War II the next generation of both these Jewish groups tended to push further out, north and west, into the nearest suburbs, their old turf being largely taken over by black families in areas such as the city’s Oak Lane district at the northern end, also like Southwest Philadelphia during this same period.

So, the large number of synagogues in Lower Merion Township surrounding Narberth (and also in the Eastern Montgomery County suburbs north of Oak Lane) is a development that followed World War II and showed striking increase including relocation from bordering areas of the city such as Wynnefield to suburban Lower Merion Township through the mid-1980s. There are now about seven Jewish congregations in that township, consisting both of groups that removed themselves from near sections of the city (the most notable, and at the time the most controversial move, being that of Har Zion Temple from Wynnefield where it had vowed to stay), and others that formed in the suburbs as new entities, all of which happened in the postwar period. Temple Adath Israel, founded (1946) as the only Hebrew house of worship in Lower Merion by forty persons in Haverford moved (1949) out of what had been the Main Line Hebrew Association when the township’s entire Jewish population totaled between 1000 and 1200 to larger quarters on Narberth’s corporate border when its size grew to 400 families. This conservative community stayed there three years, despite overcrowding on High Holy Days.

Main Line Reform Temple today occupies that old site, perched on Narberth’s boundary. The latter temple established itself as a congregation and as the Main Line’s first reform temple in 1952, settling in 1954 on this site and constructing its buildings there. Established under the name Beth Elohim, this community had as its founding president Natalie Lansing Hodes, thought to be the first woman president of a Jewish congregation in the nation. The other nearby reform synagogue is Beth David in Gladwyne. Lower Merion Synagogue in Bala Cynwyd is orthodox. Across the street is

Merion's Temple Adath Israel, its house of worship designed for it by architect Pietro Belluschi in 1958. The other area conservative synagogues are two in Penn Valley - Beth Am Israel that moved from South Philadelphia in 1973 and Har Zion Temple - and Wynnewood's Temple Beth Hillel Beth El, the latter founded in 1958 and its building designed in 1966 by architect Norman N. Rice, a close associate of architect Louis I. Kahn.

In former times, it was said that Protestants beat up on Catholics, and Catholics in turn beat up on Jews. But in 1969 through 1973, the old stereotype was turned upside down (perhaps through a mutual bond felt by a conservative Catholic pastor and a conservative Jewish congregation?) for, during that four-year interval, Saint Margaret's old 1920s school building served as the synagogue and religious school of Congregation Beth Am Israel, while it was establishing a permanent site in the township's Penn Valley section.

Though its houses of worship in the immediate vicinity are all postwar, Judaism had as its initial point of entry into the township a twenty-acre cemetery Har HaZeitim (Mount of Olives) Association established (1893) by several beneficial societies from Philadelphia's Society Hill district in a former quarry in Gladwyne to help immigrants obtain a dignified and ritually correct burial, the last known burial being that of a sailor in 1945. This and the adjoining independent Chevra Kadisha Cemetery (1914) are both, since 1974, supervised by Har Judah in Upper Darby.

Narberth, like Philadelphia itself, is a place of strong ethnic loyalties and, no less, of ethnic and racial animosities. In 1993, when both major political parties for one of the first times in borough history had a full slate of candidates running for town council and the mayoral race (in recognition that registration for the two major parties is more nearly equal now than ever before), the democrats, all first-timers, totally went down to defeat at the hands of a slate of Old Guard incumbents and one newcomer. The perception of some of the five losing Democrats (who had included lawyers, businessmen and a high-profile social worker) was that they were defeated by a whispering campaign about a "takeover" of the town by the Jews - something the electorate could combat by pulling the GOP big lever. It did, as there were few crossover votes in any event, that time Narberth voters turning out in large numbers and choosing their local candidates strictly along party lines. Interestingly, this was in marked contrast to a national trend, whereby ticket-splitting in the autumn 1992 election was said to have risen to an historic high level, according to one study of voting trends of the past forty years, "No more Santa Claus" was said to be a potent GOP rallying cry during that '93 Narberth campaign, referring to a popular local tradition of greeting the "arrival of Santa" (by train) at the railroad station in the business district, an

event attended by many children as well as borough officials, Catholics among them being the most numerous and high-ranking at the time.

Which is interesting, because it suggests that if the defeated candidates' statements are true, local Catholics have short memories about the high tide of bigotry their papist predecessors had to contend with here in the 1920s and to a lesser extent since then.

Distinct School Populations

Among pupils noteworthy in the upper echelon of our social landscape during the teens and early-1920s was Mary ("Biffy") Lea and her circle of friends, all from prominent families in surrounding Main Line towns. Her situation of apartness is really a symbol of all the separate and distinct school populations that exist in a town like Narberth. There are some crossovers for these children, but mostly they stay on separate tracks once these are established. Recalled one of Lea's former neighbors, of the time that both young women lived on the street popularly known as "Narberth's Gold Coast" (North Wynnewood Avenue):

Biffy's friends included Maudy Boyd and Kit Clothier and Todd Clark. I knew them all but they were a distinct group who attended the Shipley School, just as we attended ours - Baldwin School.

Those institutions, together with the Agnes Irwin School comprise the "big three" among old Main Line girls' schools considered elite. Two of them have gone co-ed, and are attended by sons and daughters of many of Philadelphia's old-guard families living in the suburbs, and increasingly by children of professionals and newcomers on the scene, including some center-city families. Traditionally the Haverford School (Quaker) and The Episcopal Academy, both nearby, were heavy draws for boys attending private-school from this neighborhood and still are, as is the long-time co-ed Friends' Central School (Quaker), Episcopal Academy having become co-ed. Several of these schools had moved to the suburbs with the populations they serve. Definitely in the minority here were boys such as Biffy's brothers who, like their father, attended boarding school at Saint Paul's in New Hampshire. Two of them had also been pupils at nearby Montgomery School, founded in 1915 by the rector of the local Episcopal church (All Saints) as a New England-style boys' prep school opposite his church and attended by a number of Narberth boys of that faith in the pre-Depression era.

Of course, some adolescents became fast friends regardless of attending different kinds of

schools and coming from opposite sides of the track both literally and in an economic and social sense. The two Harrys were such a pair. One of these pals was a student at the Episcopal Academy boys' school and the other attended Girard College, a school for financially needy fatherless boys from under-ten years old to eighteen set up in the city under the will of Philadelphia banker Stephen Girard. The fun-loving youths were both fifteen when they met kicking around a football one afternoon here in the late-1920s. They hit it off well immediately. So that very day the other Harry said: "I have a little extra money my mother doesn't know I have [money he either earned, or it was left over from a music lesson he didn't take] , and let's use it by going to the "Troc," referring to the Trocadero, a well-known burlesque house in the city. Harry the storyteller could not go because he had to be back at his working-class boarding school by six o'clock that evening. But that invitation was the start of their long friendship.

Another local boy, this one attending the Haverford School (the Quaker prep and elementary school adjoining Haverford College) - he was the son of an especially strict and straight-laced Protestant clergyman who forbade his two children to ride their bicycles or play with other toys on Sunday - once boasted to Harry the storyteller: "Do you know what we're doing at school? We're all chewing tobacco." Seems the two of them kept each other posted on "matters of importance" - Buddy "confiding" to a neighborhood pal from another school what he did not want his parents to know, and perhaps hoping thereby to impress or win respect among local youths he rightly assumed knew more about such things than he. Tobacco-chewing was still fairly common in some sectors of the population at the time.

The big fork in the road, though, was college. And from an early date, the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University seem to have been the schools of choice for local youths (as was true also in the wider metropolitan area at the time) from relatively privileged backgrounds seeking to make their way in the professions, or in many cases just to attend college, during the period before and after World War I. Haverford College was another choice, especially among youths with Quaker roots.

For many local youths, attending college is still very much connected with participation in some form of sports. Perhaps the local pace-setters in this regard were various members of the Lea family. A bank president's son from the city's Germantown section, Langdon Lea was a member of a famous football family. Collegiate football, that is. The identification of the whole Lea family with that sport was very intense while they were living at Narberth. The head of household (Langdon) and a large group of his family members would bundle up to attend Princeton University football games together

throughout the teens and twenties, even traveling to that school's games on the road in bitter cold weather. They lived and breathed Princeton football. In the class of 1896, Langdon Lea at the time was a strong exemplar of the WASP gentleman as cultural ideal, He had been an All-American football tackle for three years at Princeton, captained the team one year and until the turn of the century coached the Princeton eleven. Besides being chosen in his senior year at Princeton as College Football's Player of the Year, he was named to Helms Hall College Football Hall of Fame (1958) in Los Angeles, and was added to the National Football Foundation's Hall of Fame in 1964. Lea was the father of three Princeton football stars: Francis C. (class of 1927), Langdon, Jr. (1932) and Gilbert Lea (1938), all of whom played end on the varsity.

A coal baron who divided his time between here and Appalachia, Langdon Lea was manager, general superintendent and board member of a coal mine in West Virginia's Kanawha County, a facility linked with a family enterprise in Philadelphia specializing in wholesale bituminous coal (J. Tatnall Lea & Company), named for his father. Wherever he went as a businessman, Langdon Lea, who presumably found it an asset to be an All-American athlete in a macho industry like coal mining, was an unofficial Princeton emissary. He could be relied on to gather other Old Nassau alums around him, especially those he met and cultivated at Charleston, West Virginia, and pretty soon they would all be lifting their voices to do the traditional campus and grill-room renditions of school songs together. During World War I, Lea was assistant purchasing agent for the Emergency Fleet Corporation and on the United States Shipping Board at a dollar a year. It seems only fitting that one of the greatest names in Princeton football history, Langdon Lea, should long ago have had a street named in his honor in a sports-conscious town like Narberth where this gridiron hero raised his four children at his "Edgewood" estate, since replaced by the Langdon Lane subdivision of thirteen single houses.

Langdon Lea belonged to the vital early period in the development of America's love affair with the violent game of football when newspaper sports writers had just begun lionizing the four Ivy League schools - Princeton, Yale, University of Pennsylvania and Harvard.⁷³⁵ At the time, the first modern American football game had already been played (Princeton vs. Rutgers, 1869) and the important transitional phase from rugby to football (1876 to 1882) had passed. But football was not yet really popular and certainly did not draw big crowds. American newspapers, however, were trying to build up readership, when they happened to realize that football, in its evolution from English rugby, had gone

⁷³⁵ The phrase "Ivy League" dates from 1937.

through the process of having two basic rule changes put in effect by the Intercollegiate Football Association (IFA) that gave teams possession of the ball. If the team were unable to move the football forward the necessary five yards, it had to forfeit the ball. This set the stage for the playing field's becoming a battleground requiring a far stronger offense and defense than soccer and rugby ever had. With this turn of events, journalists sensed an opportunity: they seized upon the new story-telling potential of football with its quick start-ups, setbacks and dramatic outcomes - the kind of sequence of activity, as it turned out, that American men became very attached to reading about day by day, as if they were reading correspondents' accounts of a battle scene in wartime. The sports writers kept churning out reams of stories. And gradually the game's popularity caught on. The first professional sports franchises were not organized until the 1920s. But that is another story, involving Narberth's Bert Bell and the National Football League.

The uniqueness of Langdon Lea's saga is that it belongs to the era of pioneer writing about football when Princeton and the other three schools "owned" the grand centerpiece programs of the Intercollegiate Football Association around the turn of the century. Every day sports fans were reading at length about the triumphs and setbacks of this golden quartet of teams. Football was then on the march to becoming a more aggressive game. And although Lea had been voted the best football player, the handsomest man and the most popular man in the Princeton class of 1896 by his fellow classmates, he was no mollycoddle, no "trimmer." Far from it. Instead he is remembered for always having had the courage of his convictions to state his opinion bluntly and forcefully about any policy or practices he considered unwise or wrong. Certainly, the cumulative early contribution Langdon Lea made not only as a player, but also as a Princeton coach, and father of three Princeton varsity squad members helped build big-time football as we know it. He did it all starting at boarding school in New England and then, most notably, in a collegiate setting.

Another, more codified way the strong local allegiance to Princeton and Penn was publicly recognized was that during this same era - and only then - the local baseball team was called the Narberth Collegians, and included local residents from both those schools in the regular lineup. (As late as the 1940s, the same semi-pro baseball team under manager Gene Davis, still fielded a few Penn players, but they were seldom local residents.)

Something else invariably surprising to people hearing about it today, even old-timers, is that, also in that same period before and after World War I, Narberth's public high school sent a number of its young women to Bryn Mawr College on the Main Line. These were students, some with Quaker

backgrounds, who were doubtless in large part encouraged to enroll there by several Bryn Mawr graduates of recent vintage then on the Narberth High School teaching staff. A couple of these Bryn Mawr local [women] tutored the town's new Italian immigrants in the English language.

Actually, the overwhelming number of students of elementary and high school age in this middle-class community throughout its history have attended public school. The local public elementary school, established here before Narberth gained independent status, was regarded as perhaps the single strongest bond drawing together all citizens of the town, on both the north and south sides of the railroad tracks. When the school ceased to function in 1978 and the northside pupils were bussed to one school and the southside students attended another, some close observers speculated that no other one issue could ever be found to bring people in the town together the way Narberth, operating its own public school, did, with its own school board and later with its school under the wing of the township school board. So far, no other issue has galvanized everyone's attention as that school did. While it existed, that local school and its traditions were very much loved - most of the time.

In the period before World War I, some of the few large Catholic families in the town sent their children to public elementary and high school because at the time it was considered harder to find employment in or around Narberth if you had attended Catholic school.⁷³⁶

For another school population quite separate from the others consists of the Catholics with their own elaborate system of grade schools attached to all the parishes, such as at the church of Saint Margaret, Narberth, which in its early years sent its children to school on the Sisters of Mercy campus, Merion. These local schools feed into the region's archdiocesan high schools, largest network of its kind in the nation, which currently (1994) educate more than 23,000 students, at a tuition cost which is substantially lower than most dioceses throughout the United States.⁷³⁷ Most of these facilities initially were located in the city, and pupils commuted to them by public transportation from the suburbs. (Today many such high schools are in the suburbs, and some of the Catholic high schools in the city and suburbs have been merging or closing, as in 1993 did (under protest) a number of inner-city parish churches with their attached elementary schools that served black and Hispanic communities.)

One Narberth girl attending archdiocesan high school in West Philadelphia as a train-commuter

⁷³⁶ Feb. 17, 1995 interview with Anita McGarrity who discussed this with members of the Miesen family, to whom it applies. They were next-door neighbors.

⁷³⁷ Rev. Msgr. Edward P. Cullen, Vicar for Admin., Archdiocese of Philadelphia letter – publ. Newsletter, Ch. Of St. Margaret, Mar. 5, 1994.

in the mid-thirties was a busy teenager who, unlike her brothers, did not attend college. Her mother a permanent invalid, Betty routinely did all the grocery shopping for her grandparents across town, delivering these goods to their door by express wagon, as well as doing the cooking and grocery shopping for her own large family of siblings. To be helpful, her father shopped for Betty's dresses in the city, and her three brothers regularly did the family wash: "In the twenties and thirties, we did it because we had to."

Catholic convent day-and-boarding schools for girls, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, were available nearby until after World War II, and now are day-schools only. The nearest was operated by the Sisters of Mercy on the edge of Narberth. The Lutheran daughters of Theobald Harsch, the Narberth builder of that enormous turn-of-the-century complex of stone buildings that houses the sisters' motherhouse (and in those days the school), attended this school free of charge just after the pile was built, in partial payment of their father's fee. One whole family of five children was enrolled there in the 1930s and 1940s as boarding students from Connecticut, and they summered at camp, hardly ever spending time at home, because that was the way their parents liked it. At the time, "only child" students were numerous at grade-school level; high school had larger classes and an infusion of pupils from big financially well-off families that tended to send their children to the local parish school in the earlier grades, then to Merion's convent school in the upper grades for polish. A sprinkling of Jewish and Protestant students and from foreign lands (such as Central and South America) attended at the time, but the lore of the school is that the headmistress drew the line when, in the 1930s, a Chinese child applied for admission - the explanation being, so the story goes, that the child would not "fit in." Also, in those days (the thirties), each student in that convent school, from the earliest grades, was expected to write a summertime letter in longhand to the nun principal seeking the privilege of re-admittance to the school for the forthcoming academic year. In response, an "invitation" was then either extended by the principal to the child, or denied. A certain amount of tension was generated, understandably, by that annual exchange of correspondence. To be "not invited back" became a term of opprobrium, even for toddlers. Another such convent school, run by the Assumption Sisters was Ravenhill, attended by Princess Grace of Monaco (Hollywood actress Grace Kelly), by Nori Aquino who succeeded her husband as president of the Philippines, and by several of the daughters of the Austrian Von Trapp family singers of Sound of Music fame. Other convent schools in the area include those of the Madams of the Sacred Heart, Sisters of the Holy Child and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Also, well-known have been Merion's Waldron Academy (boys to eighth grade, run by the Sisters of Mercy), and various

boys' prep schools notably the Jesuit-run Saint Joseph's in the city, Malvern Prep (Augustinian Fathers) and the Piarist Fathers' Devon Prep, both in the outlying Main Line suburbs.

One thing vivid to some local children (regardless of where they attended school at the time) was, even before the United States entered World War II, the meaning of the then new expression "bomber's moon." This was because three small English brothers, Peter, Nigel and David lived among us then. They were refugees from the great evacuation of London in 1939 and the blitz that followed. They were living in a house in the first block of Dudley Avenue for the duration, and they attended the Mercy nuns' Waldron Academy on the same campus with my girls' convent school. That phrase, "bomber's moon," went into the English language in 1940 after the fifty-seven consecutive nights of methodical air raids on London, when the German bombers no longer swarmed every night, but only as the conditions were right for it, before the Royal Air Force came anywhere close to winning the night battle.

One of the liveliest local encounters for children of different school groups during the 1940s was (it often seemed like the highlight of the day) to board the public bus in Narberth for the short ride to school. Sometimes my companions were the London blitz refugees who always wore typical English schoolboy knee-socks and book-bags strapped on their backs before it was common practice here. On board, we joined the day's quota of talkative Episcopal Academy sports stars who filled the back seats and enthusiastically greeted their science teacher, a celebrity of sorts. For he was a regular winner among the contestants in the early days of the New York-based radio quiz game "Sixty-four Dollar Question." This likeable Narberth man, trailing his small son behind him, provided us with a quiz-show-update right there on the bus, and we were all ears. Apart from that weekday morning merry ride when three or four school populations were blended together in a casual mix (and I could boast later in the day that I knew the "Sixty-four Dollar Question" star), the individual school populations kept pretty much to themselves in and around the town.

Meanwhile, Saint Margaret's parish school has attained a number of academic distinctions, and in 1939 formed its own school board. Also, it has seen the third generation of families (the Sexton and Becker children) start first grade there. The first Narberth residents to have attended a Catholic college are believed to have been two members of the Young family, owners of the General Wayne Inn at the time, and kin of Gladwyne's Revolutionary patriot Llewellyn Young. They were [Vicky left space for their names] who attended Villanova College on the Main Line. A generation ago, Saint Margaret's eighth-grade pupils mostly went on to the same few high schools - typically to an archdiocesan one or

Saint Joseph's Prep. But in 1995, the destination of the parish graduating class is typically more than fifteen different middle schools and high schools. Thus, the challenge, as defined by Narberth's Catholic Youth Organization unit, is to devise new recreational and sports activities re-uniting these scattered students under parish auspices as they mature.⁷³⁸

One devout Narberth Catholic father of five and a lawyer was of that hardy small nucleus of devout Catholics, never very vocal, who over the years have believed on principle in sending their children to public school, not religious schools. This minority opinion also follows through by being involved in and supportive of the public-school system. One of this particular father's three sons, J. Shane Creamer, a product of local public elementary and high schools up through the late-1940s, and now a Chestnut Hill resident, became State Attorney General, the state's top law enforcement officer. The same father had admirably buttressed his own views on the importance of public education by teaching his children to respect and aspire to work in the public-service sector.

Perhaps the single most striking characteristic of Narberth's "school population" from earliest times until now is the exceptionally large number of teachers of all kinds who have always made Narberth their home. These are teachers and administrators at public and private, religious and secular schools, colleges, universities and professional schools. However, you define it, this town is a veritable teachers' haven. It attracts teachers to come here, and they remain also after their retirement.

A Girl Graduate of the Narberth High School

Margaret Eyre Russell, at ninety-six full of quips about student life as she knew it, was the oldest alumna in attendance at the 1995 Narberth School Reunion that attracted more than five hundred persons from thirty-five states nearly a quarter-century after that public school closed. Enrolled at Narberth School for twelve years, Margaret was a 1917 graduate of Narberth High School, and the first head of its alumni society.

When Margaret Eyre started first grade, the school had, she thinks, only four rooms, the first and second grades sharing one room with a pink curtain as divider.⁷³⁹ Being unable to resist taking a peek through that curtain, the inquisitive child found the coal-black eyes of second-grade teacher Miss Nellie Wetherill staring directly into hers. "I was unnerved for the rest of the day," she explained. Wetherill

⁷³⁸ The challenge/points made by/outlined by a CYO spokesman in a short talk at all the St. Margaret's masses May 14, 1995, asking for volunteers.

⁷³⁹ The recollections described here and below are from "My Recollections" by Margaret E. Russell.

switched to her legendary role as first grade teacher the next year.

Children entered that early school building through a large hallway, then climbed a wide staircase to their classroom. Pupils arriving late had to sit on the stairs until the opening of the classroom door. Margaret Eyre recalls being late only once in twelve years, that lapse due to the failure of her mother's alarm clock. So, while the more "hardened and habitual" ten-o'clock scholars laughed and chattered, Margaret wept and sobbed off and on for the rest of the morning.

To hear her tell it, being a teacher in those days made you a nurse, mother, and mother's helper. Just the necessary handling of the students' winter clothes gives a clue to this. Little girls then wore long flannel drawers, covered by cotton stockings to the waist (like today's pantyhose). Also, a flannel petticoat and a woolen dress. Eyre recalled that after the children trudged up the school hill in sleet, rain or snow, the teacher would have to assist them in getting off as much as possible of their sodden garments which were draped over radiators to dry. "No one my age will ever forget that odor," she confided.

More appealing sights and sounds greeted little Margaret whenever she crossed Narberth railroad tracks via the tunnel en route to school from the southside. She could always count on seeing there in station circle beneath its towering elm the Saint Bernard dog⁷⁴⁰ belonging to school board president McCarter. The big beast would lounge about there for most of every day, as much a symbol of Narberth at the time as the elm tree itself. Also grabbing her attention as she passed through their midst were people arriving at the station in their carriages. Unusual people such as the dapper, well-groomed gentleman, mining engineer David Manning Ellis, who lived in the mansion where he was raised as an only child by his parents and their many servants.⁷⁴¹ Ellis lived there with his younger and beautiful wife Louise, the couple driving up to the station in their luxuriously fitted open carriage, complete with a footman. Sights like that fascinated Margaret. But when the harness-racing season was in progress at Belmont Driving Club on Meetinghouse Lane, passing through the Narberth station complex was "off-limits" to Margaret and many another child, for the concerned parents wanted their young children nowhere near the crowded omnibuses with people hanging on the sides that met certain trains to take sports fans to the track.

At Narberth High School, all the teachers had the reputation of being strict disciplinarians,

⁷⁴⁰ "My Recollections," M.E. Russell, 3rd install, p.1.

⁷⁴¹ This house is now the Evviva Restaurant, 1236 Montgomery Avenue.

according to Eyre. Of course, William T. Melchior (he resembled a character out of a Dickens novel but was a good man) was principal in Eyre's time there. But Anna B. Sailor⁷⁴² ("the best ever") headed the high school meanwhile. This was the period when Narberth pupils were already doing very well academically, judging from the readiness with which many of them obtained entry into top-flight colleges. As for the nitty-gritty, Margaret Eyre points out a few of the school's practices in her day there. For example, from freshman through senior year, every student had ten words⁷⁴³ to spell and write and woe betide the unfortunate pupil who missed a word, especially a senior. If a high school student giggled or talked too much. Miss Sailor would give each one a slip of paper with his or her name on it. They were to add a mark each time they again talked. She would say, I am preparing you for the outside world. If you work in a bank, you will not be permitted to talk while working. Margaret was also favorably impressed by her language teachers, Miss Elizabeth Snyder and Miss Grace Turner. The school had its share of earnest recent college graduates, one of whom, Margaret says, took the senior class to Montgomery Pike to measure the speed of sound. As the students sat on a grassy bank, the young teacher strode toward the Toll Gate to fire his gun. Unfortunately, when he did so, nobody heard it, because the students were making such a commotion and having so much fun. So the scientific experiment failed.

There was one Narberth High School graduating class with only one graduate. But Margaret's class of 1917 had seven graduates. Of those seven, six went to Gettysburg⁷⁴⁴ for the Senior trip, accompanied by the school principal and the daughter of the school board president, C. Howard McCarter. McCarter owned one of Narberth's earliest automobiles, a Stutz Bearcat. In 1917 there were no macadam roads. So, traveling in McCarter's 1912 Stutz Bearcat and in a same-vintage Ford belonging to the family of one of the graduating seniors, the flotilla set sail. Both autos were open, with tops which had to be rolled back and up for rain. The adventurous travelers had flats at frequent intervals. And there were very few gas stations, so it took the convoy from six-thirty in the morning to four in the afternoon to reach Harrisburg. It was a round-trip of three days to Gettysburg. But very instructive.

⁷⁴² "My Recollections," by M.E. Russell, 3rd installment, p.2.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., p.2.

(Distinct school populations) - Permanently Expelled at 15

For working-class youths at Narberth public school early in this century, the transition from ninth-grade classroom to workplace sometimes could be as swift as it was permanent. This was true of one youth who left no doubt whatever about his yen to start working full time in his father's hauling and janitorial business here in town. One day in 1917, Lester, big, strong and guileless but no dumbbell, went to school with the idea that he wanted to be expelled that day.

The boys in his class had been talking among themselves about how it would be when their teacher Edgar (Pop) Kehler would say, "All rise" (for morning recess, at nine-fifty to ten) that nobody would. That morning, when Mr. Kehler did so, nobody stood up. Then the teacher's mouth straightened and he got a very glum look he had when he was mad, and repeated the command in a more determined way. All then stood up except Lester. Mr. Kehler insisted. But Lester still sat with his head buried in his physiology book - a book that actually had no interest for him. Mr. Kehler broke off a piece of the seat trying to make him stand up. Finally, he pulled the book from Lester's hands and hit Lester on the head with it.⁷⁴⁵ The students crowded around as Mr. Kehler dragged Lester to the classroom door, where Lester held his arms out to avoid passing through. Finally, he was taken to Principal Melchior's office, where Melchior said: "You've done something again." And he expelled him.

Lester went home and went directly into the basement and began working on the projects he and his father had together. His mother said to the youngest of her five children: "What are you doing home?" He said: "I was expelled." Within a few minutes Lester could hear the lively conversation between his mother and father, with his father saying: "Well, he'll be sixteen in several months, so let's not send him back. And so it was.

The following year Lester's father got a very nice letter of thanks from Mr. Melchior about his and Lester's having transported successfully and with great care a fragile and very heavy plaster of Paris replica of Philadelphia's Liberty Bell for a public event involving the school. With such recognition of his on-the-job capabilities - it seemed permanently recorded with schoolmasterly tones in a flourish of the pen right there under the official letterhead - Lester's world was back in balance. There had been a cloud over his departure from school. Now he felt free at last.

⁷⁴⁵ Corporal punishment was abolished in 1902 in both Narberth and Lower Merion schools after parents threatened to prosecute teachers who failed to spare the rod. Main Line Times Jan. 10, 1952.

Courtship and Marriage: Going Public

Oh, the hazards of courtship by public transportation long ago - and of public-school teachers' courtship customs of yore.

Narberth native Caroline Myers Grow, a truck farmer's daughter born in 1910 in an old farmhouse on the south side of Haverford Avenue where it meets Montgomery (her son was Narberth police officer Paul Grow), used to say that when her husband-to-be first started visiting her from Philadelphia, presumably in the late 1920s, a Narberth police officer on duty would meet every arriving train at Narberth Station and question strangers about where they were going and whom they were visiting. While this early practice, which did not deter Caroline's beau, is long gone at Narberth, a variation on it does exist for at train stations in small cities such as Lancaster, Wilmington and Trenton, it is still a common sight to see a pair of patrolmen eyeing closely - but silently - the influx of passengers stepping from the train onto the platform. Long ago, however, schoolteachers with romance in mind met stiffer opposition than boyfriends did coming to court their girl.

Prior to 1930 in Pennsylvania and in much of this country, a public-school teacher who married could expect to face an almost certain job loss. In some places, including Lower Merion, this embargo lasted another dozen years or so. Yet despite such widespread intolerance and banning of married teachers, Narberth's official attitude on the subject at least during the mid-to-late 1920s proved to be quite liberal. And once this breakthrough had occurred in Narberth, there was no going back to the old ways in the thirties, although such a possibility loomed briefly in 1930 due to the background of the newly named principal.

This surprising openness⁷⁴⁶ in the twenties flourished during the tenure of the principal George H. Wilson, an administrator who had stayed at the helm after his position (and salary) were downsized⁷⁴⁷ when Narberth public school gave up its high school in 1923 and was reorganized upon an elementary and junior high school basis, eventually having elementary grades only. Wilson's stern manner⁷⁴⁸ made the pupils in awe of him. But this University of Pennsylvania alumnus with the right W.A.S.P. connections was no scold, and they appreciated that. Certainly, by all accounts, he was well-liked by his faculty. They spoke of his gentlemanly dignity⁷⁴⁹ and administrative acumen, his understanding and

⁷⁴⁶ Correspondence with Alice Miller Postel, February 2, 1985.

⁷⁴⁷ Our Town, May 2, 1930.

⁷⁴⁸ From correspondence with E. Smedley, 9-15-1996

⁷⁴⁹ From correspondence with Alice M. Postel, 2-5-1985

diplomacy, and his ability to cope with parents' complaints without overreacting. Also, in his favor they saw that he could not easily be manipulated by various interest groups in the community. Thus in 1927 and again in 1929, when married teachers were still not accepted in many localities, and New York State was leading the bandwagon to break the taboo against them, Principal Wilson took a forceful, locally unprecedented initiative - he backed a total of three Narberth women faculty members who wanted to marry. They were fourth and fifth-grade teachers and a health hygienist, and Wilson bade them to go ahead and try it. One of them, fourth-grade teacher Alice Hiller Postel, believes that it was Narberth School Board member Dr. Steckbeck, a University of Pennsylvania professor of who was instrumental in keeping those three teachers on the faculty after their marriages, for Wilson retired from his position in 1930, having spent ten years in office.⁷⁵⁰

There had also been a history-drama-English teacher at the Narberth junior high school level, daughter of a prominent Quaker family whose father was editor of The Country Gentleman, who also would have required Mr. Wilson's approval for her matrimonial plans. This Swarthmore College graduate was marrying a law student and wanted to continue to teach. Miriam Jenkins accomplished this, and she began teaching under her new married name in September 1926. At first, she had to correct some pupils in her class who kept calling her *Miss Jenkins" instead of "Mrs. Elsbree."⁷⁵¹ But as far as the students were concerned, there seemed nothing unusual about their teachers at Narberth School staying on after marriage.

During that period, from the cessation of the high school (when pupils were sent to Lower Merion in autumn 1923) to the removal of ninth grade in 1926 and a bit longer (seventh and eighth grades were transferred to Ardmore Junior High School in 1961), the "Narberth junior high school" was considered excellent. And there were very good teachers, with the students at Narberth School studying more subjects than their counterparts in Lower Merion. For example, Narberth taught Latin in eighth grade, while the Lower Merion district's Latin courses began in ninth grade. Also, Narberth's English studies were divided into two categories: three days were devoted to grammar and writing compositions and three days to literature and the studying of books.

A number of former Narberth School students mention various cultural advantages they enjoyed

⁷⁵¹ Miriam Jenkins married Wayland Elsbree who became longtime editor and president of the Philadelphia Legal Intelligencer.

under Principal Wilson in the 1920s. But also, there was a certain flexibility extending beyond accommodation of teachers' matrimonial plans that made things interesting. For example, in March 1928 the eighth-grader Elizabeth Smedley received from her aunt a gift of two tickets to the stage production of "The Merchant of Venice" starring George Arliss at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre. She and her school chum wanted to attend but the tickets were for a Friday afternoon performance. Elizabeth and her friend went to see Mr. Wilson one morning after assembly and asked if they could be excused from school that afternoon. He said yes: "I wouldn't let anyone else go, but since you are such good students, I will let you go as a reward of merit."⁷⁵² Not the sort of thing that happens anywhere routinely; and certainly not at all in today's big overcrowded schools.

At the time, the Narberth School Board was still operating independently of any link with Lower Merion's, so local awareness of being "the hole in the donut" surrounded by Lower Merion must have been very acute just then, and doubtless opinion was sharply divided on the matrimony question within the borough itself. For married teachers were then still banned in the Lower Merion School District, and Lower Merion's restriction continued unabated "into the 1940s."⁷⁵³ An example of how one couple sidestepped this while both husband and wife were teachers in the Lower Merion District: Charlie Hupch⁷⁵⁴ went ahead, got married, and man and wife continued to hold teaching jobs because the Merion Park pair was able permanently to keep that marriage a secret. Whereas in Narberth, with the attitude of a principal and at least one or two of the school board's most respected members far more welcoming to matrimony than Lower Merion's authorities at that time, marriage-minded Narberth teachers had no such need to hide. So, referring to that time frame, Alice Miller Postel could flatly declare that to her knowledge, no Narberth School teacher from the late-1920s on ever left his or her job because of marriage.⁷⁵⁵ Interestingly too, that long reign of unmarried public school teachers had its counterpart in Catholic parish schools taught by nuns only, lasting until "lay teachers," many of them married, entered the picture in large numbers after the 1940s.

Then sudden panic set in - but only briefly, in 1930 - when it appeared Narberth might be ready to turn back the clock about married teachers because two things happened in close succession that gave an inkling that some kind of dispute on the subject might be raging behind closed doors or in the

⁷⁵² Elizabeth Smedley's diary records this incident.

⁷⁵³ Ted Goldsborough interview, 2-26-1985.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Alice M. Postel's second letter, 2-24-1985.

Narberth School Board meetings. One week Our Town published a long interview of a Narberth School Board member focused on a recent public controversy about the firings of five married women teachers and their replacement with five single women in a rural school district near Pottstown.⁷⁵⁶ A week later the same newspaper announced a new principal for Narberth School - he was none other than the supervising principal of the same school district where the firings had just occurred.⁷⁵⁷ In that position five years when chosen unanimously by Narberth School Board, the newcomer had particular interest in elementary schools. He hailed from upstate, and his name was W. James Drennen who headed the North Coventry Schools.

Whatever the aim of the Our Town interview of school board member Dr. Leroy A. King of the University of Pennsylvania faculty and a member of the State Council of Education, the tone of it sounds quaint to us today. Entitled “Is a Married Teacher as Effective as her Single Sister?” his answer seemed to rest on how undivided her attention to her schoolwork could be expected to be, so that teaching would never become just a “sideline.” Dr. King admitted how difficult it would be to measure the efficiency of married teachers in comparison with single ones;

Undoubtedly, there would be outstanding cases of unusual teaching ability in each group. However, when a teacher signs a contract to give her services to a school district, it is assumed that teaching is her major occupation. It is difficult to see how a married woman can give a hundred percent efficient service and at the same time either supervise or attend directly to the duties of a home, particularly when there are children to be cared for. What is needed, I think, is a study of each individual case on its merits. School teaching is such an individualized occupation that it is unfair to form a general opinion from a few cases considered.⁷⁵⁸

The best that Narberth’s married teachers (and there were more of them in the thirties) could hope for was that Mr. Drennen, the new principal, would stay mum on the subject of matrimony. And with a little coaching from Dr. Steckbeck, he apparently did.

Houses, a Debutante, a Bride’s Room

Houses, the “right” house, a girl’s attire on special occasions, and customs involving a bride’s

⁷⁵⁶ Dr. King’s interview Our Town, April 25, 1930, p. 19.

⁷⁵⁷ Mr. Drennen named principal Our Town – May 2, 1930, p. 1+.

⁷⁵⁸ Dr. King’s interview Our Town – April 25, 1930, p. 19.

trousseau and household objects gathered as a send-off for her...such things all play a part in the rituals of courtship and marriage preparation. At least two of the first houses in Price's "Lady's Book town" of Elm seem to have been built as part of the lure in the courtship of the first young women who occupied them. Bertram Richards brought his bride Mary Dorrance Evans to the stone house built for him and his parents when these couples moved over from New Jersey. And Edward Forsythe, Sam and Bartram Richards' business colleague, was an eligible bachelor when he built his big house at Elm and eventually brought his bride there.

As regards the Richardses, settling in the suburbs turned out to be a foreshadowing of the decision by their close kin, Mr. and Mrs. John T. Dorrance, Sr. (whose family name and fortune were so closely identified with the Campbell Soup Company, headquartered in Camden, New Jersey) to move to Philadelphia's Main Line suburbs from New Jersey because they felt their daughters would have better marriage prospects this side of the Delaware River. The Dorrance mansion, lived in by three generations of the family, is in Radnor.

Even with that bit of polish of one of the Dorrance family welcomed here as a bride, as things developed, debutantes were always distinctly in the minority in Narberth. So, Mary Lea's style of social life seems an exotic exception to us today - something that probably did not last longer than the 1920s in our town. Her gown for her coming-out party was pale blue taffeta, and formal photographs were taken of her wearing it in the garden of her home, Edgewood. She loved dancing in that long dress with the hooped skirt. That was quite a relief to her mother, a federal judge's daughter from Clinton, Louisiana. Mama had hated that her only daughter among several sons was a terrible tomboy, her heart set on growing up to play football at Princeton and not like a Southern belle. Those differing perspectives even caused a rift between the two women, who were not close, except about gardening. Letitia Belknap Lea lectured to garden clubs all over and Mary ("Biffy") was her assistant. So, when Biffy, tall, willowy and beautiful, was to be married in 1928, the Lea family went all out. And the decorations they sought were hand-gathered, natural ones, nothing commercial. Biffy and her best chum, Mary Todhunter ("Todd") Clark (who later married Nelson A. "Rockefeller, the best known and most controversial of John D. Rockefeller's five grandsons - he was vice-president under Gerald R. Ford and governor of New York) made sure of that. They walked along Wynnewood's nearby Cherry Lane and gathered corn husks, reeds and other natural flora to decorate the house and adjoining large tent for the October wedding. Philadelphia's celebrated dressmaker, Miss Meeley, made Biffy's long white gown, tiara, long train and the ten bridesmaids' long dresses of yellow chiffon that they wore with hats. Three hundred attended the

wedding at nearby Rosemont's Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. Four huge hams sent up from the South were served to the dinner guests under the tent, where the borough's Langdon Lane subdivision (named for Biffy's father Langdon Lea and comprising thirteen single houses) is now. It was the first night wedding up North in her family and there was a dance band.

Marriage preparation of a different kind is involved in the ancient Mediterranean custom of the "Bride's Room" as it is sometimes practiced in Narberth. This custom has its main following in south and south-central Italy and in Greece. And it still has common currency among Italian-Americans in our region. This practice most likely evolved as a means to facilitate showing guests the dowry that the bride's family had gathered for her, traditionally things such as linens, furniture or sometimes even now, a television set. Not everyone who takes part in this custom realizes it ever had anything to do with dowries. Older women, acquaintances of the bride-to-be's family, are mainly involved as a way of socializing. The bride-to-be's mother will invite people over to the house where they are brought up to see the bride's old room. For the occasion, pillows are of white satin and lace, something definitely for show - what might be considered the ultimate in decor, but that the bride-to-be herself would not have.

A lifelong resident of Narberth's "Italian neighborhood" described being taken as a child on such a visit in the mid-1950s to a neighbor's house. She recalled her mother, a non-Italian married to "Louis the tailor" from Abruzzi, questioning the practice by asking: "Why are they doing that? It's not going to be her room." Visitors meanwhile were entering the room and throwing almonds on the bedspread. Some also may throw money - the one as a gesture that the marriage may be fruitful, the other to wish the couple prosperity. In a variation on this, a Narberth woman of Irish ancestry recently was invited to a "bride's room" party of a similar nature given for an Italian-American office co-worker soon to be married.

Baffled Beau

Sometimes what happens while courting someone from a different background can be baffling, and ultimately a turn-off. Perhaps more so, in this case, because the incident took place during the Prohibition era. The Narberth chap was dating a girl whose family drank liquor at the time. Prohibition did not faze them. And they allowed their young daughter to have some with water diluting it. But meanwhile they were adamant about her not smoking. So, her beau one time asked them why one and not the other. They insisted that no woman, except ones of ill repute, smoked. So, he then asked around and others felt this way too. Later, after marrying his wife (a Narberth girl but not the one mentioned

above), the young husband made a plea of his own: “I was stuffy enough to ask her not to smoke on the street.” The practice of allowing young people to drink diluted wine at the family dinner table, sometimes starting in the early teens, crops up among families of Italian, French and English heritage as well as others, and cuts across class lines. Apparently, such an ingrained custom was not easily dislodged by an “inconvenience” like Prohibition.

A Polite House Call

He was a dour and aloof Protestant gospel minister with a pastorate and administrative duties elsewhere, but in the Narberth neighborhood where he lived with his family, he paid a formal call on families that had a daughter or son newly engaged, regardless of their religious affiliation. He dropped in unexpectedly, made polite inquiries, wished them well, that sort of thing. It usually came as a mild shock to the family to be singled out like this, but was a pleasant, uplifting experience for those so honored. It seemed like an old-world custom from another era. And it conferred broader significance upon the forthcoming marriage to have it acknowledged personally by someone prominent in the community.

Actually what it represented for the recipient(s) was one of the defining experiences of what it felt like to live in a community in which Protestant ministers were among the most conspicuous and revered public figures in the town, and Protestant cultural traditions were dominant - a period covering three generations that only began to be diluted in the late-1950s, with a sharp influx of Catholic residents that has held steady for more than a generation.

Ballroom Dance-Team Era

Elm Hall over the firehouse became the scene of frequent dances soon after the turn of the century. Before World War I, regularly held adult Assembly Dances, sponsored by a special independent committee formed for that purpose, were well-attended there. After the war, the American Legion Post’s women’s auxiliary dances proved popular, apparently as a continuation of Narberth’s “assembly dance” tradition. Various children’s dancing classes sprang up meanwhile, perhaps most notably by the late-1920s, Margi Carter’s dancing school - a middle-class version of a social dancing class - conducted at Elm Hall on Friday afternoons. Mainly girls from Narberth public elementary school attended to learn ballet and tap dancing. They were joined at the end of each session by little boys to do ballroom dancing so as to emphasize the social aspect. That dancing school’s annual recital took

place at the nearby public high school in Ardmore.

Fred Astaire came to national prominence in the 1930s, the era of the ballroom dance teams, a genre that would fall out of favor in the 1940s. The craze soon reached Narberth, livening up middle-class courtship and recreational customs for a while in the town. Helping things along, two recent graduates of the township high school started a ballroom dancing class in 1936. One was the daughter of a telephone company executive and the other girl, formerly girls' hockey team captain at school, was from an athletic family - her father had been an All-American football player at the University of Pennsylvania and was now a grid talent scout for a major college, and her uncle a famous coach at Temple University (excellent credentials to launch such a project in a town like Narberth). For boys and girls, the dancing class met on Friday nights at Elm Hall over the firehouse. The basics of how to waltz and strut were taught. The class also sponsored an end-of-season dance, with music by a former high school classmate of theirs, Billy Wren and his orchestra.

Narberth's dance class was more a solidly middle-class response to the dance craze than a bow to High Society's venerable tradition of prestigious dance classes. Thus, the popular Narberth project was more subject to fashion, less to a social-class perspective. At the time, comparisons were nonetheless made by the locals between Narberth's down-home type of instruction and the elite social dancing class then being conducted at Merion Cricket Club in nearby Haverford. The co-directors of Narberth's ballroom dancing class were well aware that the woman directing the Cricket Club class had lots of girls attending but far too few boys, whereas Narberth had the reverse situation: more boys than it could handle. And so it remained, because there was no communication between the two groups. Hardly social arbiters, Narberth's pair of dance instructors nonetheless had in their favor that they knew lots of boys. Also, each had two athletic brothers of the right age with their network of pals, and even their male cousins living here signed up. This was largely a public-school network.

That ballroom dance craze reached right into Narberth living rooms. One local resident recalled an incident in the thirties in which she, the only sister in a household of several macho brothers, one night heard a rumbling downstairs and tiptoed down to investigate. There was her oldest brother in his stocking feet, his shoes discarded, teaching his brother (later a Narberth family physician, as his son also is at the present time) how to do ballroom dancing. "Ours was a very close family, and that incident was hysterical," recalled their sister. Around that same time, their father, one of three brothers who had settled in Narberth (Charles, Ray and Jack Chain) and who held a front-office accountant's job with the railroad, became with his sons a founder of the local rod-and-gun club. His children had attended

parochial high schools in the city, and their daily commute took them out of the orbit of many of the activities shared by their public-school neighbors so they would not have been “reached” by the dance class over the firehouse, but probably heard about it,

Another pair of hoofers, Narberth’s Dan B. Ely and his dancer wife Alma Neilson, both of Keith’s Vaudeville Circuit, where dancing was an essential part of every spectacular revue, used to practice their revues over the old firehouse. Upon retiring from the stage, they opened here a small restaurant, The Pike, frequented by teenagers from throughout the Main Line for after-the-prom and after-the-movies outings and other get-togethers. At first it had a live orchestra (Ed Lowry) in the late-1930s before it had the juke box on which kids played Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey and Hal Kemp music. It is comforting nostalgia for some to recall that The Pike was the closest thing we had hereabouts to a visualization of a 1940s teenage dance hall catering to jitterbugs who came, as they did here, to dance and eat hamburgers and hoagies and who also carved their initials in the wooden booths. Another popular local hangout for young people was Merritt’s where ice cream and sandwiches were served and there was also dancing. Both places lasted into the mid-1940s.

Another quite influential supporter of ballroom dancing in the town in the thirties Depression was Mrs. Eberhardt Mueller, remembered as perhaps the outstanding and most tireless organizer of various kinds of local women’s volunteer activity in the borough’s history. Mrs. Mueller loved to dance. So she organized a monthly dance at Elm Hall for adults and young people. To encourage attendance, she and her husband (married on Christmas day 1905) hosted pre-dance suppers at their house. Then everyone strolled down the street and around the corner to the main event. At Elm Hall, Mr. Mueller danced with all the ladies.

Actually, the 1930s ballroom-dancing craze lived on indefinitely for many of the most traditional youths from this middle-class town who graduated from the township public high school around 1945 - people like the young fellow who entered West Point that year, a younger son in a family of war vets who became a career military officer and a teacher at West Point. This ramrod-straight young man married his high school sweetheart, also a ballroom-dancing buff. That couple’s youthful enthusiasm for this graceful and courtly activity from courtship days continues today now that their two sons are grown.

Public school children in the fourth and fifth grades (about nine and ten years old) from two school districts on the western Main Line currently attend, as they did in the 1960s, ballroom dancing classes conducted by the Junior Saturday Club of Wayne in that Radnor Township community.

Leisure Time Activities: Dancing: for those in school, out of school

Schools consciously play matchmaker sometimes. In the 1940s, Merion Mercy Academy used to hold tea dances for its own high-school-age girls and for same-age boys from suburban Malvern Prep – these being Catholic private schools. And there used to be around that same time an old tradition, perhaps still extant, of a large formal dance each year after the Army-Navy football game (by custom, in Philadelphia on the Saturday after Thanksgiving) for the cadets, with students at the local suburban women’s colleges invited to attend also.

Meeting and greeting does not usually become serious dating. But for one local girl, it did. Three Narberth girls right after their graduation from public high school in 1945 became USO⁷⁵⁹ hostesses at the Central YMCA in Philadelphia. Each wrote hundreds of letters to United States servicemen overseas. That was a natural enough pastime especially for one of the trio. Her father, Russel Basler, was then Narberth postmaster. Pretty soon daughter Dorothy met her future husband closer at hand – at those USO dances. In walked a sailor whose destroyer had just checked into the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for repairs. Russel Adams was his name and he hailed from Atlanta. The couple fell in love and, after he completed his four-year hitch in the Navy, married and settled in Narberth opposite the American Legion hall where the parades start.

Leisure time activities: Sleigh Rides

A favorite wintertime recreation of the four adult members of the Samuel Richards household, hand-picked “first family” of Price’s town of Elm, was a popular one locally: bundling up for sleigh rides across the Schuylkill River and up Lincoln Drive where it meanders along Wissahickon Creek. Most likely they were tipped off about the pleasures of this particular destination by Edward R. Price who thought enough of his own several sleighs to mention them in his brief will.

Another custom involving sleighs - it amounted to a ritual - had strong appeal for local horsemen, especially those who worked around horses and carriages for their livelihood. No sooner would snow begin to fall than sleighs were making a mad dash for the region’s inns - General Wayne, Red Lion, Indian Rock and Valley Green. The host at each location had a bottle of champagne for the first to arrive. Varieties of musical bells of many sizes were suspended from shafts on sleighs in those

⁷⁵⁹ Editor’s note: United Services Organization

days. The snowy roads were full of the fastest horses and all kinds of rigs on runners. A livery stable operator from adjoining Bala Cynwyd won the champagne race more often than anyone else. His regular target was General Wayne Inn, and contenders arriving there later than he usually found John L. Ott with the bottle secure in his possession and holding forth about the battle of Chickamauga to any and all listeners.

Sothern & Marlowe

Sothern & Marlowe, one of the most famous acting partnerships in the history of the American stage, resided in Narberth in the early-1920s. Julia Marlowe devoted her life to Shakespeare. Considered one of the all-time great Shakespearian actresses - she captured the spirit of dramatic art at its noblest and most reverent. Marlowe and her actor husband Edward H. Sothern belonged to the ranks of the Old Shakespearian Guard that used to dominate the English-speaking stage.

After starring with him in nine Shakespearian productions under their own management that traveled coast-to-coast with a train of six baggage cars for scenery and four other cars including one private railway car during the 1910-11 season, Marlowe married E. H. Sothern at season's end. From then until their retirement in 1924, their repertory became exclusively Shakespearian, and what followed, with a pause only during the war years, was the period of greatest triumph in their artistic lives.

During the years 1919 to 1924 (and possibly also 1912 to 1914), Sothern & Marlowe took up occasional residence in Narberth. It is not known on how many occasions they did so, but the location on North Wynnewood Avenue in the borough is well established, although the large house they occupied there is no longer standing. Unknown is how the two celebrities obtained the loan (more likely than rental) of this particular site. But we do know that this married couple always secured furnished houses prior to arriving in the cities in which they played, even if they planned only a three-night stay. Explained Julia Marlowe:

The comfort of such a way of living, especially for a woman, quite revolutionized the wandering life to which I had so long been accustomed. All the home-longing which wearies the spirit was banished. We would usually reach our new city on a Sunday and drive at once to some charming house on the outskirts of the town.

Already on hand would be one of their two cooks who had left the last city on Friday, done her

marketing on Saturday, and had the couple's dinner ready for them on Sunday night.

Usually we secured beautiful houses, standing on their own grounds... The actual expense of such a manner of living was not in the end much more extravagant than the best hotels.

Their Philadelphia acting engagements were lengthy, often three to four weeks, and they usually summered abroad so Julia would have had few opportunities for favorite pastimes such as long walks in the woods picking wildflowers, or swimming locally. Yet the presence of a skating pond on the Narberth property owned by Chilton Publishing Company head James Artman and known as Lakeview (now replaced by the Narwyn Lane subdivision) surely would have appealed to Marlowe, an avid skater. Her use of the pond is suggested by the fact that neighborhood children, always welcome to skate and swim there during the Artman ownership (before the community playground existed) tended to avoid the place whenever they knew Sothern & Marlowe were there.

The actress hungered for a romanticized landscape beauty reminiscent of the loveliness of her English birthplace in Cumberlandshire where a Wordsworthian brook flowed behind her modest house with a garden in between. Marlowe said of her preferred acting roles: "What I want is sweep—a great wonderful outlet for the imagination and the soul."

Certainly, sweep is what she had in her Narberth acreage, from the summit where Artman's house stood down the slopes to the brook and the artificial lake with a rustic gazebo on its central island. Marlowe's always-strong Philadelphia following developed rapidly after her first stage appearance here in 1888. Audiences likewise invariably gave the conscientious Edward H. Sothern (who had married his first wife Virginia Harned in Philadelphia in 1896) a warm welcome in a city which enthusiastically remembered the high-class comedy acting of his English father. "Narberth's attitude toward Julia and Edward during their stays and for decades afterward was affectionate and reverent," Uncle Ben Kramer penning an unlocated tribute to Julia at her death much later, in 1950.

Ethnic Celebrations

One local man of the cloth, an Episcopal minister active in the Christian education field and not attached to any one congregation, notes the increasing public interest in ethnic celebrations of all kinds during the past decade. Of Swedish ancestry, he says, for example, that the number of Saint Lucia Fest observances, a December thirteenth Swedish pre-Christmas celebration in which he is involved at

metropolitan area churches, has multiplied in recent years due to sharply increased public attendance at such services at Philadelphia's Old Swedes' Church and other locations. A fourth-century Sicilian martyr, Lucia, is associated with festivals of light (Swedish girls wear a crown of lit candles and serve sweet bread and coffee to hungry householders in the early morning hours of her feast), especially in Swedish countries. This upswing of interest is borne out by the current popularity of ethnic exhibits at Philadelphia's Balch Institute of Ethnic Studies.

Leisure Time Activities: Home-Town Fun

Novelty aspects of the sport of baseball - donkey games, other games in which the contenders were the town team playing in its home field against the House of David - were a great hit in the pre-World War II years. Narberth provided a captive audience for such activity. One time in 1928, while Narberth baseball team was playing a bewhiskered House of David team from the Midwest (the men had long, flowing beards) in a midsummer twilight game before a packed crowd of two thousand spectators here, a local barber further livened things up: he sent a man wearing "sandwich boards" out onto the diamond with advertising for his Narberth shop, between innings. And as good as a vaudeville act any day was that game's clownish bearded first-baseman who entertained the crowd by singing, accompanied with a banjo, and at intervals performed comical acts to the applause of the fans. Fans really got their money's worth in those days, without venturing far from their own doorstep.

Quite a few local families had their own pool tables by the teens and twenties. Dr. O. J. Snyder's attic pool table was a popular friendly evening gathering place for mature men from around the town, a very male chauvinist group playing the ultimate man's game. Other household pool tables were a mainstay of teenagers - an example being Gilroy's basement facility. The story is told that the several Gilroy boys often played pool there with the neighboring McGarry boys of about the same age. The only rule laid down by Mr. Gilroy: there was to be no betting. So, one time while that tribe of boys was happily playing pool there, Mr. Gilroy, a Catholic lawyer, came down to the basement and saw a nickel sitting on the pool table. "All right," he barked. "That's it -- there will be no more playing pool at this table for six months."⁷⁶⁰ He sounded like the sheriff trying to shut down this sport of rogues in Dodge City. The Protestant attitudes about "vice" apparently had considerable trickle-down effect locally at this time.

⁷⁶⁰ Bud Hewitt – Interview re Gilroy's pool table 3/20/1995.

The Eyres were a prominent family with colonial roots in the city and western suburbs, and their most distinguished member at the turn of the twentieth century was the nationally prominent architect Wilson Eyre. His cousin Edward D. Eyre, a hardware store owner on Ardmore's Lancaster Avenue, in 1894 signed a petition to create Sabine Avenue through Wynnewood and Narberth, upgrading transportation in the vicinity of our newly built public school.⁷⁶¹ That merchant's son, insurance man Albert Eyre, soon settled in Narberth, raising a family here. Albert Eyre was apparently the only person on Narberth's southside owning a Victor Talking Machine. On summer evenings it was customary for neighbors living in the vicinity of his house to request opera, light opera or orchestra, and Albert Eyre would oblige with an evening of music, which the neighbors could enjoy from their porches. (The Eyres' first local address was the southwest corner of Maple and Elmwood avenues: architect Henry L. Reinhold, Jr.⁷⁶² then designed a house for Albert Eyre in 1903 which Elmendorf J. Heddon⁷⁶³ built at 123 Woodside as their permanent home).

Picnics⁷⁶⁴ were a big item here in the early days, and are mentioned in conversations with many of the older people who grew up in the town at all periods. Picnic destinations nearby included "Stretches' Woods" (Penn Valley) and "Harsch's Woods" - the latter surrounding the stone residence Theobald Harsch built for himself at Sabine Avenue which was for most of the twentieth century's first decade the only house on Sabine Avenue, and had the dormitories for Harsch's Italian construction workers in back of it. Indian Creek ran through there, and in good weather Narberth Public School children went there at lunchtime. It was not unusual for the boys to return to class with garter snakes in their pockets to frighten the girls. Another popular picnic spot was the Shortridge Estate in Wynnewood just southwest of our railroad tunnel. The Quinns, tenant farmers there, were very gracious to local children. They would often give picnicking children milk if they would trudge up to the barn for it. Explained Margaret Eyre Russell: "In those days children were welcomed because we had been taught to respect property."

Gathering chestnuts⁷⁶⁵ on the way to school (on North Wynnewood Avenue and also at Sabine and Dudley Avenues where groves of chestnut trees were very plentiful before struck by blight) is often

⁷⁶¹ Grandfather and kin of Wilson Eyre. Correspondence with M.E. Russell 9/18/1980

⁷⁶² Reinhold - in biog. dictionary

⁷⁶³ Heddon - "My Recollections of Narberth" by M.E. Russell - 3^d installment, p. 2, September 1980

⁷⁶⁴ Picnics - "Recollections of Narberth" by M.E. Russell - 2^d installment, Sept 25, 1980. Written for V. Donohoe, typed by 87-year-old husband, Robert L. Russell.

⁷⁶⁵ Chestnuts - Ben Yowell, Mr. Livingston, ed.

mentioned by other former public-school pupils, contemporaries of Margaret Eyre, referring to some of their favorite boyhood pastimes.

Favorite southside sledding⁷⁶⁶ haunts started from the railroad bridge southward and then west onto Woodside Avenue and it was not unusual to reach all the way to East Wynnewood Road, where there was a stile leading onto the Shortridge Estate. The other popular route was to sled down the hill from Rockland Avenue to - or into - a creek.

At kids' parties,⁷⁶⁷ we played kissing games very timidly, Margaret Eyre recalls. Homemade ice cream was generally on the menu at such affairs. And it was fairly common for the boys not invited to try to steal the freezer from the back porch where it was placed to be kept cool. "That was the most vandalism that I can remember," declared Eyre.

Leisure time⁷⁶⁸ of family doctors in that turn-of-the-century era was scarce, as only two physicians served the whole town. Dr. Clarence T. Faries (1871-1926), a very distinguished-looking man with a neatly clipped goatee who drove an open carriage pulled by a dappled-gray horse, liked to spend his evenings, when he did not have evening office hours, playing pinochle games with Count DuMarais, E. Perry Redifer, Bodansky and Albert Eyre, mostly at Eyre's. Meanwhile, the wives came along, visited and sewed. Narberth's other physician, Dr. Willett E. Rotzell (1871-1913) in his spare time was a considerable nature-lover who, no sooner was he a young physician living here, than he compiled and published [Birds of Narberth, PA (1895) and Man: An Introduction to Anthropology (1905)]⁷⁶⁹

The coziness of Eyre's home was further attested by frequent visits from old Henry Russell, a retired businessman (father-in-law of silverware merchant C. Arthur Roberts employed by "Mill" Justice) who liked to drop by from around the corner to play cribbage⁷⁷⁰ with Albert Eyre on winter evenings at the turn-of-the-century.

Of course, with the advent of the auto, a great new recreational activity opened up. Initially, the speed limit for cars in Narberth was fifteen miles per hour. (Grover C. Bergdoll,⁷⁷¹ popularly remembered as a flamboyant recreational driver who was frequently denounced as a draft dodger in the

⁷⁶⁶ Sledding – "My Recollections" by M.E. Russell, 3d installment, p.3.

⁷⁶⁷ Kids' parties – "My Recollections" by M.E. Russell, 3d installment, p.3.

⁷⁶⁸ Leisure – "My Recollections" by M.E. Russell, 3d installment, September 1980 p.4 written for V. Donohoe

⁷⁶⁹ Editor's Note: the author left a space here in her manuscript for insertion of information.

⁷⁷⁰ Cribbage – "My Recollections" by M.E. Russell, 1st installment September 18, 1980

⁷⁷¹ Bergdoll – "My Recollections" by M.E. Russell, 3d installment, p. 4. September 1980 & other sources.

press, owned an automobile before World War I that he used for racing in Fairmount Park. His preferred route to and from that race course took him through the center of Narberth. At the time, Fred Walzer was constable. And every Sunday Bergdoll was brought before Walzer and fined for speeding twenty-five miles an hour. While it lasted, it became a notorious feud, raising a great deal of money for Narberth.

Smoothing things over Conway Avenue style

Due to Narberth's closely-knit character, some close friendships sprang up in defiance of sharp early-twentieth century Protestant/Catholic divisions, flourishing despite them and against all odds. One such friendship strongly bonded two family men and heads of large households, both Irish, who lived on opposite sides of the first block of Conway Avenue between the two world wars - men who, it was thought, had very little in common.⁷⁷²

What stands out about them is that these men found their own unique way of bridging the gap that still separates so many Irish - and Irish Americans - on Northern Ireland's most divisive holiday, the Twelfth of July. That day is sacred to Orangemen, Northern Ireland's largest fraternal order, which even in 1995 had some eighty thousand members. Since the early nineteenth century the Orange Order has celebrated British rule in Northern Ireland by taking to the streets (often traversing neighborhoods of the Catholic minority) with flag-waving marches and huge demonstrations to recall the Battle of the Boyne (1690), in which William, Duke of Orange, a Protestant, defeated England's King James II, a Catholic. Closer to home, Orangemen's day was long highlighted by a popular and boisterous picnic in an amusement park on Philadelphia's western edge. The "odd couple" - Mr. McCafferty, a Protestant and an extreme "black-and-tan" supporter, and his counterpart, Mr. Murphy, a no less ardent Roman Catholic who was a laborer and probably the younger of the two men - once a year would bury their differences and always attend the Orangemen's picnic at Woodside Park together, have a wonderful time and return home the best of friends - until sober. The interesting thing was they were always up and running, ready to repeat their venture at picnic time the next year.

Northern Ireland's Twelfth of July observance is notorious for provoking tensions and bloody confrontations in places like Belfast and in the province's second city, Londonderry. Currently even individual families in Ulster, if they happen to have both Catholic and Protestant branches, are said to

⁷⁷² Interview with Frank H. ("Bud") Hewitt, January 1, 1995. Hewitt called this friendship to the author's attention.

experience their sharpest divisions and lack of civility among each other on that day each year. You have to see it to believe it declared one member of such a family.⁷⁷³ But here on Conway Avenue (a street name, after all, of Irish origin), the Twelfth of July became identified as a day for extending the olive branch - McCafferty and Murphy style.

The Auld Sod for Narberth. Servants: Maybrook

Irish-born servants loved Maybrook. Just congregating there made them feel as if they were back home on the Auld Sod. And gather they did. Anything in the way of servants' parties seemed positively grand, held in that Scottish baronial castle-like setting in Wynnewood just across the borough boundary line. Nellie Kelly, after marrying Irish-born rail worker Patrick Hopkins and settling in their modest Narberth bungalow, used to reminisce about attending those parties while she was a domestic servant employed in the area and still single.

The fifty-acre estate bore a resemblance to her childhood surroundings in County Donegal where she grew up practically in the shadow of Glenveagh Castle. There a long succession of lords of the manor had employed generations of residents from her nearby village of Churchill. Philadelphia cultural leader and art collector Henry P. McIlhenny (who later gave the castle to the Irish government) was but the latest of these employers.

The reason many Irish servants working throughout the Main Line area had a special place to congregate at Wynnewood's "castle" was because heiress Mary K. Gibson while she was mistress of Maybrook (roughly the period between the two world wars, give or take a few years) put the word out to her predominantly Irish-born household staff that they and their Irish servant friends in the area were welcome to gather and celebrate special occasions at Maybrook. Thus, a cherished local tradition was born and flourished in her lifetime which happened to coincide with much of the peak period of Irish-born domestic workers in this region.

⁷⁷³ Interview with Philadelphia's Peg Donohue Rauner, November 14, 1996 about her mother's extended family in County Tyrone.

Chapter 9 - 1945-1975

Cold War	448
The changes: Postwar Changes.....	448
The response: Government's response: Central Park or a Town Hall	450
The Borough Manager - the Burgess becomes Mayor	452
Commuters	453
Candidates for Tax Collector: A Fiery Contest in 1949	455
A Gymnasium for the Town?	457
Rent Controls	458
Big Houses Go Duplex	459
Narberth's Magic	459
Government's response: New U. S. Post Offices	460
People Respond: Demolition and Redevelopment	460
Community groups respond: Business 1945-1975	461
Post War Cooperation among the Churches	462
Women Aid Health and Welfare Activities	462
Beyond Merger Talk: Solving a Problem	463
Frictions: wartime on the home front: Press Targets Antiwar Clergy.....	467
Community groups respond: Civic Association Number Four Is Launched (1972-) ..	471
Narberth Summer Basketball League, 1946-1975.....	474
Narberth Athletic Association.....	477
Narberth Fire Department – Update	479
Animals	481

Cold War

As the Cold War escalated, talk turned to the terrifying possibility of nuclear war. Soviet saber-rattling had various Main Line communities in 1961 responding either by fast action or by going into a dither and having nothing to show for it. The townships of Lower Merion, Radnor, Upper Merion, Tredyffrin and Easttown and the Borough of Narberth were questioned on their preparedness and general approach to civil defense. Among them, only Narberth was estimated to be a hundred percent ready for whatever might come. It had made public shelter provisions for every person living here. It had compiled a catalogue listing every resident, also each person's blood type, special diseases, age and any talents or specialized training. Narberth's preparation was complete down to the last detail.

What was the special magic of this Narberth formula? Plausibly those local civil defense officials, from the burgess on down, devised a program for preparedness against nuclear attack based on the national passion - and certainly the Narberth passion - for keeping score. Americans are keen about knowing the score in sports. They are number-conscious and like to collect data. Most likely therefore, the Narberth folks faced down the atomic war dilemma in their own homespun, practical, patriotic way - by playing into that passion and producing a "scorecard" that lists anything and everything.

The changes: Postwar Changes

Enormous postwar changes occurred throughout the Philadelphia metropolitan area suburbs, even those in the inner-rim such as Narberth. This expansion became very evident in the demands made upon public utilities services. Already in 1952, the outer-rim Upper Main Line was growing faster than the Lower Main Line, which is close to the city. Representatives of the telephone, water, gas and electric companies meeting to discuss these trends at the Main Line Chamber of Commerce, pointed out that ten years previously, only 1,738 Main Line homes were heated by gas. By contrast, in 1952, 4,419 homes (one in four) had gas heat. So that gas consumption for heating by then accounted for forty-two percent of the gas load, whereas it used to be incidental. In 1942, 20,000 families were living on the Main Line between Overbrook and Malvern; in 1952, this figure had reached about 30,000.

The local Pennsylvania Railroad schedules soon reflected these population growth patterns as well, by substantial expansion of service and adding of trains. However, at that time (June 1953), the Paoli to Philadelphia commuter trains were mainly trying to cope with the sizeable population growth

between Philadelphia and Bryn Mawr, and the fact that 69.4% of their passengers were being picked up at the inner rim which is between those two points, rather than at the outer rim, at least up until that time.

The Suburban Water Company, meanwhile, was not standing by idle as numerous big estates were either converted for institutional use or cleared for construction of multi-story apartment buildings. This and two other factors lately had spurred the water company to double its facilities. Those other considerations were the new trend toward constructing 100% air-conditioned houses (Narberth had acquired its first one of those in 1935 - millionaire Clarence Dolan's modest abode in Narbrook Park), and the other was the new tendency of business firms to locate their offices and branch laboratories on the Main Line.

Also the number of telephones had increased on the Main Line from 19,700 in 1942 to 32,700 ten years later, with the Ardmore exchange alone at that postwar date handling 75,000 outgoing calls and 65,000 incoming ones daily. And although there had been a long waiting list for telephones, this circumstance was gradually improving.

Also there lately had been an increase of forty percent in the number of electric customers along the Main Line, compared with only an 8.9% increase in West Philadelphia and 14.5% in Philadelphia's Germantown section. In 1942, an electricity-consumption average of 2,000 kilowatt hours was fixed as a utility company objective. So the electric company staged an in-house celebration when that ceiling was broken by the postwar figure of 2,006 having been reached on the Main Line -one of the highest kilowatt consumptions in the Commonwealth. In 1952, the Main Line's figure had risen to 3,180, due to an upsurge in the number of electrical appliances, including television.

Meanwhile, the sixty-year-old Bryn Mawr Hospital was reporting (by November 1953) the highest number of births and the lowest infant mortality rate in its history. Its figures showed 1,903 infants born in the past fiscal year. Six percent of these were prematurely born, one percent was stillborn, and one percent died in the newborn period. By 1963, the Main Line's mushrooming population was causing delays of as long as four to six weeks for patients scheduled to enter Bryn Mawr Hospital to wait for a room. In order to eliminate that waiting list (and even though Lankenau, a hospital recently relocated from the city to the nearby suburb of Penn Wynne was now sharing some of its work load), Bryn Mawr Hospital late that year announced plans for a spacious new building and a major modernization project. Growth was apparent at every side.

This growth pattern of the immediate area was further spelled out in 1960 by the release of reportedly the first-ever statistical analysis of population and housing in the 236 municipalities in the

four-county suburban area of Montgomery, Delaware, Chester and Bucks. This study showed that four Main Line townships toward the outer rim— Upper Merion , Radnor, Tredyffrin and Easttown—were “adolescents” in the “explosive” stage of their development, with more than 50% of their usable land still open but rapidly being snapped up.

In this study, the borough of Narberth was the only nearby area characterized as a “mature” municipality that had reached its potential. Lower Merion and Delaware County's Haverford Township on the other hand were described as “youthful” but nearing maturity. Lower Merion Township’s population growth from 1950-1957 comprised a 17.3% increase in population, and Haverford Township's 36%. House-building and land subdivision in both these municipalities were still high.

By contrast, Narberth, which had experienced most of its full growth before World War II, was demonstrated in the study as having had a population density change of only 2.4%, and a yearly average between 1950 and 1956 of only five permits for the construction of new houses. The study also noted that all of the fastest-growing Upper Main Line townships - Upper Merion, Radnor, Tredyffrin and Easttown - by then already had zoning and subdivision ordinances. And all except Upper Merion (which has tended to be a developers' paradise) had planning commissions. Narberth of course had acquired both types of ordinances, as well as a planning commission—all before World War II.

Lower Merion’s prewar building code was the model for a uniform building code on the agenda for adoption by the 111 municipalities of Montgomery and Delaware counties in 1953. The purpose was to standardize building regulations with regard to public health and safety, so as to replace the 71 different building codes then in operation throughout the two counties. At the time, there were 31 municipalities in Montgomery County without any kind of building regulations.

The response: Government's response: Central Park or a Town Hall

The borough’s response to these tumultuous changes all around it was slow. Initially it began to fumble for ways to shore up its own identity as a town that lately had celebrated its fiftieth anniversary of self-rule. Most conspicuously, borough council made a couple of false starts toward obtaining another, more commodious town hall near its original one known as Elm Hall.

The first of these proposals would have been a more “important” building in its setting than American town halls usually are - more like a European town hall fitted out in the American colonial revival style. The design of this imposing structure with a clock tower (Walter I. Dothard, local architect) appeared in Our Town during an intense period of energetic local Reform Era political and

civic activity. Apparently the town fathers were testing the waters to see if public sentiment favored such an ambitious project, which involved the adaptive reuse of the existing town hall. And presumably it had the strong backing of prominent citizens on the civic association board such as A. J. Loos, closely tied with the Dothard & Dothard architects who previously designed the YMCA next to Elm Hall. Probably the two immediate causes of the sudden death of this lavish project were: a public outcry that did occur about the high cost estimate for that new town hall, and the growing public sentiment after World War I, to build a memorial connected with a playground.

Another world war came and went before the next move was made by council to replace its accommodations. In 1948, it purchased the Late Victorian corner house “Romar-Florem,” home of the first Narberth burgess, at a prominent intersection on the southeast corner of Windsor and Forrest avenues from the burgess' son and three daughters. The property, where Edward ap Rees' 1690 stone house once stood, was acquired as a possible site for a new municipal building, firehouse, auditorium and/or municipal parking lot, and to facilitate planning of future requirements. The borough paid \$20,000 for the site and razed the house, but dropped plans for a town hall complex when it learned such a building would cost more than \$350,000, which was in excess of Narberth's borrowing limit.

The location came to be known informally as “Central Park,” amid vague suggestions the ground be used for an apartment house or a parking lot. It was the first large lot cleared at the town center, and the disadvantages of embarking on a period of postwar construction haphazardly at the town center, and without a comprehensive master plan for the future development of the town are abundantly clear now, in retrospect.

By early 1952, the borough found a way to unload the unused “Central Park.” Council changed its zoning and permitted construction of a professional building (Clarence Woolmington, local architect) on the site for medical and dental offices and laboratories - a facility more recently converted to an office for a single business.⁷⁷⁴ Thoughts of a new town hall were again put on hold.

In autumn 1956, local residents greeted with mixed emotions a “drive by” effort by council to gain support for a \$150,000 bond issue to finance a new borough office building and fire house. This time the borough stayed its course and eventually would win a tough fight to relocate three blocks away from Elm Hall in a residential neighborhood. With respect to its choice of that new location (foot of

⁷⁷⁴ Editor's note: This site is once again under development without a comprehensive master plan for development of the Borough.

Conway Avenue abutting the railroad's high embankment), the current borough hall complex as a civic symbol can be said to be typically American in being relatively understated and hidden.

The Borough Manager - the Burgess becomes Mayor

A suggestion surfaced as early as 1917 that the borough hire a “town manager,” just as suburban Bristol in Bucks County had lately done.⁷⁷⁵ But this piece of advice from a journalistic source fell on deaf ears. Eventually the borough did bring aboard a full-time clerk, in an effort to relieve the public works superintendent of inside duties. The year was 1930.⁷⁷⁶ But the inevitable naming of a manager had to await the passage of still another world war, although Lower Merion hired its first township manager (the former secretary of the commissioners) in December 1942. Finally, in what was recognized as a sure sign of stepped-up postwar community growth and development, Narberth installed its first borough manager in September 1954. He was a tweedy, rosy-cheeked, pipe-smoking wearer of three-piece suits, George B. Supplee, a dependable borough employee in some capacity or other ever since 1905, and he set meticulous standards for getting the job done. Among other things, he was a stickler at insisting residents fix any pavement cracks. After two years on the job, Supplee, ever the inspector, retired at age seventy-four.

The position of Narberth borough manager evolved considerably during its first 25 years of existence, changing as the needs of the community itself did, with the responsibilities of this occupation hammered out “as needed” by the manager and town council working cooperatively. Gradually this job was scripted also by the actions of the State Legislature which began to require that an increasing number of records be forwarded to the Commonwealth. William Furber, Sr., the fifth borough manager in a dozen years (in office from 1966 to 1983) presided over that job's growth period that the current borough manager Bill Martin⁷⁷⁷ declared was “the most difficult” to date and “appears to have been very adequately handled by Mr. Furber.” The main complicating factor at the time was that the State laws governing boroughs were substantially changed during the mid-1960s and also in the early to mid-1970s. Certainly this meant the implementation of these new measures was very time-consuming.

⁷⁷⁵ Our Town, a “town manager” Feb. 15, 1917, p.2.

⁷⁷⁶ Our Town, “clerk” Jan. 24, 1930, p.1.

⁷⁷⁷ Editor’s note: In approximately 2015, Bill Martin was succeeded by Sean Mettrick, as borough manager. Sean was succeeded at the end of 2020 by Matt West.

The creation and development of the borough manager's position did not really cause an organizational power shift within our local government except in the sense that a borough manager has more responsibilities and authority over borough administration than a mere borough secretary would have had formerly. In any event, the several managers of the late-1950s to early-1960s had to rely on careful orchestration during that extended changeover phase, so that various duties would not conflict when a person took over who was schooled in running a borough. For as a municipal employee working for the elected members of council and for the community, the borough manager neither makes nor sets policy decisions. Instead the manager tries to carry out policy, and also may recommend changes.

Meanwhile, when the elected position of burgess was transformed into mayor in 19xx,⁷⁷⁸ this shift represented more than a word-change. According to the old burgess system, the Narberth burgess could largely write his own script and some of them - George M. Henry, for instance - came across as extremely active public servants, initiating all sorts of new programs. Borough manager Martin explains further that, although they had no council powers or veto powers, those early burgesses did create their own law and enforcement techniques.

By contrast, our mayor as his duties are presently defined is the executive head of the borough and in charge also of the police department. What closely links such an official to the operations of borough council is that the mayor has veto power over all ordinances. To override that veto requires a two-thirds majority of council, says a Commonwealth directive. That veto power makes the mayor responsible to every council committee, even as the legislation these committees enact must in turn be enforced by the mayor through the police department.

Commuters

Another postwar identity-confirming exercise that local public servants engaged in around this time: they looked at their fellow councilmen seated at the council chambers table each month and saw nothing but other commuters. To them, it was like a banner proclaiming "All's well." For was this not the way Narberth was governed from the start - by men who lived here but worked in the city?

Certainly the local governing body of any community tells a lot about its character. And a look at the roster of town fathers in Narberth has always given a rather clear idea of the type of citizenry living in this town. Thus a columnist, Ben Kramer, launching a new series of occasional feature articles

⁷⁷⁸ Editor's note: Vicky left this blank.

on this borough in the Main Line Times, could write in 1948 that the “patres conscripti” represent a fair sampling of Narberth's average residents and their occupations. He went on to point out that all of the town council members and the mayor were commuters at that time.

All were businessmen with positions in downtown Philadelphia except one councilman who had a longer commute: to New York City. As was - and still is - customary, all served without pay although the law says that such public servants could vote to pay themselves, something they have never done. Council meetings opened too with an invocation. And the columnist found that feature to be unprecedented in his more than thirty years of “covering” meetings of town councils and commissions. Kramer went on to characterize that particular sample of politicians as being “of the substantial middle class like the rest of the population, among whom you find few who are either titans or indigents.”

Kramer also mentioned an intimacy of relationship that exists between the people, their local government representatives, their officials and policemen that is peculiar to Narberth. He added: “Lots of community spirit in Narberth” is what people say up and down the Main Line, with even strangers sensing it on their first contact with Narberth. And he made a clear case that these are things associated with real democracy, Narberth being a “contented community of families.” Loyal to their institutions, its citizens participate in civic activities. He saw them as friendly, self-respecting and ready to show respect for others. He shrewdly noted that two groups of people, commuters and apartment-dwellers, presumed to be more “detached” from local matters than others in their community, are anything but detached in Narberth.

A little research shows that these observations can be extended to apply to most of the borough's first hundred years. For, from the start, Narberth's government was made up mainly of commuters - highly respected and prominent local men with business ties in center city, most of these at the outset being heads of their own firms such as manufacturers and publishers. Only very recently did this equation begin to shift noticeably away from all or mostly commuters running the borough, to a local government in which almost no one now is a commuter.

Particularly interesting, therefore, was a comment made at the 1993 “meet the candidates” night at election time, the well-attended event sponsored by Narberth Civic Association. That November contest marked one of the first times any Republican office-seekers ever had to face a full slate of candidates from the other major party in the borough's history. A then current borough elected official not running for office stood up in the rear to speak to the audience on behalf of the Republican slate of

candidates - all incumbents except one new candidate who, like all the other Republican candidates save one, has a local job. Facing a Democratic slate with numerous commuters, the speaker had this to say:

We feel from our experience that the best and most satisfactory arrangement for people running for public office in Narberth is for them to be locally employed.

So much for maintaining tradition.

Candidates for Tax Collector: A Fiery Contest in 1949

And, of course, the local political scene was still unchanged in other ways as well for although Narberth politics was dominated by Republican rule throughout the first century of the borough's existence, this did not always guarantee smooth sailing for Republican Party-endorsed candidates. Voters like a contest. And this is what they got in an off-year election in 1949 between three Republicans and a Democrat running in a four-way fight for tax collector. At the time, the job of tax collector was still the highest-paying post in Narberth government.

Republicans outnumbered Democrats ten to one at this period in the area. Registered voters in surrounding Lower Merion Township that year included 22,880 Republicans, 2,494 Democrats and 494 Non-Partisans, while here in the borough the figures were 3,167 Republicans, 326 Democrats and 83 Non-Partisans. Rebellion was rampant that year in Narberth. As a consequence, more voters turned out at the polls for their two embattled candidates than they normally would during a presidential election. That in itself is not an unusual thing in American politics - for people to be stirred up about something that directly touches life in their neighborhood. What is interesting in this instance is the cause of their agitation and even, in some cases, vehemence.

Touted then as the biggest political upset in Narberth's history, the victory by the insurgent Democratic tax collector (actually he was a Republican running as a Democrat) was claimed by his supporters as "A protest against the threat of 'organization control'" - this, in a town that at the time boasted it never had been dominated by a political boss. The winner, Richard L. Miller tallied 1,359 votes against the anointed Republican candidate's 1,139, a clear majority of 220. Those November voting totals were up from 1,823 votes cast in the primary election.

A close look at the background of the losing candidate; Otto B. Duer, is revealing. In 1949 at age thirty-five, Duer was strongly linked with politics both at the county and local levels. A former transcriber in the county courthouse, he had been president of the Young Republican Club of Narberth

and treasurer of the same club's county organization. In 1949, he was just ending a second six-year term as magistrate for Narberth borough, and was looking for a new job. While a magistrate, he had been unanimously elected president of the Montgomery County Justice of the Peace Association (as its youngest president), and was also president of the Tri-County Justice of the Peace Association. Still, they do not come any more true-blue Narberthian than Duer. His uncle was that children's recreational dynamo William S. (Doc) Howard who had the first drug store in Narberth and whose clerk was J. Paul Shea whom Howard sent through pharmacy school (Shea's Drugs still survives).⁷⁷⁹ A Narberth native since age three and a product of its public school, the candidate himself was an old hand here at youth activities, notably in the operation of Narberth Boys' Club. Duer had also been active in the war effort during World War II - the United War Chest, War Finance Committee, and a member of Narberth's Auxiliary Police, besides being an associate member of the Fraternal Order of Police.

Citizens apparently did not want to see the office of tax collector politicized. After his humiliating defeat at the polls, Duer got out of politics and worked for many years as second in command in the tax department of a major insurance company in center city, thus joining the ranks of commuters. He also worked a short time as an administrative assistant to a local district justice. Was Duer a potential political boss? Probably not. But he did have an exceptionally large number of political connections going back many years. Locally the post of tax collector has generally not been a stepping stone to higher office. Was Duer building a political base here? Perhaps.

One other significant factor that undoubtedly contributed to Duer's defeat in 1949 was a local law and order squabble dating back six years. It represented a collision between two separate worlds of lawmen. Two different eras, really. And it had the feel of an "end-of-regime" standoff - one of those testy confrontations that occurs because a monarch (or pope) has been on the throne too many years and his subjects are getting edgy awaiting his successor. In this case, the archaic state court system of justices of the peace and magistrates going back centuries was still in operation but showing obvious signs of wear and tear, although it would not be replaced for another twenty-seven years, following justice of the peace corruption scandals in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the 1960s.

The incident in question was an operatic exchange in mid-October 1943 between the Narberth borough council president and the then magistrate Duer - the council president charging laxity, claiming

⁷⁷⁹ Editor's note: In 1998, Shea's Drug store was succeeded by Narberth Pharmacy which closed in 2015. See "Comments" in Main Line Times, Jan. 28, 2015.

that Narberth law enforcement had reached a new and degrading low ebb. Addressing council, its president Roland Fleer placed the blame for lax enforcement (in a reckless driving case) on the borough's two magistrates (one of whom was a taxi driver) and recommended that the use of the council chamber be denied them for holding hearings. He asked that the current burgess be appointed justice of the peace in their place. The magistrates were running for reelection at the time.

The fur flew in that battle (Fleer had been the lawyer seeking a conviction in the reckless driving case), but nobody resigned and the fuss died down - until 1949, when Fleer presumably got his revenge. One of Duer's successors in the post of local magistrate recently gave this explanation of the slings and arrows aimed at those magistrates in 1943 by Fleer, a Harvard Law School graduate: Roland Fleer was quite a good lawyer, but very strait-laced.

Perhaps, but a re-reading of contemporary accounts also suggests that an outmoded grassroots judicial system may have been as much an irritant to the well-schooled lawyer in this case as any laxity by particular magistrates.

Another, more political, explanation for the terrible trouncing Otto Duer took verbally in 1943 and at the polls in 1949 - and a plausible one - comes from a local plumber who ran unsuccessfully for council without the anointing of the Republican party some years later, and who likes to sidestep "centers of power" wherever he finds them:

Otto Duer was very thick with Republican committee-person Eunice Lane, and together they had a power base at the fire house. New people entering Republican politics in Narberth wanted to oust them, and did.

As for partisan politics around the fire house in the small towns of America - as in Narberth, it lives on.

A Gymnasium for the Town?

The postwar period on the town council was a time when, if a councilman thought his side of an issue was not being discussed adequately, he spoke up in the press about it. With so many matters vying for the local government's consideration sometimes that was the only way to focus attention on a matter of importance. And so it was with assigning a use for a small piece of ground near the basketball courts.

The fondest hopes and dreams of the Narberth Recreation Board and of certain borough council members during the immediate postwar period were summed up in one word: Gymnasium. They

wholeheartedly wanted such a structure. And they thought it should be located on the recreational field for easy supervision. There was an understanding - or so they thought - that open land in the vicinity would be left available in case an opportunity arose to build that gym any time soon. Perhaps with State help.

Well, council found other uses for a prime piece of such ground in 1952, and issued a public statement explaining its intention to make the site available to the Narberth Volunteer Medical Service Corps to construct a headquarters building, as if this decision were already finalized. Then a month later it decided the matter in executive session and acted upon it. At the time, no move had been made by council to ask the recreation board's opinion. Nor was anything said publicly that this site had been a prime contender as the location for a gym - one that, among other things, probably would have housed an indoor swimming pool.

This oversight so incensed one councilman, Richard T. Smith, MD, a rheumatism specialist on the Thomas Jefferson University Hospital staff, that he denounced the one-sidedness of the handling of the matter in the pages of the weekly Main Line Times in a lengthy and detailed public statement. Meanwhile Dr. Smith was solicitous that every effort be made to find the ambulance unit a suitable home. Of course the issue had already been settled by then. That gymnasium was never built. But the issue itself did not immediately disappear.

In 1955, voters went to the polls, soundly defeating a proposed \$80,000 bond issue for a Narberth swimming pool on the playground. The election returns showed a vote of nearly three to one against this project. I can recall hearing people say at the time that a public swimming pool would bring riffraff into the town. And that anxiety may have been the key factor at the polls.

Rent Controls

One way Narberth clearly showed that it was being subjected to post-war changes and pressures, and that its response was agonizingly slow, was in the matter of rent controls. Borough council voted reluctantly in late-September 1952 to extend rent controls another seven months, following the example set a few days earlier by Lower Merion Township.

One curious difference in the way the two municipalities handled this prickly subject, however, was that the Narberth councilmen, unlike their fellow politicians the township commissioners, willingly let the public know how they voted, and why, in reaching their six-to-one verdict. For their part the commissioners, voting for controls twelve-to-two, kept mum on such a disclosure. The fact that each

commissioner represents a specific district within the township, while Narberth's councilman are always elected "at large," may have been a factor in the differing response by these two groups of officials.

Councilman Leonard A. Drake, Narberth's lone dissenter, in his minority statement at the time, branded the repeated extension of rent curbs "a crime against our American system." He declared that the "injustice" against landlords was being perpetrated simply to pick up votes. Things were no different in Lower Merion. Their rent controls died when federal rent controls expired July 31, 1953. The commissioners had taken no action on the matter, arguing that a local government has no jurisdiction as this was not a critical defense area.

Big Houses Go Duplex

After two years of study, Narberth's zoning ordinance was revised in 1953 so that owners of large single-family dwellings in R-2 zones of the town were permitted to convert them into two-family homes under certain conditions. These requirements included that not less than 2,250 square feet be provided for each family, that only the existing entrances on the fronts and sides be used so that the outside appearance would remain unchanged, that off-street parking be provided for both families, and that the lot should be a mean width of forty feet.

The purpose of liberalizing this in local law was to provide relief for those owners of Late Victorian and turn-of-the-century houses who found them economically unsound to maintain. These owners claimed their houses were too large for present day needs and could easily accommodate one extra family when converted. Some of the town's large houses of course have remained single family, while occasionally a new owner will buy one of those duplexes and convert it back to one-family use.

Narberth's Magic

More cars than ever were zipping along postwar Narberth streets. But for two years in a row (1950 and 1951) Narberth earned awards for traffic safety (no fatalities those years) bestowed by the National Safety Council and the Automobile Association of America. People driving through the town had to make sure they respected the stop signs, or their negligence was likely to cost them \$8.50. It had been determined that Narberth's very few traffic accidents were invariably caused by motorists disregarding stop signs. So Narberth police were - and are - especially vigilant on the subject.

Considering that the national rate of traffic fatalities at the time stood at about 35,000, the Main Line Times commended Narberth's enviable record with an editorial, "Narberth's Magic" (July 2, 1952).

Government's response: New U. S. Post Offices

Another reflection of the vast demographic changes that swept even the established inner-ring suburbs in the postwar era was the surge of new post office construction and expanded postal services in this locality. By summer's end in 1952, ground was broken for a Wynnewood post office, following close on the heels of the loss of much nearby farmland and wooded areas to tract-house subdivision and construction of sprawling apartment house complexes. Meanwhile, as a result of rapidly escalating house construction in vast wooded areas of Penn Valley, the Narberth post office which serves not only the borough but all of once-rural Penn Valley announced it needed to more than double its current space, and therefore was on the look-out for a new location in town. Not to be outdone by all this activity on its doorstep, and feeling pressure from upscale housing development that turned its farmland and subdivided estates into a newly fashionable address during this period, Gladwyne announced the start of letter-carrier delivery service that autumn. The Narberth site that beckoned, and today houses our post office, was at the time occupied by a big Late Victorian house and a much-admired large elm.

People Respond: Demolition and Redevelopment

One great postwar change was that some people began to see dollar signs in the oldest parts of town where our Victorian buildings stood. Narberth's demolition derby began soon after World War II. Yet to listen to some people, one might think little was lost in the postwar years. Most of the losses occurred on the northside - usually individual large Late Victorian houses on corner lots and a few structures considerably earlier. The carnage extended from the late-1940s through early-1980s, with only a slight slowing of the process before sporadic initiatives began to be taken to flag or at least attempt to control the destruction. A philosophy had taken tenacious hold here, lasting well into the mid-1980s. Namely that demolition of larger dwellings was an unquestioned, inevitable step on the road to progress. In the town center business district, the first large redevelopment proposal from the private sector was welcomed with nary a voice raised against destruction of a Victorian stone railroad station for example.

So strong was the belief that this was the only way to go - pull down the old and raise the tax base especially by putting up subdivisions similar to those cropping up in the outlying new suburbs - that borough officials seemed overjoyed when local people, or former local residents, came forward as the developers, as if "gratitude" was the only proper response for this kind of "assistance." One ex-

resident demolished the rail station and erected a commercial complex on the site. The same developer also replaced two corner Victorian houses by architect Angus Wade (including football commissioner Bert Bell's house) with two apartment houses totaling__units,⁷⁸⁰ all in__ . Another builder moved here after doing a west end of Wynnedale Road subdivision, took over a local real estate office, and again turned developer in the town to demolish a large Victorian house for a housing subdivision. Soon this real estate man was tapped for service on borough council, where he has tended to be pro-development on controversial questions (as elected officials with a real estate background so often are) , and is now serving as the council president.

Community groups respond: Business 1945-1975

Business began to pick up after World War II on Narberth's front street, Montgomery Avenue, as well. The Narberth burgess (Sterling M. Chain) was the central figure in a Norman Rockwell-style painting used as the cover of Sun Oil Company's 1951 annual report. Portrayed by artist Larry Grey was a group of townspeople, readily identifiable ones, at a ribbon-cutting ceremony as a business is born. The subject was picked as being representative of Sun's 6,000 Sunoco Station dealers. A granite marker commemorating George Washington's Army encampment on that site was moved a block to the east to make room for this gas station which, in 1993, was converted into a Japanese restaurant. The small commercial strip within that block was poised for postwar expansion westward from the meeting house in what a later generation of critics would decry as the “Manhattanization” of Montgomery Avenue.⁷⁸¹ The focus of the organized business community of the town, meanwhile, has always continued to be Narberth's main street, not this “front street.”

The Narberth Business Association re-established itself in 1951, feeling the need to respond to larger challenges facing it. This group known as the Narberth Business Council until reactivated, had voiced its opposition to the passage (1947) of a parking meter ordinance aimed at regulating the use of scarce parking spaces in its off-the-beaten track downtown business district, at a time when all the then new shopping centers were advertising free parking. Local businessmen naturally were anxious to keep the customers they already had, and their patrons' complaints over the strict enforcement of these fees have been unceasing ever since. Where parking meters were concerned, Lower Merion was the local

⁷⁸⁰ Essex Manor. 23 units (1962)?

⁷⁸¹ Editor's note: more on this topic in Chapter 10.

pacesetter. In a thirty-page report to the commissioners in 1941, Lower Merion Planning Commission had proposed installation of parking meters and establishment of municipal parking lots in order to cope with the circumstance of “too many cars and too little space.”

By 1971, steps were taken to make Narberth streets one-way through the business district to facilitate the traffic flow and to ease parking space. With some refinements, this arrangement continues.

Post War Cooperation among the Churches

Another type of cooperation among the town’s churches that, in retrospect, seems unusual was the program of weekday religious education in the public school that took place here in the 1940s for at least five or six years, starting in 1942. In charge of this project was a group known as the Narberth Community Council of Christian Education. During 1947, for example, all the Narberth public school pupils from second grade through fifth grade received Biblical instruction one hour each Wednesday for twenty weeks in public school classrooms. In that same period, Catholic students in the public school were “guided in their own church.” Besides cooperation being received from all the Narberth churches on this matter, also the Narberth Parent-Teacher Association and the Bala Cynwyd-Narberth Rotary Club gave the program its support. Plans for the 1947-48 school year spoke of expansion - the sixth grade to be included, and lengthening the number of weeks covered from ten in each semester to fifteen per semester. Ten laypersons and one ordained minister conducted the Bible instruction classes during 1947.

Women Aid Health and Welfare Activities

Narberth always has gotten high marks as a town ready to rally in support of community health and welfare needs. This was very noticeable in the postwar era when the end of summer always brought intense worry about the rapid spread of the crippling disease of poliomyelitis, before Dr. Jonas Salk had developed his vaccine for that disease in April 1955. At the height of the epidemic in the early-1950s, some 40,000 Americans a year were being killed or crippled by this modern-day plague. Narberth's response was that it conducted a yearly March of Dimes “Mothers March on Polio” with the ringing of church bells and porch lights lit throughout the town. On one such occasion in January 1952, Narberth Theater postponed the start of its movie so that local residents need not be late for the performance due to the porch-light parade. It was a blitz canvass, making it easy for those who wished to give to do so. There were seventy-two workers in Narberth. On some streets such as Homewood Avenue, every porch

light was brightly shining. Narberth's 1400 houses collected \$1300, an average of about a dollar per residence. By October of that year, the borough reported its first polio case of 1952 - a married woman on Homewood Avenue - thus showing that although this so-called "infantile paralysis" hit children the hardest, it struck randomly, afflicting some adults as well.

People waiting for that dreaded disease to be wiped out had to have patience. In 1962, the federal government approved a new vaccine, the oral Sabin vaccine which overcame some problems with the Salk serum. And by late the next year, this vaccine was being administered in three successive doses taken in a sugar cube. Health authorities were trying to reach the four million people of the Philadelphia metropolitan area, including 100,000 residents of the lower Main Line, who were asked to go to neighborhood schools for those feedings.

Also around the early-1950s, when Narberth's Red Cross Drive was launched, its quota of \$3,900 was considered a large sum to be raised in a town this size. Yet drives like this had a habit of going over the top in Narberth. Partly this was due to the strong organizational network this and other charitable groups had here. In this instance, a Narberth chairwoman was assisted by four "majors" and thirty "captains" - the largest number of workers for any Red Cross district along the Main Line.

Beyond Merger Talk: Solving a Problem

Meanwhile, the original problem that had ignited the furor over home rule, namely how to help the school survive under the state's restrictions, remained unsolved. But the playing field was slowly tilting in favor of finding a workable solution. A clue to this gradual shift is that when public discussion of the matter resumed, talk focused exclusively on merging the two school districts. To this day, nothing further has been said about merging the township and borough governments. So, while Lower Merion School District was discussing its possible merger with Narberth's in mid-1955, Narberth School Board was talking about the post-merger "tax exoneration" it was looking forward to. This had become, reportedly, its "favorite topic" by 1957, the year Lower Merion "regretfully informed" the Narberth Board of Education that it was not prepared "at this time" to join in a merger of the two districts. Obstacles cited were inequality of assessments, teacher salary differentials, different standards of building maintenance and other problems.

Narberth continued wistfully to eye merger of the school districts, making other formal requests for this status in 1958 and 1960 - unsuccessfully. But the extreme chill of Lower Merion to merger talk appeared to have thawed considerably by mid-1960, Lower Merion indicating a desire to cooperate with

Narberth in attempting to solve the town's critical school problems. Narberth, meanwhile, was readying what it considered a trump card of its own, doubtless aimed at winning the attention, confidence and respect of the township school board officials, for just before early-autumn talks behind closed doors were set to begin between the David and Goliath school districts, the Narberth district made a bold announcement.

It came like a bombshell - some called it the most explosive announcement in the history of the Narberth School Board. Doubtless the step was intended to strengthen what Narberth hoped finally would be its winning hand. The local board declared itself ready to tear down the borough's elementary school and replace it with a new six-grade school at a walloping tax increase of about ten mills. That estimated hike was to cost the average taxpayer \$45 additional in taxes. Eight mills of that increase would be used for demolition and for \$750,000 in new construction costs, and the remainder was to go toward paying tuition for a hundred Narberth seventh and eighth-grade students to be switched from the borough school system to Ardmore Junior High School in the Lower Merion district after June 1961.

Some local observers saw red, claiming the expenditures could reach two million dollars before anybody saw an end to it. To say that this plan was controversial is an understatement. Several months later, the cost estimate had risen to \$1,300,000, with a likelihood of more increases to come. So, it was back to petition signing for some Narberth people, including that firebrand of the 1932 merger drive, ancient Mrs. Margaret Town, who went around with a petition herself.

Nonetheless, by late July 1961, Narberth School Board won the first major hurdle in the long controversy over its plans to replace the existing public school with a new one. For two Montgomery County judges that month dismissed arguments by Narberth taxpayers that had been brought before the court. And the judges' opinion sliced down the middle. On the one hand, they characterized the taxpayers brief as "so bare of well-pleaded facts supporting the cause of action that it must be dismissed." Yet on the other hand, they declared themselves sympathetic to the plaintiff's alarm at the creation of a school authority and the expenditure of what seems an unwarranted and excessive sum of money. (Using an authority is the most expensive means of financing a new school, but the advantage of this method is that the debt load is spread over a much longer period so the yearly tax load is not great.)

Narberth went ahead and built its new school (designed by Chapelle & Grothers,⁷⁸² architects, of Philadelphia, 1961-62). This great feat of school-building that Narberth so strenuously undertook

⁷⁸² Editor's note: not sure of this name.

occurred during a phase now widely regarded as one of hysteria when communities across the country in the 1950s and 1960s sought teachers and new schools to accommodate their increased enrollments.

Merger of the two districts finally became a definite possibility when the state legislature passed a school redistricting bill (Number 561) in 1962 that was designed to bring about redistricting in the state by 1965. Before being clarified, this law brought up a host of questions, the opposition to it being greatest in rural areas that were striving to maintain a sense of their own identity through independence. Meanwhile, Montgomery County formulated two plans for school redistricting (1962) and submitted them to the state. For its part, the state was expected to approve or reject these the following year, and if both these proposals were rejected, it would be up to the state to formulate a plan to become effective in September 1965. Merger of these two districts did finally take place on December 7, 1965. In all, some 2,000 school districts across the state were consolidated into 501 school districts at that time, amid considerable lamentation in rural areas over the resulting loss of local control.

Over a long period, the Lower Merion school system has had an excellent reputation, and this has been a drawing card for families thinking of moving into the township. By 1967, Narberth was beginning to feel some of the beneficial effects of its new status of belonging to the surrounding school district. A school board meeting took note of the fact that there was now an increased demand for houses in Narberth, and that they were bringing much higher prices than a year or two ago. Likewise in 1967, talk at Narberth School was of enlargement, with a spacious new half-million dollar wing proposed by Lower Merion school board to be completed in September 1968, for a student population that would include children from the township's Merion Park section, as well as children from the borough. This major expansion never happened. Instead came a swift population decline among America's elementary age population from 37.7 million in 1969 to 31.7 million in 1979. Elementary schools are always the first to feel any downswing of enrollment, and the first to feel an increase. Schools in the Northeastern states were particularly hard hit during this period. So, Narberth suddenly was caught in a decade of perhaps premature elementary school closings undertaken as a cost-saving measure by public school boards throughout the Northeastern United States during the 1970s.

At the outset, came the rumors. One of the "hazards" a once-independent school district faces in being absorbed by the larger surrounding school district, despite unification's many advantages, is that eventually the "swallowed" little-fish district can expect that redistricting might occur. When that happens, some of its children could be sent to other schools. For a borough that prides itself on

maintaining community spirit, breaking up a school population can be hard to take. Such a scare hit Narberth in autumn 1973.

A small group of worried Narberthians met to discuss the unthinkable: their shared belief that their community was facing a serious threat from a redistricting plan that would send one-third of the borough's students to other schools. At the time, all of Narberth's 315 students attended Narberth School. The big fear was that splitting the Narberth school zone would also divide the borough community as a whole, since so much activity in the town orbited around the public school. The accusation heard that evening was that the Lower Merion School Board was keeping the alleged decision to divide the pupil population of the Narberth School "a deep dark secret." That crisis passed, only to be followed by a more serious one in the eyes of Narberth public school parents.

Narberth became one of four public schools closed by the Lower Merion district in 1978, even as "portable" rooms were being added to school building in places like South Carolina to handle the sudden enrollment increases and state-required lower class-size requirements, as migration to Southern states increased and drastic educational needs were being met there. And of course there were hidden costs to the Lower Merion school district with these shutdowns - the cost of additional buses to transport Narberth pupils to two nearby schools, increased maintenance services at the schools absorbing new students and disruption in employment to staff members. In Narberth, a plan was afoot to avoid one common hazard: increased vandalism at vacant school sites. For it intended to recycle the school.

Much earlier, Narberth had learned, as did many other American school districts at the same time, not to expect much help either from the state or from Federal demographers. But the painful personal experience of Narberthians in dealing with rapid fluctuations of enrollments - its own, that brought the sudden closing of its relatively new school, and those over a wide area of the Northeastern states - led them to explore alternate ways to at least hold onto their school building for the near future. Many other neighborhoods in the region, finding themselves in similar straights, chose this option.

Shaping up as the next big issue: can the state change the way public schools are financed, or will it just settle for reducing the number of school districts again - something only whispered now? For by 1994, about 132 of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts had joined a pending lawsuit against the Commonwealth to fight on behalf of struggling school districts in cities hammered by industrial decline. Three school systems in the state are currently hit with insolvency and designated "financially distressed," while another twelve impoverished ones are being closely watched. The lawsuit addresses

the root problem, declaring that insolvency cripples school districts in the poorest communities due to the inequities of using property tax revenues to finance the schools.

Frictions: wartime on the home front: Press Targets Antiwar Clergy

The Vietnam War produced domestic conflict more intense than any other hostilities since the Civil War, and the sharp divisions it caused were laid bare in a public outcry in May 1968, and again in October that year. The dispute involved Narberth's perceived identity as the embodiment of a true red, white and blue flag-waving town and the consequent disapproval of disgracefully "unpatriotic" rantings from the pulpit by two local antiwar clergymen. Adding insult to injury in the mind of the journalist who first denounced this "aberration" was the fact that its source was Narberth's oldest church. The target of this and a subsequent writer on the subject were two men of the cloth, one about to depart on a new assignment, the other a newcomer - both young scholarly ordained ministers who served in succession during the 1960s as pastors of the local Baptist church.

Ethyl Kramer, the first writer, praised Narberth to the skies, started off by claiming she liked to consider it her second home town. She also declared she liked the fact that the way of life here is not pretentious, nor are its people. She went on about its playground being always full of children, "as a playground should be," and noted there are no dark corners in the town government, and that anyone may speak up at borough council meetings - and does. Also, she liked the place because:

In a world given over to protest marches and sit-ins and flag burning, Narberth remains one little town where the Fourth of July is still the biggest day in the year, with the most flags flying and the greatest number of people celebrating, and visitors by the thousands swarming from miles around to participate in an old-fashioned, patriotic Fourth of July.

Ethyl Kramer further stated her abiding dislike for ministers who are social activists. To her taste, the Narberth minister's approach, both in community prayer and in his sermon, contained unwanted references to pressing social problems. She felt he was out of touch with the kinds of prayer ordinary folk would offer. It reminded her of a Presbyterian convocation the week before in Minneapolis, in which the delegates were more concerned with social and political issues than with religious matters.

By autumn, marking the arrival of the Baptist Church of the Evangel's new minister, a younger writer for the same weekly newspaper attended his first service and complained in print about his

declared priorities. “On these things [race, peace, internationalism], he said from the pulpit, there must be no compromise. The Church must give everything it has to see these ends achieved.” The writer griped about this, noting that the congregation has 125 members, mostly older people. She found fault with his sermonizing about poor people in America and about “thousands of people being killed senselessly in Vietnam.” It galled her that, as he raised the bread in the communion service, the new minister said “and with this bread do this knowing that you do it in company with a starving Biafran, a “Russian peasant woman, a Vietnamese widow.” And then with the cup raised, he intoned: “Drink this with a Philadelphia ghetto dweller, with a Czechoslovakian worker, with a New Mexico Indian.” The columnist did find one thing to compliment: the new minister’s dedication and proclivity for hard work.

The first of those sharp criticisms was penned by the wife of one of American suburban weekly journalism’s principal old curmudgeons of the Cold War era hysteria, active here for just over three decades after World War II. A weekly editor, publisher and columnist, “Uncle Ben” Kramer briefly lived in Narberth and remained steadfastly devoted to it, always defending Narberth as the small town against all comers. So, although he lavished plenty of criticism upon better-known antiwar clergy particularly from the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania who frequently spoke at the Church of the Redeemer in Bryn Mawr, he personally never put his name to criticizing the two Baptist ministers. Instead his wife Ethyl Kramer took aim at them – in her own regular column in his newspaper, the Main Line Chronicle.

This was unusual for her. Few of Ethyl’s largely impressionistic and informative features in the “Stranger in Church” series ever made any comments that might be considered political. But this particular verbiage (“I think that a minister’s job is to talk about God, not war, Mad Magazine or hippies”) shows how closely attuned her thinking was to her husband’s crusty editorials with their extremely pronounced conservative slant that earned him such worthy journalistic adversaries as Main Line Times managing editor Gil Spencer, later the widely respected top editor at the New York Daily News and subsequently of the Denver Post. A second salvo at the incoming Baptist pastor in the autumn was fired by a young Chronicle writer serving as a stand-in for Ethyl in the “Stranger in Church” feature format.

Neither Ben nor Ethyl Kramer – both Cold War warriors to the end, and now deceased – ever reflected in their subsequent published writings full comprehension or any insightful understanding of the final Vietnam episode of self-doubt or of questioning America’s role in the world, which was about as powerful an episode as this nation ever experienced.

Earlier that same year, Ben Kramer's fixed position denouncing one particular Episcopal minister who, he claimed, supported draft-card burning and civil disobedience, was a "missioner to the hippies" and a "leftist quaintsie," rallied strong support at a noisy meeting in the parish house at All Saints' Episcopal Church. That church stands on Narberth's corporate boundary and was founded before World War I, serving a substantial number of Narberth families of that faith as well as Wynnewood residents. That 1968 gathering at All Saints, attended by a representative of the local bishop and another high-ranking official of the Episcopal diocese, questioned many things, including how the controversial clergyman's activities were being financed and whether the money was coming from Hanoi. That meeting was sponsored by a new group, the Committee for the Preservation of Episcopal Principles, founded by members of the congregation to fight what they perceived as a gradual drift of the diocese toward support of antiwar activities and related matters.

At the time, the northside Wynnewood neighborhood where that Episcopal church is located could be described as a stronghold of political conservatism, its long-time near neighbors on Cherry Lane including the metropolitan area's two principal newspaper publishers, Walter Annenberg (Philadelphia Inquirer and Philadelphia Daily News) and William L. McLean (Philadelphia Evening and Sunday Bulletin). So, Wynnewood, where the Kramers also lived, was congenial territory for a group well versed in the politics of the establishment to pledge vigilance about defending what it saw as endangered "Episcopal principles" during the Vietnam War.

Narberth's Baptist church on the other hand had always been considered in its own right a "liberal church," probably due in part to the circumstance that, for at least a generation starting in 1890, a two-block area around this church was home to a number of clergy administrators from the American Baptist Convention (national Baptist church organization headquarters in Philadelphia, now located in suburban Valley Forge). An elite group, they were more idea-oriented than an average Baptist church congregation tends to be, and were noticeably active in community service here in the town.

Another indication of the liberal leanings of this congregation is that its women members were so impressed with the work of early-twentieth century child welfare reformers that they set up here in their church a special chapter of a nondenominational group to facilitate a major effort by that organization to bring slum children to vacation in Narberth upon referral from Philadelphia settlement houses. (See Chapter 4). And those Baptist women formed the central core of workers on that reform-era local project - their chapter being two-tiered: the adult women, plus a cadet group for young Baptist girls.

In any event, in 1968, Narberth's Baptist congregants "knew they had a peace minister" as their pastor and were "quite comfortable" with that fact, the barrage of criticism in the Chronicle about peacemongering by him and his successor notwithstanding. At the end of the 1970s, a new minister (still the pastor)⁷⁸³ abruptly shifted that Baptist church's course, causing a large exodus from the congregation and assembling a new one along strictly conservative lines while introducing a specialized ministry to the handicapped. Lending continuity during this sea change were two male descendants of one of this church's founding families, the Trotters, who stayed the course and continue their membership. Most recently this church went nondenominational.

In an uncharacteristically boisterous manner reminiscent of that 1968 gathering in Wynnewood, local Episcopal conservatives again went public with gripes about where their church [was] heading – this time in 1993 at the 67,000 member Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania's convention in Bala Cynwyd. Throughout the 1980s, the number of church-related conservative groups founded by the nation's two and a half million Episcopalians has greatly increased, yet conservatives control only five of America's 118 Episcopal dioceses. The conservative complaint nowadays is that the church has abandoned biblical principles and adopted liberal social stances on abortion, homosexual rights and the ordination of women while ignoring the conservatives. The issue has not yet reached the point of open schism, but this remains a possibility. Meanwhile, one conservative Episcopal congregation in predominantly white Northeast Philadelphia that took the extreme step of seeking and hiring a pastor in Canada during the Vietnam war era so as to avoid choosing any American even remotely tainted with the liberalism of clergymen such as this diocese's Reverend David Gracie, in 1993 declared itself willing to hire a woman minister, provided she [was] no activist.⁷⁸⁴ For conservative Episcopal churches in the 1990s, "activist" carries much the same dreaded connotation "Communist" had earlier, noted a young Narberth clergyman interviewed for the job.

It is widely recognized that the rise of American conservatism during the second half of this century was in large part a response to the rise of radicalism on college campuses in the 1960s. Often overlooked, however, is the way conservative opinion was shaped by what was happening in churches at the same time. Certainly, groups of conservative laymen of a thoughtful turn of mind were emerging within various church denominations and soon became articulate about dangers they perceived from the

⁷⁸³ Editor's note: accurate when this was written (approximately 1995).

⁷⁸⁴ Editor's query: was this Rev. Lynne Griffo?

radicalism (to use their term) of some of their own clergy, which they saw as threatening the core beliefs of their denominations.

Mention of the “s” word (schism) stirs thoughts of local groups such as the Church of the Holy Sacraments, the first parish (established 1980) of breakaway Episcopalians in the Greater Philadelphia area. This first local congregation of the dissident new Anglican Catholic Church denomination met for its first five years of worship services in Narberth’s Baptist Church of the Evangel (until 1985, when it moved to a Lutheran church in King of Prussia in another space-sharing arrangement). The Holy Sacraments flock is attached to a nationwide church founded in 1977 and estimated by 1980 to have between twenty-five and thirty-thousand members with a hundred-fifty to two hundred clergy. Some twenty-two of these congregations are scattered in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. This new network objects to such changes in the mainline Episcopal Church as the ordination of women priests, permission for abortion and modernization of the Book of Common Prayer - their division caused by their intensive search for old values.

Meanwhile, among the irritants was the then rector of Saint Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church nearly four miles away in Chestnut Hill just within city limits (he had grown up during the Vietnam War) who stirred a firestorm in his congregation when he declared the Persian Gulf War “misguided and wrong” and reminded his flock that their parish church was named for Martin of Tours, patron saint of conscientious objectors.

Community groups respond: Civic Association Number Four Is Launched (1972-)

In its next - and current - incarnation, what formed a Narberth Civic Association in 1972 (incorporated 1973) was the then raging battle over the old slaughterhouse tract and “witch's” house location “that during much of the twentieth century had housed Barclay's – Hugh Barclay's distinctive and nationally-advertised garden nursery combined with a sophisticated Arts and Crafts period garden ornaments and antiques shop. This picturesque setting in the heart of old Libertyville had been a favorite stopping place of my family out on our regular Sunday afternoon stroll during the Depression because the combined garden and aesthetic ambiance gave us such a lift - adults and children alike. Barclay's occupied an assortment of old buildings from abattoir days including the hulking slaughterhouse itself, the blacksmith shop and “witch” Betty Conrad's much older tiny house that, in the Barclay era, were still surprisingly well-preserved, as in a time capsule. Also a survivor up to that time was the old springhouse marking the “Ancient Indian Spring,” source of Indian Creek's East Branch.

Pitted against saving any of this property renamed the Hansen tract (for Hugh Barclay's foreman who took over ownership after marrying into the Barclay family) was a then current Lower Merion Township commissioner. He was Donald H. G. Segal, a man wearing two hats - one as the owner of a South Jersey building construction firm active in nearby Main Line suburbs, the other as a politician in office.⁷⁸⁵ The proposed development of this tract - it included some of the earliest-settled portions of the town and was a prime prospect for an archaeological site after yielding scores of Indian arrowheads over the years around the ancient Indian spring,—called attention to a larger problem beginning to receive wide public attention in America at the time: greed on the part of developers seeking to squeeze every penny of profit from land for subdivision by over-building upon it.

Moreover, this was a classic case of a grassroots-level conflict of interest. Here was a township government elected official reaping financial gain by privately developing land on the corporate border of his Ward One jurisdiction and directly across the street from it in a neighboring borough. This aspect, however, never assumed prominence in the public debate over this construction project in Narberth.

The legacy of this “win some, lose some” struggle by the petition-wielding group known as the Northwest Narberth Neighbors Association was the establishment of the civic association that continues to serve Narberth today. Local resident Marianne Altman led that preservation fight assisted by local lawyer Desmond McTighe and by local residents James D. Barry, Jr. and his wife Mary Jane Barry and Denise Carroll. During their successful attempt to win at least some hard-fought concessions on the density of this residential subdivision (originally slated for a 192-unit apartment complex, it became a tract of twenty-five new single houses in 1980), these citizens who formed the leadership of the group soon said: “Let's start a civic association.” Opponents of their idea countered with: “Why do we need that? We're just one big happy family in Narberth.”

Uncle Ben Kramer, editor and publisher of the Main Line Chronicle, strode into the first official meeting of the new association at borough hall and vehemently disrupted it, hurling insults in all directions. A once-powerful figure in county GOP politics until ousted along with others by Republican reformers from Lower Merion about 1960 (see _____⁷⁸⁶), Kramer remained outspoken and reactionary in both the written and spoken word all his life. In this particular episode, the old firebrand

⁷⁸⁵ Appointed to the Lower Merion Board of Commissioners representing Ward One (General Wayne) in 1971, Donald H.G. Segal eventually served as president of the board from 1974-1978. Some of his later real estate ventures in N.J.'s Atlantic, Cape May and Camden counties forced Segal in 1993 to face theft and embezzlement charges.

⁷⁸⁶ Editor's Note: not sure what Vicky intended here.

charged that this band of citizens was left-leaning and pinko for founding a new civic association at a time like that to oppose a developer - also splashing the same message in banner headlines across page one of the next editions of his newspaper. Had Kramer been asked to jump into the fray by the politician-developer? This much is certain. Some people were upset that a new and young group was making its presence felt in the town, maybe even trying to take over.

Cold War politics was then still able to fuel suspicions internationally but a “Commie plot” to take over Narberth? That was ridiculous. And Mary Jane Barry knew it. A still-girlish-looking mother of seven, Mrs. Barry recalls that she had just come from seeing one of her sons go through a ceremony making him an altar boy. And she was thinking: what a wonderful place to live, and to be able to help found a civic association, when she walked into this crowded community meeting and it was a boiling cauldron of rancor. Also the city planner her husband Jim had invited to talk about density confided that he had never seen anything like the carrying on (by Ben Kramer). No question but that Kramer had launched a full-scale attack on Northwest Narberth Neighbors Association, and everyone better head for cover.

But this rather small embattled group stood fast. It had made spiritual eye contact with its fellow citizens on an important matter of concern had to all. Two hundred people had gathered to discuss founding a new civic association, and the idea won approval.

Another matter on which Narberth Civic Association took useful and timely public-service action (early 1973) was in the controversy over whether Resources for Human Development Inc. should be granted a special zoning exception to open a group home for six to eight mildly retarded adults from Lower Merion and Narberth in a house in a residential neighborhood opposite the Narberth public school. The civic association polled its members (as did the Narberth Home and School Association) concerning the proposed group home. A telephone poll of the civic association's 102 members produced a tally of 53% in favor, 29% disapproval and 17% undecided. After the original application's rejection was appealed in county court, a ruling returned the case to Narberth for a second hearing. That group home never materialized, but at least the episode demonstrated the ability of Narberth Civic Association, then newly minted in its fourth incarnation, to act in the public interest.

As a result of the Hansen tract affair and a couple of other incidents, local lawyer Desmond McTighe's name became synonymous with Narberth's growing awareness of the pressing need to hold down density of development, protect open space, and preserve local architecture. McTighe had tasted battle on the home front and he did not give up. In 1932, he contended that a conspiracy was afoot to

build a high-rise apartment building on five acres at 233- 235 North Wynnewood Avenue next door to his own house. And he charged that “devious means” were being used to push the project through. So, he filed suit in Norristown to stop the development and obtain damages from the defendants.⁷⁸⁷ The apartment tower, already being planned, was never built. Eventually, Fox Hall housing subdivision was. Some years later when the borough got serious about historic preservation, it called upon McTighe to head up its new historic ordinance review committee.

Narberth Summer Basketball League, 1946-1975

Narberth was the only place in the area for outdoor basketball during World War II. And the Narberth Summer Basketball League, launched at the dawn of the postwar era, is by far the oldest of the many such leagues, city or suburban, throughout the Philadelphian metropolitan area. Narberth is still the basketball league on Philadelphia’s Main Line, unsurpassed too, some claim, by any other high school suburban league throughout the region. Or, some say, anywhere. Its glittering era of attracting celebrity players was brief, and is now long over. Today the Narberth league is still a big suburban draw, despite competition from the larger West Philadelphia-based Sonny Hill Community Involvement League Inc., founded in 1968.

Begun as a suburban league for high-schoolers in the borough and surrounding township, Narberth’s league became a pro showcase for players from Philadelphia. But it has since returned to its original concept. Its unique and highly-valued feature among suburban Philadelphia summer leagues is that the Narberth players are distributed among various independent teams, instead of being entered as a high school club. This enables young people to play alongside those who are their big rivals during the school year. Also some players, unable to make their high school varsity team, will come out here and have an opportunity to play organized basketball for the fun of it or else just to experience competing against high school stars. Every team in the league has two or three players like that.

The league began in 1946, which is unusually early. Robert D. Tabor Jr, just back from wartime military service in the Pacific with the Army, had taken a job here at the playground. He and several others started pushing for league. Its original backers were recreation board chairman “William S. (“Doc”) Howard and Carlton Harkness, a teacher at the local public school who was in charge of the

⁷⁸⁷ In early 1975, a civil suit filed vs. Narberth borough and its manager by preservationists (which charged: prohibitive building restrictions) was dismissed in U.S. District Court. M.L. Times – the third week of February 1975. (check c. Feb.23?)

playground. One of the earliest heads of the league was Norm Butz, a Saint Joseph's College All-American player. Bob Tabor, Jr., a burly red-haired former outfielder and heavy-hitter from Narberth's prewar semi-pro baseball team, held various administrative posts with the league for several decades.

The league in its first year (1946) had six teams named after team captains or sponsors - D'Amora, Hackett, Harmon, Heindel, Welsh and Whalen— and the Heindel team won the first championship by defeating Harmon. The next summer saw permanent lights put on the courts and an increased number of teams which were renamed after the players' hometown communities or their city neighborhoods. Soon various local colleges began entering a team in that league. Meanwhile, Matt Goukas, Sr. (Saint Joseph's College) was among the early coaches and Paul Arizin, Tom Gola, and Jimmy Lynam (Saint Joseph's College) were among the players. Goukas and Lynam became National Basketball Association coaches, and before long the Narberth hoops league was a well-known source for both NBA coaches and referees.⁷⁸⁸ Arizin and Gola were two of the first big celebrities to play in the Narberth summer basketball league. Hailed as America's top collegiate scorer and Most Valuable Player by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (both in 1950) while a Villanova student, Paul Arizin became the leading NBA scorer (1957) while with the Philadelphia Warriors, and in all was named All-Pro three times. Tom Gola who carried his La Salle College team to an NCAA championship in 1954 and to runner-up the next year, played here before he became the first college player named All-American three years in a row by the wire-service polls. Despite being tall, Gola could play every position in the game well, which was a distinct advantage in Narberth. It is easy to imagine the level of spectator interest that was generated by nighttime hoops action like this on our courts. Great crowds came from as far away as Southern New Jersey and Pennsylvania's Lehigh County. And often the fans' roar of approval (or disapproval) of the action on the courts could be heard for several blocks. But the big scandals of 1951 put an end to college participation in the summer leagues nationally. For when the point-shaving scandals were traced that year to contacts gamblers had made with college players on New York City playgrounds, the National Collegiate Athletic Association banned summer basketball leagues from using its players.

Not that dullness settled in on Narberth courts after that. Seven-foot-one-inch-tall Wilt ("The Stilt") Chamberlain of Philadelphia's legendary 1955 Overbrook High School basketball team from just across the nearby City Line dominated Narberth's senior league in the mid-fifties before donning the

⁷⁸⁸ Jim Lynam was the Philadelphia '76ers (basketball) coach in 1987.

uniform of the Philadelphia 76ers and ruling the NBA during the 1960s with his ability to score a hundred points in one game (March 3, 1962, for example against the New York Nicks), haul down fifty-five rebounds or average 50.4 points per game as he did that season, in all winning the NBA's Most Valuable Player award a total of four times. By the late-fifties this league also had Wali Jones, Walt Hazzard, Big Bobby Jones and Ralph Heyward off the Overbrook High teams⁷⁸⁹. The importance of the contributions African-Americans were making to this sport were well showcased here in the borough during that period. And in general, big-time college-prospect players from Philadelphia schools were very much in evidence for a number of years, sometimes dominating the action. The Narberth courts were also attracting a large number of post-collegiate players from Philadelphia for quite a while because the Baker League targeting that group (begun in 1960), headquartered in West Philadelphia) had not yet been founded.

In 1963, Narberth's league was declared limited only to players either in high school or recent graduates. At the same time the league teams began their current practice of being named for their business sponsors.

So much interest had been generated by then in basketball activity here that many high school freshmen in the region did not yet dream about college or about prospects of playing in the NBA or ABA. Instead they dreamed about playing in another hoops paradise, the Narberth summer league, where ninth-graders like Tom Inglesby (now a suburban high school, coach) in 1966 were watching Howard Porter, Geoff Petrie and Artis Gilmore play. Inglesby did get to play at Narberth two years later, and now encourages all his best players to do so. The late- 1960s and early seventies also saw a number of other future NBA pros such as Andre McCarter, Joe Bryant, Willie Sojourner and Jimmie Baker active in Narberth's league.

Narberth's Golden Age as the top summer circuit spanned more than a decade from the mid and late-1950s through the 1960s, when the Hall of Famers were playing here and Bill White was the league director. However, young local talent soon asserted itself, in 1971 forming its own Lower Merion-Narberth Summer Basketball League. Upon its merger the following year with the existing league, this insurgent group of players contributed both its league name and its tilt toward drafting high school age youths which benefited the new hookup. A major turning point had been reached. Thus in 1972,

⁷⁸⁹ "As of old, Narberth League sporting a suburban flavor." By Don McKee, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 21, 1984, p. 41-M – quoting Harry Parker, the league director. See also *The Official Encyclopedia of Sports* by John L. Pratt and Jim Benagh, N.Y.: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1964.

basketball action in Narberth became again strictly a high school league, which it has remained. Ever since, it can safely be said that at least the best Main Line players are on Narberth's green-painted courts four nights a week in the summer.

By tradition, the key players of Narberth's league-leading team often find themselves atop the list of names mentioned for the all-Main Line teams. The league (all of its squads are Narberth teams, each with a name chosen by its sponsor) in its then new high school format soon was attracting 300 players, who paid a very small registration fee. Sponsors at the time paid \$200 for a Senior League team, \$100 for a Junior League team - most of that money earmarked for referees. These have ranged from the township high school athletic director to officials who are fixtures at the University of Pennsylvania's famed Palestra, indoor sports facility.

One very distinctive feature at Narberth is the Junior League, a rarity in summer leagues. While under formation in 1950, it played only Wednesday afternoon games. High school coaches keep a sharp eye on this nighttime league because its games enable them to watch these teams of junior high school players develop. And the Junior League coaches tend to be former players who are able to gain coaching experience this way. One of the guiding spirits of the Narberth Summer Basketball League, and one of its founders, is Ardmore's William Draper ("Mr. D."). An unpaid coach, of many of its teams for more than four decades, this black man in 1980 was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame.

Narberth Athletic Association

Although 1953 marked the much-discussed end of a sports era in Narberth, it also heralded the start of another. For the town fathers were prepared for the changeover that occurred with the grand exit of the Davis ball team from the spotlight it so often had occupied. Already by 1950, a number of youthful Narberth baseball teams were active here in various leagues, notably the Narberth Pack 212 team in the Main Line Cub Scout Baseball League, the Narberth Boys Club team in the Federation League and, that year, the American Legion team, in pursuit of a local title and managed by Vernon Fleck, resumed competitive play after a ten-year hiatus.

To build on that foundation and round things out, the Narberth Athletic Association, already in existence by 1914, had been re-organized in 1949, and it launched a plan so there would be a baseball team for boys in every age group.⁷⁹⁰ Thus in 1952 and 1953 - and most conspicuously in 1954 when for

⁷⁹⁰ In 1952, 4 teams were added: Colt, Pony, Cadet, American Legion (16-19).

the first time borough council backed a drive to assist that effect - a vast baseball program for young people in the town and from surrounding communities went into operation. The fund campaign for this program was launched in April 1954 and conducted jointly by that association and the Harold D. Speakman Post of the American Legion. They sent 8,000 letters about the drive and the new program to everyone having a Narberth post office address. This solicitation drive proved helpful inasmuch as baseball equipment and uniforms for some of the projected teams and insurance coverage for the boys was anticipated to cost more than the two groups could raise directly.

President of the newly reestablished Narberth Athletic Association was Samuel K. Barclay, a local insurance man whose office with its splashy logo in bold gold-leaf lettering on a large plate glass window memorably adorned the Victorian railroad station facing Ricklin's⁷⁹¹ at the pedestrian crossing level. Everybody knew him. That first group of managers who guided the teams and could be seen at the playground teaching the youngsters came from varied backgrounds, and their successors still do.

Sam Barclay piloted both the young men's team and the senior American Legion team, the latter including at least a half-dozen Lower Merion High School players that 1953 season. The Barclay-managed team for young men over eighteen, playing Sunday games in the Penn-Del League, represented the borough's attempt to fill the wide gap left by the departure of Davis' semi-pro team. Meanwhile, Sterling M. Chain, manager of the junior American Legion team, was burgess of Narberth and a commuter to his center-city trust company executive position. Manager of the Cadet League team affiliated with the Bryn Mawr-based Community Youth Association was John Minsker whose repertory included both Bach and baseball, for he was an English horn player in the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Narberth's American Legion post took readily to sponsoring this new program, which fit right in with goals the legion already was pursuing nationally. For after some lessening of interest of boys in baseball was noticed in this country in the mid-1920s, the legion had attempted to intervene to set things right by launching Junior Baseball nationwide starting and running such leagues under its "Americanization program." Promotion of athletics was seized upon at the time by the legion as a means of teaching Americanism - something it saw as a remedy to combat the Red Scare then widespread.

Joe Crowley, is athletic association president (since 1964). His current range of teams starts with seven-to-eleven-year olds for the T-Shirt team, and on up through the Colt team, to Junior Legion and Senior Legion.

⁷⁹¹ Editor's note: Ricklin's - former hardware store on the corner of Haverford and Essex.

As has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, the baseball-playing that goes on here today is of a different kind than formerly: the grandstands are fewer and smaller, reflecting different crowd expectations, now that kids and youths have taken over the sport on the Main Line and here. Nevertheless, it gave old-timers a jolt to see the Main Line Times headline: “Glory Days Return as Narberth Makes Playoffs,” (July 27, 1995, p. 23) when Narberth’s Delco League team clinched its first playoff since rejoining the league two years ago. This advance happened because the team lately scrambled to add talent – most notably southpaw pitcher Mike Sharkey from St. Joseph University and right-hander Ed Kimlim from the University of Pennsylvania.

Narberth Fire Department – Update

„⁷⁹²,occurred shortly before World War I caused when a youth foolishly lighted a match to see how much gas he still had in his tank whereupon the auto blew up and set his garage and Flannery’s barn afire.⁷⁹³ Then, the brake on an arriving Narberth firetruck gave way, and the vehicle slid into Flannery’s little pond and settled there at North Wynnewood Avenue below Sabine, with the engine end out of the water. The firetruck soon froze that way, and so it remained for most of the winter because no heavy equipment was available to pull it out. That predicament was said to be “Great for the kids.”

Narberth firemen have been called upon of course to perform many unusual tasks, a favorite of mine being the time they rescued a ravenously hungry American bald eagle (Aquila escaped from her Narberth backyard perch two days before and had had nothing to eat) from the roof of a Brookhurst Avenue house. The greatly relieved owner, who assisted the capture by waving a huge hunk of raw meat, was Narberth explorer and adventure writer Daniel P. Mannix.

Ricklin’s Hardware Store fire in January 1940 was the town’s biggest conflagration, and it destroyed far more than half of the large block of shops and apartments that developers Goodman & Clothier had erected with such great expense. Sixteen families were routed from their apartment dwellings on a bitter cold Sunday night in a blinding snow storm and six stores damaged in that fire fought by 200 firemen from five companies long after it was declared under control by Fire Chief Miller at 1:30 a.m. The basement blaze had gained great headway before being discovered by a passing youth (Ray Cabrey, Jr.) five hours earlier.

⁷⁹² Editor’s note: missing preceding pages

⁷⁹³ Mrs. Richard H. Pough interview 6-5-1985. Mrs. Phyllis Flannery Meier, 1-28-1985.

That big business block was well constructed but did not have up-to-date fire-proofing or fire-resistant features that, along with a type of alteration to the interior that had worsened these conditions, and a basement crammed with merchandise, contributed to rapid spread of the flames.⁷⁹⁴ Ardmore firemen used their tower to douse the fire from above, and one firemen suffered minor injuries. Second Alarmers from Montgomery County and Philadelphia dispensed food and hot beverages to firemen at the scene, and aid for the homeless was quickly forthcoming from Narberth's Emergency Relief. Two-thirds of that three-story business block had to be razed and cleared.

An April 1981 arson fire blazed through nine brick row houses in the 200 block of Woodbine Avenue, consuming five structures and leaving twenty-one persons homeless including a newborn infant.

But other kinds of disastrous events tested the mettle of our brigade as well. The SEPTA morning rush-hour commuter train crash at Narberth Station in November 1984 involved two trains heading for the city – a local that had overshot the station and was backing up around the curve without sending a flagman back to warn other trains, and an express train behind it running late on the same track. The local backed into the express at the station at 8:14 a.m., scrambling five carloads of passengers and injuring 147 people, five seriously. Another shocker was the mid-air collision between a helicopter and a private plane over Merion Public Elementary School while school was in session in April 1991 that killed seven including U.S. Senator John Heinz, four aircraft crew members and two Merion students, and injured many.

Today Narberth houses four pieces of equipment, its newest piece of apparatus being a 1995 KME pumper, which was housed amid ceremony in May 1996. This fire company tries to update and replaced one of its trucks every twenty years, according to Chief John Thomas. Besides the borough, this company serves most of Merion, Penn Valley, and Wynnewood, and is a back-up for surrounding fire companies when needed. This volunteer unit has belonged to the Lower Merion Township Fire Department since 1924.

Interestingly, the fire-fighting tradition of Narberth's Harsch family lives on through one of Theobald Harsch's grandsons who today⁷⁹⁵ is a volunteer fireman with the Wayne Fire Company, just as fire-fighting continues to be an outstanding family tradition here in the town. Narberth's two principal

⁷⁹⁴ Town and Township. Jan. 12, 1940, p.1 News article and Fire Chief John Miller's statement.

⁷⁹⁵ Editor's note: This probably was current as of the mid-1990s.

firefighting families at the present time – families with three generations of men who have served this brigade – are the Nultys, with Albert H. Nulty's son-in-law and two grandsons active and the Bill Hofstetter family including his son and grandson.⁷⁹⁶ Besides those standard-bearers, those families with two generations of Narberth firemen include Blessing, Constantine, Cotter, Deal, Gray (and his two sons), Henderson (and two sons), Hewitt, Jenkins, Kelley, Merkle, Miller, and Chief Thomas and his three sons. Fire chiefs run in the family of my near neighbors the Hornungs, except that their company is in Bala Cynwyd where the sirens are audible from here. Narberth's all-volunteer brigade of more than fifty members currently includes a medical doctor who attends fire calls after hours and a television news reporter who responds to the fire calls he does not report, as well as shopkeepers and craftsmen working in the immediate area. Protection extends to some 5500 households and 15,000 persons.

Animals

In 1952, there was a rabid fox scare in this area after two of several foxes killed in Lower Merion were found to be rabid and a gray fox attacked three people in Wayne. One animal was killed on February 10 after it terrorized the J. B. Briggs household, 1217 Hagys Ford Road, Penn Valley. That fox chased the dogs on the property and tried to follow one into the house through a door opened for the pet to enter. A family employee killed it with a shotgun and the remains were sent to Harrisburg for analysis. Other complaints were received from Penn Valley, Gladwyne and Villanova where foxes have been chasing chickens, disturbing sleepers by barking and scaring residents. A few days later a fox was seen running at large on the Penn Valley school grounds and at the Gladwyne Colony as the rabid fox problem worsened. Police handling fox carcasses began wearing heavy rubber gloves. And Patrolman John Boyd wounded a fox that had been worrying a dog at 1714 Flat Rock Road, Penn Valley but it got away. By the end of March, the problem had not abated and Narberth Borough ordered a dog quarantine. At the time, only six persons, all members of the Pennsylvania Trappers Association, were authorized to trap fox in Lower Merion.

In 1952, Narberth Fire Company had a pair of dalmatian mascots.

⁷⁹⁶ Letter from Jane Nulty Dixon, 10-1-1996.

Chapter 10 - 1975-1995

Politics in the Region	483
The IRON Republicans - Politics in Narberth	488
Politics: Borough Police Force, end of 1970s & in 1980	489
Borough Politics: Turmoil in 1981 and 1982	494
Earned Income Tax: Hot Topics of 1984.....	495
Spoils System Politics Endures.....	497
Favoring “Citizen Legislators” or Career Politicians – update	498
Civic Association Number Four — after 1975.....	502
The “Manhattanization” of Montgomery Avenue	504
The Recycled Public School	510
Infrastructure in Need of Repair	515
Legacy of Secession: Avoiding Distress	517
School Populations.....	518
Narberth Summer Basketball - after 1975	519
Scouting.....	522
A Girls’ Basketball League.....	523
Tennis, after 1975	524
A Tennis Update	525
Soccer.....	525
Busy Hoops Court: Symbol of Harmony near the City’s Edge.....	526
Narberth Ambulance – Update	528
Med-Evac Helicopters.....	534
Women's Lives.....	535
Volunteerism.....	536
Junior Women’s Community Club of Narberth	537
American Legion Post— update.....	538
Community Library: Update.....	539
Town Watch.....	540
Business, after 1975	542
Business District	543
Recycling.....	544
Growth Management - Yes or No.....	546
A Concern about Open Land	547
Historic Preservation in Narberth – 1980s.....	551
Lower Merion-Narberth Watershed Association.....	560
Volunteer Firemen	561

Politics in the Region

When the Democratic Party recaptured the United States Senate in 1986 amid the prolonged agony of the Reagan administration over its arms deals with Iran, hopes were raised among Democrats that the pendulum of public approval might be swinging their way. That year saw a surge of Democratic registrations in suburban areas closest to Philadelphia. Balancing this meanwhile was a counter-trend: upwardly mobile Democratic voters moving from Philadelphia to its newer outlying suburbs where land-development issues were paramount often registered Republican. Many of these issue-oriented voters switched parties as a way of taking up their new exurban lifestyle “to the manor born,” as if they believed they otherwise might not fit in. Also, the smooth-operating Republican field-workers tended to be the first to distribute party literature.

At the time the traditional voting pattern in the Philadelphia suburban counties of Montgomery, Delaware, Chester and Bucks for more than a century had been that GOP statewide candidates tended to capture a huge majority that wiped out the heavy Democratic vote from Philadelphia, and sometimes surpassed it. Democrats, though slowly increasing in the suburbs, scarcely made a dent at election time.

Montgomery County has more Republicans than any other county in the state, besides being the state's most prosperous GOP county. In the late-1980s, Montgomery County's Democrats were out registered by more than a two-to-one ratio which meant that the Republicans led by about 100,000 voters. Furthermore, nearly 100 of some 350 precincts had no Democratic committeemen in place - such foot soldiers being an essential ingredient of success in grassroots politics. The usual adjustment the Democrats made to such facts of life was that they slugged it out among themselves for the single guaranteed minority seat on the county's three-person Board of Commissioners. For the perennial underdog Democrats to see opportunity open up for themselves would seem to require massive defections from the GOP. Creating a problem for the Republican Party at the time, its county chairman since 1978, Robert B. Asher, a Springfield Township lawyer and former state Republican chairman, was found guilty of political corruption in a federal court trial in 1986, and served nine months in jail. Since then, although seldom in the limelight, this ex-felon has reportedly returned to playing a central role in county Republican politics behind the scenes.

Meanwhile, Montgomery County's most populous municipality, Lower Merion, had been for most of the twentieth century as much a bastion of Republicanism as any other constituency in the nation. A prosperous area that formerly was one of America's handful of richest townships, Lower

Merion Township has long produced a stream of Republican candidates for county, state and national offices. By contrast, until the 1970s, it only once had sent a Democrat to any local, state or national office: Haverford's George H. Earle 3d of a prominent Main Line family served as governor from 1935 to 1939. Despite that state Democratic win, which was termed a 'New Deal' victory, the three local suburban counties of Montgomery, Delaware and Chester stood steadfast at the time in their Republicanism, electing every local candidate and giving all state candidates on the GOP ticket heavy majorities.

Until the late-1980s and early-1990s, only a few Democratic township commissioners and borough councilmen and one candidate for governor (Milton J. Shapp, a Merion resident on his successful third try, during the Watergate era in 1974) have carried Lower Merion and Narberth. The township was such a GOP stronghold that, also prior to the late-1980s, Raymond Broderick was the only Republican who ever ran for governor (1970) who did not win the county. Yet he did carry Lower Merion. Narberth, known as the "hole in the donut" because of its geographical configuration in relation to the surrounding township, has always remained closely attuned to the political tenor of Lower Merion at any given time.

Registered Lower Merion Republican voters showed their most rapid increase between 1940 and 1960 when their numbers rose from just under 20,000 to 29,000. Emboldened by those increased numbers, and outraged at a 1959 courthouse scandal, a new group launched a reform of the county government from Lower Merion.⁷⁹⁷ These Republican crusaders were led by SEPTA board chairman/patent attorney James McConnon (then the township's most powerful Republican, and reputedly its "boss"), and by Judge William Vogel, stockbroker Elkins Wetherill and state Attorney General Eugene Alessandrini. Their action overthrew a group said to be:

An aging and corrupt Mayflower lineup of Old Guard WASPS ... centered around Fred C. Peters [county chairman], Uncle Ben Kramer of the Main Line Chronicle, and the Blue Bell Inn crowd.⁷⁹⁸

Of a New England conservative background, Peters had been a Montgomery County commissioner nineteen years, most of it as president, until 1955, a Main Line Times editorial

⁷⁹⁷ A new group – Philadelphia Magazine, December 1977. L. Berson.

⁷⁹⁸ A quote from Philadelphia Magazine, Dec. 1977, "Dumbo in Montco" by Lenora E. Berson, pp. 131-145 re Montgomery County GOP and the gubernatorial sweepstakes.

crediting him for the county's having no bonded indebtedness and the lowest (1 1/2 mills) tax rate of any county in the State.⁷⁹⁹

That eventual victory over the old guard by insurgent Republicans shifted the balance of county power over to the Lower Merion camp until the mid-1960s, when the rejuvenation of the county Republican party showed its most impressive gains so far with the political rise of Dick Schweiker, an ally of business executive and an outstanding GOP fundraiser Drew Lewis.⁸⁰⁰ The Schweiker-Lewis ascendancy returned the baton of leadership to the up-county exurbanites and WASPS, but not without complaints from Lower Merion. Montgomery County GOP power reached its late-twentieth century apex in autumn 1974, by which time the party held all the allowable county offices, controlled all the state and Congressional delegations and most of the governing bodies of the local municipalities and their school boards. Besides, it had Dick Schweiker as United States Senator, while the former Republican county chairman Drew Lewis was running for governor - against Milton Shapp, the Merion Democrat whose win that year knocked the wind from GOP sails temporarily.

In the same period between 1940 and 1960, the number of registered Democrats in Lower Merion grew from over 3,000 to 5,000. Since 1960, Democratic voters reached nearly 13,000 (1986), while the same interval saw a decline in the number of registered Republicans in the township from 29,000 to 22,500. Pennsylvania is second only to Florida in its “senior citizen” population. Older people in Lower Merion and Narberth who have been moving outside the immediate area to retire or who died in recent years have tended to be registered Republicans, and the younger people moving into these older suburbs very definitely come from Democratic backgrounds.

With the advent of the 1990s, some dramatic political changes occurred. In a contest to succeed Senator John Heinz after that Pittsburgh Republican was killed in a helicopter crash in Merion, Lower Merion's Harris Wofford, a John F. Kennedy administration Democrat living in Bryn Mawr and running on a health-care platform, carried this Republican county (and the township and borough) over former governor Dick Thornburgh in a successful United States Senate race in 1991. George Bush lost Montgomery County to Bill Clinton by 11,000 votes in 1992, Clinton thus becoming the first Democratic presidential candidate to win Montgomery County since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Meanwhile, Wynnewood lawyer Paul B. Bartle, the “one-man ruler of Montgomery county”⁸⁰¹ was

⁷⁹⁹ M. L. Times editorial “A Public Servant,” Nov. 22, 1955, p. 18.

⁸⁰⁰ Drew Lewis in 1996 was chairman of the Union Pacific RR.

⁸⁰¹ Philadelphia Inquirer editorial, May 24, 1991).

ousted in a bloody confrontation that ripped the party – he and his running mate being defeated in 1991 by Fox and Mele, a pair of unendorsed Republicans. One of them, Abington lawyer Jon D. Fox, quickly threw his hat into another race, in 1992 losing his bid to Congress to Democrat Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky of Narberth by 1100 votes (he trailed her by 6243 votes in Lower Merion and by 527 in Narberth).⁸⁰²

The NBC-TV journalist Mezvinsky thus became the first Pennsylvania woman to win election to the United States House without succeeding her husband. The year of the woman in politics, 1992 was called - a term that seems apt because the election of four new women marked a 200 percent increase of their gender in the Senate, while 24 new women (including Marjorie, mother of two, stepmother of four, who had taken in four Southeast Asian families, written a novel, and a dating how-to book) equaled a 68 percent increase in the House. In that Thirteenth District race, Montgomery County had elected a Democrat to represent it in Congress for the first time since 1916.

Another uproar ensued at the county level in 1993 when Mario Mele, a Republican businessman from Fort Washington and the new chairman of the county commissioners replacing Paul Bartle (who had been a commissioner twelve years, the last eight in the top position), began going his own way, and took to instituting policies aimed at promoting “good government.” Mele declared that the county GOP must adjust to a new era. He went on to reduce the number of county jobs for the first time in a decade. He has posted all job openings, and has opened contracts for bid. Also he has established a rule that bars the solicitor from political activity, has closed the Higher Education and Health Authority which he claimed is a hotbed of patronage, and he plans a county employees' handbook that would discourage nepotism.

So there has definitely been a change in the political weather at the county seat - both inside the Republican Party and with regard to recent strides made by Democratic politicians. Meanwhile, Republicans did well in 1993 races in the township and borough, recovering some of their recently lost momentum. The Bartle name has surfaced again prominently: Paul's brother Frank R. Bartle now heads the county Republican Party. And it is a hopeful sign that in the past few years, county Republicans have been working hard to give their committeemen more of a say in picking county-wide candidates, not just be restricted to giving their rubber-stamp approval to selections already made and announced to them, as formerly.

⁸⁰² Election figures – Montgomery County Board of Elections.

But by the autumn 1994 races for United States Senate and House, the Lower Merion/Narberth Democrats had the numbers. And that surely gave the local GOP cause worry about the future. True, the incumbent Democratic Senator Harris Wofford lost his state-wide reelection bid. But he handily won Lower Merion by 14,493 to 10,368 over Santorum; and Wofford won Narberth by 1,087 to Richard Santorum's 686. The same thing happened to Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky in autumn 1994. She lost her Congressional seat to Jon Fox but she won Lower Merion by 14,261 to 10,238, and she won Narberth by 1,098 to Fox's 670 votes.

Politics today in Narberth is becoming a more level field. In the process, politics is also re-positioning its limits. Does that mean, as some close observers believe, some unpleasantness is likely to erupt as the old emphasis on garnering votes in a sweeping, absolutist manner is slowly replaced by other strategies? One hint of an answer comes from the way the local GOP recently reasserted its old unquestioned dominance of borough politics in the opening pages of its Centennial book that went to press in autumn 1994 before the election. For instead of highlighting the whole borough council or the town's highest-ranking elected official, namely the council president⁸⁰³), it spotlighted a career politician, Mayor Dennis Sharkey, as well as our Republican state senator and our Republican state representative, while ignoring any politician of the other major party (except the governor), most especially the Democratic congresswoman from Narberth. Apparently, Narberth Republican party leaders are still in denial that a level political field, a "first," now exists here. During the 1995 borough centennial year, the senior member of the town council and its most "visible" member was the naturally extroverted, tall and friendly Chester C. (Chet) Tyson, Jr. He hails from a typical Narberth background among those of us born here before World War II, insofar as both he and his Narberth father were also railroad men. The older Tyson, like Chet, was an elder at Narberth Presbyterian Church. Chet Tyson is a retired supervisory employee of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Conrail who clocked forty years' service with those companies, some of it spent bossing road crews. A very active public servant on matters concerned with recreation, Tyson left council at the end of 1995 after twelve years....

⁸⁰³ Businessman James Clark, a dedicated public servant for a dozen years, an ex-Navy man who heads his own real estate firm in Narberth, is a devout Catholic, and has overcome physical infirmities to provide service without complaint.

The IRON Republicans⁸⁰⁴ - Politics in Narberth

The split in the Narberth GOP in the mid-1970s during the late phase of all-Republican rule goes back to Arthur L. (Mike) Cooke, Jr., a free spirit, second-generation Narberth councilman, a popular Santa Claus in many a borough ceremony, and burly ex-Marine who became known as the first person in memory to come up with “No” vote. It meant he was not considered a team player. So the Republican Party decided not to support him for reelection after his first four years. As a result, a group dissatisfied with the party's endorsed slate of candidates and calling itself the Independent Republicans for an Open Narberth (IRON) was formed.

IRON was made up of Cooke and his supporters including the then mayor Wolcott Merrow running for council, three other IRON candidates, two of Narberth's six GOP committeepersons and other Republicans who felt shut out when their Party did not endorse Cooke for the 1977 primary. The regular party organization, criticized by IRON for its practice of allowing persons to belong to and vote on the committee which endorses their own candidacy, meanwhile had the support of three other councilman including the council president who became locked in a feud with their fellow party members over the issue of endorsements versus giving voters a choice.

Neither side among the Republicans chalked up a clear victory in the primary, although in November Cooke was reelected (How can anybody vote against Santa Claus?⁸⁰⁵) and Merrow also - to his new post. But in that stormy context, so was a Democrat, the first to hold an elective office in the borough since the 1920s.

Like his much-loved civically astute father, Cooke was a dynamically moral individual walking a tightwire. Mike Cooke in this famous instance of a conscience vote manifested a courage of his convictions that is always salutary wherever it appears. Such courage is valuable not only because it is so scarce but also because it is so necessary - both in politics and for sheer survival in this life. Ever since the IRON episode, however, Narberth's Republican-controlled council has taken the smoother, easier “safer” option of voting as a block on matters put before it.

⁸⁰⁴ Editor's note: This section is entitled by Vicky as: Chapter 10, No 1: Politics & Group activity, b. Politics in Narberth.

⁸⁰⁵ Said to the author and Peter Grove by Kay West on February 28, 1995 on the way home from a council meeting.

Politics: Borough Police Force, end of 1970s & in 1980

Whether a Narberth Police Department remained viable became the Number One hot topic for our Borough Council throughout the 1970s, and into the early-1980s. A very vocal minority claimed the borough should relinquish all police responsibility to Lower Merion Township. More than once during the '70s, council approached the township commissioners about whether they would assume comprehensive police protection here. Such proposals usually were scuttled by our councilmen as too pricey. But as costs of the existing arrangement kept spiraling upward and seemed poised this time for a giant leap, council launched the second such probe in November 1979, targeting a 1980 changeover. Shock waves were soon felt as a sharp division in council between opposing sides on this question exploded into public view. At the time, our all-but-one Republican town council was negotiating a new contract with four Grade A patrolmen on Narberth's five-member police force. The fifth member, Sgt. Charles Myers, was covered by a separate contract.

The bugaboo that brought the very existence of Narberth's tiny police force into question was the speed with which police work was becoming sophisticated and expensive. It just seemed so difficult for the borough to keep pace economically.

The year 1960 had seen the borough hand over an unprecedented amount of its law enforcement responsibilities to the township. As a result, Narberth had access to 29 essential services including use of the township's jail and dispatch network, support services such as back-up police coverage on routine calls, detective work, emergency medical services and animal control. Still, the wages and the benefits' cost kept rising. The situation reached a point that, by 1975, it seemed Narberth would have to make do with one less patrolman. George A. Bailey was then council president. And he spearheaded an effort to start a dialog about contracted police protection for Narberth. Those talks were derailed at the time because the borough said Lower Merion wanted too much. Similar talks in autumn 1979 faltered for more complex reasons.

Had Lower Merion taken over the policing of Narberth at that time for such a three-year agreement, the borough was prepared to pay \$125,000 the first year for that service, while holding onto the \$9,000 remaining in its police budget to be earmarked toward the salary of the one employee being retained [since] none of Narberth's patrolmen would be absorbed by Lower Merion [and] parking-meter inspection and related fees would still be in the borough's hands. By way of explanation as to why no Narberth police officers would be carried over into Lower Merion's ranks, it was noted that Narberth in

the past had recruited as policemen many of the people who failed Lower Merion's test. James McCaughey, Lower Merion police superintendent at the time, saw no problem in absorbing the workload although it would require their hiring five additional policemen. Narberth had made a better offer than previously, but on a different tax base. Narberth residents were paying \$26.88 a year for police costs and Lower Merion citizens \$62.24 a year. And this should jibe.

In the matter of jurisdiction, some councilman, led by borough council president Mike Cooke, were absolutely unwilling to surrender council's control of borough police matters. For this was seen as the first step to the borough's losing independence. Mike Cooke told the Lower Merion commissioners that he flatly opposed the switchover of police control on those grounds. Some other councilmen did not oppose the move to give up our Narberth police force. For the takeover to happen, our self-governed town would have to accept that Narberth's police coverage must be subject to such programs as Lower Merion saw fit to draw up. Council could have input but not the power to override the township police superintendent's administrative prerogative.

So, when it came to a vote on that emotional issue in December 1979 before a lively crowd of pro-retention residents, council stood behind its president Mike Cooke and voted four-to-three to keep the borough police force. It also decided to up their pay and benefits in a new three-year contract. The future possibility remained, meanwhile, that the commissioners might one day cancel the working agreement on police-related matters as it stood. Adopted in 1960 and updated in 1976, this agreement required the township to give six months' notice to the borough before termination.

As mentioned, for some people, the controversial matter of whether to keep the police seemed like tampering with Narberth's identity as a separately governed town. But spearheaded at that time by McQuiston, the pro-merger forces including Joseph Crowley and Stephen Wilson, argued meanwhile that a new contract with Narberth's police would overburden an already shrinking tax base and point the way to taxing people out of their homes. One possibility mentioned was that, if two Narberth policemen were to retire at the same time, the police pension fund could collapse. The most detailed contemporary account of this controversy (Bob Calandra's otherwise very useful discussion. Main Line Times January 31, 1930) is mistaken, I believe, in suggesting that the pro-merger forces represented the progressive option and in assuming the other group was merely "parochial" for wanting to keep the borough police.

As a local resident not yet interested in politics at the time, I felt only the outer ripples of this controversy. Still, it seemed to me and others in my immediate family a clear signal of the first step in a "sooner or later" process whereby the borough would be totally absorbed by its external neighbor, the

township. A couple of years later, when I did become more involved in attending our civic association events and borough council meetings, I recall my pleasant surprise in realizing that the merger of those two governments was in no way viewed as “inevitable.” I also came to believe that with much hard work and a little luck, our small independent police force might remain no less viable than the borough itself. I personally feel indebted to the far-seeing late Mike Cooke for being the brave standard-bearer for independence - the outward sign of that independence being our police - during this stormy period. Without Mike Cooke's leadership at that crucial time, Narberth would have no police force today.

With its very existence at stake, the Narberth Police Department and its performance came under closer scrutiny than ever before in 1979 and 1980. Local comment did not range from friendly and approving to sarcastic and downright hostile. It almost exclusively was one or the other. Either our police could do no wrong. Or they could do no right. Curiously there was virtually no public discussion at this time of a middle ground that would have advocated keeping a local police department. And reforming it.

Certainly there's a cozy feel about living in a small town that has its own police. Cops are the public servants the townspeople know best. Friendly greetings are exchanged on a daily basis with a familiar patrolman on the beat. And until recently many Narberth police were second-, even third-generation residents of the town. Such applicants probably even received preferential treatment at the time. Professionalism is slow to gain a foothold in such an atmosphere.

Meanwhile, the police-must-go faction was piling up points like sandbags around an embattled position. “Some officers can't even write a report,” a few contended. And there was constant carping over performance. The most notorious incident involved a veteran Narberth patrolman who on the evening of April 26, 1978 ignored an order. It was an order in effect by then three years that banned Narberth officers from responding to calls outside the borough unless Lower Merion's in-house dispatcher sent them over the township line due to absolute necessity. On this occasion, Officer Paul F. Grow went charging across Montgomery Avenue to assist on a Lower Merion burglary call although dispatch did not request it. Arriving, Grow saw a 17-year-old youth with a six-pack of beer. When ordered to halt by that officer, the teenager dropped the beer and ran. Grow fired a shot and found himself suspended three days without pay.

A more poignant incident around the same period involved a Narberth patrolman on crossing-guard duty who twice ignored a radio dispatch order to report to a Narberth address where a child had labored breathing. Both times he explained he could not leave his post (reportedly he was operating

under orders from borough council and knew that Lower Merion was supposed to respond to that call in this circumstance). Lower Merion did respond in a flash; but the child died after arriving at Lankenau Hospital. Some people also blamed Narberth Police for not keeping an eye closely enough on the Fieldhouse at the playground so as to have been able to prevent a rash of vandalism there.

And then there was George A. Bailey's 1980 contention that "Twenty or twenty-five years ago, we could say we had police. What we have now is a group of young men serving a small function. We've got a bunch of guys out there watching." Perhaps he was thinking about the tale of the Narberth patrolman told in 1980 by then councilman Stephen Wilson, a one-time assistant district attorney for the county. According to Wilson, a Narberth cop went up to a township policeman and said he saw an acquaintance of his smoking dope. Asked why are you telling me, the Narberth officer replied, "I thought you'd like to know" - the strong implication being that Lower Merion police are the crime-fighters.

During an eighteen-month period ending in December 1979, Narberth police got 2,712 calls through the Lower Merion dispatcher and were dispatched 2,340 times, the township police responding 1,129 times. Of those, Lower Merion was assisting Narberth 912 times, going in alone the remainder of the times. Lower Merion responded 28 times during the midnight to 8 a.m. shift.

At this time, too, both the instruction and supervision of Narberth policemen came under heavy fire, providing a target for stinging verbal attacks as well. (Barbs included those directed against cops who graduate "inevitably" at the bottom of their training class.) The Lower Merion and Philadelphia Police Departments train our officers. But their instruction ceases with graduation, although they may take refresher courses. For Narberth cops do not participate in the intense rookie training under a seasoned policeman that new Lower Merion and Philadelphia officers can count on as part of their formation. As McCaughey put it, "Riding with the veteran is very important. Not everybody learns at the same rate."

Supervision proved to be the thornier problem, however. Anxiety about it surfaced in a hundred different ways. One symptom of this pervasive unease was the oft-quoted remark of one Narberth patrolman to Steve Wilson when he approached that councilman to lobby his support for renewal of the borough police contract then on the table. The unnamed cop, expressing his concern, said: "About the upcoming vote, we don't know if we're doing something wrong. We don't think we're doing anything wrong, but if we're doing something wrong maybe we need better supervision."

Borough police matters come under the direct supervision of the mayor. Mayor J. Jeffries Eyster, a retired investment analyst, had been in office then for two years. Not a contentious man and really likeable he felt he was in complete control of the police but, as with virtually every other key political issue here at the dawn of the new decade of the '80s, public opinion was deeply divided on Eyster's role - indeed that of any Narberth mayor - as the Chief of Police, hizzoner's other sworn duty.

At issue was whether the Narberth police really listen to the mayor, whether he was in complete control of his five-man unit, and whether they report everything to him or only tell him what they want him to know. Also some council members complained they couldn't get information they requested. Eyster's ready answer: "Tell them to ask me and I'll get it," referring to specific police reports. As for the monthly synopsis of police work the officers hand in each month, some councilmen objected that they do not know more about individual incidents than that they were "adjusted."

George A. Bailey, long considered a power behind the scenes in local GOP politics at least through the 1980s, is quoted in contemporary accounts as claiming that a large part of his term on council was spent unearthing facts about the Narberth police. He often encountered roadblocks to his search and often felt there was an inappropriate mantle of protection around the police. When he did finally obtain some difficult-to-retrieve records, he realized it was less important what was on them than what wasn't there. Yet amid all this criticism, the integrity of the Narberth police force was not being maligned. Elected officials instead were questioning how the local police functioned together as a unit.

No sooner had the borough signed a new three-year contract for \$485,000 with its four-man police force than another major police-related event of 1980 occurred. This was the township's notification in March that it was revamping its agreement with the borough about police services it provides. When more detailed information was received, the borough accepted an amended form of the proposal in its end-of-year deliberations about its proposed 1981 budget. It was expected that the new Lower Merion board of commissioners taking office in January 1980 might request the township manager to draw up a new document for Narberth to consider.

The then township manager Keith Frederick declared the best method of police protection of course would be if Lower Merion assumed complete control. But he said he understood Narberth's not wanting to give up the police: "We say we would continue either way. I'm not going to get into contracting the whole police function. As far as I'm concerned it's a dead issue."

Lower Merion's new document was fully aired in June, and by November the commissioners voted to increase the price of protecting Narberth from \$5,000 that year to \$28,200 in 1981. Narberth's

offer in the immediately preceding discussions had been \$25,500, but it was prepared for something larger if necessary. The way these figures were arrived at involved, among other things, subtracting the figure for Narberth Fire Company services to Lower Merion Township, where it made 72 percent of its calls in 1980, from the Narberth bill for the township's police service. This is the net cost to the borough for that police service. Explained borough manager William J. Furber, "We're more in the ballpark with \$28,000. We certainly gain a lot more from them than they do from us, obviously." As December 1980 drew to a close, peace between warring factions on council seemed a definite possibility.

Over the years, talk has tended to be scarce about the merging of police forces in nearby suburban communities. A recent instance of it occurred when the League of Women Voters held a brown-bag luncheon to discuss the subject in a timely fashion early in 1994 just after the county seat of Media and the townships of Upper Providence and Lower Providence, all in Delaware County, formed a joint authority to discover ways of saving money by such things as joint purchases and mergers.

Borough Politics: Turmoil in 1981 and 1982⁸⁰⁶

But the last days of 1980 meant that 1981 and 1982 were almost here. And when they did finally come, they ushered in two chaotic years that saw probably the greatest political turmoil this tiny borough has ever known. Governance went reeling during this time, with a phenomenal number of resignations by elected officials and hired help alike. Threaded through this strange tale is the saga of borough patrolman Paul F. Grow, the public servant so many people loved to hate.

Spring and fall elections were the headliner political story in Narberth in 1981. The sudden flare-up and growing drama of the patrolman Grow story played counterpoint to this by autumn. Its swelling crescendo just would not go away and things got hotter and hotter early the following year. Suddenly the top seat and almost every other political job in Narberth was up for grabs - by Republicans - with the lone Democrat banished. Ironically this happened soon after the Democrat scored his greatest triumph, cutting through the red tape of SEPTA, Conrail and Amtrak bureaucracy to see a new Narberth rail station built - credit for which was angrily denied him in public by one of the councilmen. The Old Guard had set its sights on a new decade of all-Republican rule. They could almost taste the sweetness of it.

⁸⁰⁶ Editor's note this section is part of what Vicky had named: Chapter V—Govt by Elected Town Council
2. Chronology: Borough Politics: Turmoil in 1981 and 1982.

After the revolving political door period, which followed the 1981 defeat at the polls of borough council's only Democrat in his first bid for re-election, the longer-term strategy for fending off future threats from other Democratic aspirants had clearly come under new pressure. Changes resulted in a new common wisdom for the next decade, which apparently was that a complete defanging of would-be Democratic opposition could be accomplished only through an elaborate political accord within the all-Republican council.

By the mid-1980s, this outward accord was still running smoothly - to the point where borough council members at regular public sessions were more likely to counter a probing question from the audience with a sharp and sometimes angry "How long have you been living here?" retort to a new resident than to disagree publicly with one another on anything of importance. During the 1980s, in striking contrast to the 1970s, the Republican council spoke with one voice. By the early-1990s, with another lone Democrat again on council, the Republicans continued to speak in unison. There was no apparent change in policy. What one looked for at the time, and sometimes got, was some limited tactical fine-tuning.

Earned Income Tax: Hot Topics of 1984

Some winters produce heavy snow and ice storms, others not. Discussion of an "earned income tax" recurs in similar cycles, unpredictably. The year 1984 blew in a torrent of such talk. Borough finances were strained as a result of rising costs of many kinds of essential services, and the municipality had been skimming by postponing its capital improvements. So, for the fourth time in twelve years (the second time the question had been put to a vote), Narberth considered the possibility of instituting an earned-income tax, and tried to gauge how the tax would affect finances and how the 4,496 local residents felt about the matter.

Three municipalities on the fringes of the Main Line (but no major community along the "Line" itself) had such a tax augmenting their real estate taxes - Bridgeport, West Conshohocken and Willistown [Chester County]. This 1 percent wage tax (.7 percent in the case of Willistown) enabled them to keep real estate millage low. It accounted at the time for a third of Bridgeport borough's budget and almost half of the neighboring West Conshohocken budget. Citizens of West Conshohocken had little objection when the tax was approved, out of fiscal necessity, in the early-1970s.

But at the same period, and during the ensuing decade, such a much-discussed proposal faced stiff opposition in Narberth. Discussions were held here in 1979, but when the matter was brought to a

vote in 1982, Borough Council rejected the tax by a four to three vote. Such a tax is levied on all working people's wages and on the net profits of a municipality's businesses. Nonresidents working in the town also pay unless they are similarly taxed elsewhere. In 1982, all except 206 of Pennsylvania's 2,638 municipalities had an earned-income tax. Of these, 122 of them were in the suburban Philadelphia counties of Montgomery, Chester, Delaware and Bucks. As a fiscal tool, this levy has been in existence since the state legislature passed the Local Tax Enabling Act in 1965. However, municipalities close to Philadelphia are less likely to have this tax because a 1932 law, the Sterling Act (amended in the 1970s), sets Philadelphia's wage tax guidelines and lets the city wage-tax of then 4 and 96/100 percent take precedence over any comparable tax in a local community. It was estimated that Narberth might collect \$445,554 at a 1 percent rate during one year. It was thought that people working in Philadelphia and therefore exempt, numbered 405. Some councilmen saw it as a fair way to increase revenue.

Councilmen Donald E. Hall and Mike Cooke had introduced the measure repeatedly. Their reasoning was that the levy would ease the real estate tax burden of people on fixed incomes, and tax those most able to pay, and the tax revenues would increase as their salaries did. Real estate taxes and business-privilege taxes (on gross sales) could be lowered, in turn. One of the councilmen (Edward McBryan) opposed the tax as unfair because it might affect no more than 25 percent of the people. He declared it would discourage businesses from locating here as well as home-buyers. The business community did seem sharply opposed, among other reasons because each of their employees would have to pay the tax. At the time the Pennsylvania State Data Center in Middletown supplied data showing a 4,496-resident borough population, of which 17 percent or 769 persons were 65 or older. The working-age population from 18 to 64 years of age, were 61 percent (2,769 persons), and 21 percent or 958 were under eighteen.

Over the previous fifteen years, faced with a rise in the cost of services, the borough had economized by their non-funding of capital improvements. These had been kept to a bare minimum. One councilman argued that the earned income tax was unnecessary because the Narberth public school building would be paid off by 1986, but the borough manager pointed out that such an amount would not be substantial. Alternatives to this tax were seen at the time to be a trash fee and the raising of real estate taxes repeatedly. The opposition to the earned income tax declared that it would turn Narberth into a "Saint Petersburg North," referring to the high concentration of retired people in that Florida community. Of course, [as indicated earlier,] Pennsylvania itself has the second-largest number of retired persons of any of the states, second only to Florida.

So, the measure was defeated. Eventually, the tax-cut fever of the 1980s became widespread, quieting down these discussions.

In 1994 and again in 1995, a bill was introduced in the State legislature (as a result of initiatives of a Chester County task force appointed by the county commissioners three years ago) that would allow school districts and municipalities to shift away from property taxes to income taxes.⁸⁰⁷ Thus while cutting dependence on property levy, a menu of taxation would be created enabling municipalities and schools to choose among various taxing options. Support across party lines was forthcoming in 1995 from legislators in Philadelphia, Montgomery, Delaware and Bucks counties, the Pocono region and Allegheny County. Such a bill is reportedly a plus especially to the counties of Montgomery, Delaware and Chester which are undergoing property reassessments in 1995.

Spoils System Politics Endures

Spoils system politics is about as easy to eradicate in the American suburbs as dandelions. Certainly the League of Women Voters of Lower Merion and Narberth sent a strong message on the matter when in 1986 it twice publicly criticized the Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners for making appointments to its public boards and commissions based on party politics rather than qualifications - these two separate complaints believed to be the first time this watchdog group had ever stepped forward to question the board's workings. The same "pattern" has been apparent in appointments to an array of public-panel appointments in Narberth - a topic aired with more heated discussion than usual just after the autumn 1993 elections when the enrollments of the two major political parties had become practically even.

The spoils system in American politics of winner take all has a tenacious hold in Narberth. This system was already in effect when Narberth's independent rule began. The infusion of Progressive Era thinking here just before World War I had a chastening effect upon this settled way of doing things at least for a while. However, when the civil service system was put in place during the New Deal, public monopolies such as the Post Office system came to the fore. Thus, it gradually became easier to take for granted at the grassroots level other kinds of monopolies such as the continuing one-party rule of a municipality such as ours and also to tolerate as perfectly normal the long tenure of "professional"

⁸⁰⁷ A new bill, Philadelphia Inquirer, July 5, 1995, by Nancy Peterson.

politicians as the grassroots level - something that a half-century or more ago the Narberth citizens so often vociferously resisted.

Today we are seeing the breakup on all sides of big monopolies. Now not only the phone company but even the Post Office has its competitors. Yet so far the borough government has taken no hint from this nor has it seen any compelling reason to give up clinging tightly to its old monopoly and spoils system for service on the various borough committees rather than spreading the jobs around to the most qualified people who apply for them. A typical refrain heard from “old pols” in public session when such matters of appointments come up for discussion is still sometimes heard:

Here are the resumes. Shall we bother to look at them? We know who the committee candidates are.

It is only the growing public criticism of this state of affairs, sometimes voiced by residents at public council meetings here in the town, that is new.

Favoring “Citizen Legislators” or Career Politicians – update

Three decades elapsed before someone with political connections as strong or stronger than former magistrate Otto Duer's would again become a candidate for public office in the borough - in this case, appointed to the job, then elected and reelected. Even so, some people might question whether it “meant” anything one way or another to have a career politician in office for an extended period. If anything, Narberth voters’ sensitivities to such matters seem to have dulled with the passage of time. For Narberth has a venerable and praiseworthy tradition of electing its local leaders for short seasons - choosing people from the endangered species of “citizen legislators” who hold regular jobs rather than occupying a paid political post outside the borough as Narberth's current long-time mayor does.

Dennis J. Sharkey was a candidate with alliances when he became Narberth mayor. In that respect, he was cut from different cloth than previous mayoral prospects. True, he was similar in that, like so many of the town councilmen over the years, he was both appointed initially to his job and is a long-time (or in his case, lifelong) resident of the town. The crucial difference from his predecessors is that Sharkey may have been the first rank and file political worker ever to receive the Narberth mayoral position as a reward for services rendered to his political party.

In contemporary accounts, area GOP sources were quoted the evening Sharkey’s appointment took effect in 1982 as saying the new mayor was a “behind the scenes mover and shaker” and a “GOP

man who has finally been paid his dues.”⁸⁰⁸ The appointee was further described as being a key member of the committee which helped Anita B. Brody (an ex-Democrat) to be elected as the county's first female Common Pleas Court judge. (She is now a United States District Court judge.) He also helped, the account said, the then newly-elected District Justice Caroline Cully Stine reach her post (which covers the Narberth area) by serving as a member of her election committee. Both judges were reportedly on hand for the swearing in of this committeeman and former local constable. The lone councilman (Cooke) voting against Sharkey's appointment was quoted by the press as saying he “didn't like the way the selection was made,” while one councilman voting in favor reportedly commented: “No person should hold two offices,” referring to the elected committeeman's post.

Mayor Sharkey took office with a mandate to pursue a much-needed reappraisal and shoring up of the then maligned Narberth police. Son of a well-liked Narberth landscape-gardening contractor of Irish Catholic heritage, this tall dapper lifelong bachelor purchased his first house shortly before making his successful 1993 reelection bid which also was the first time his candidacy was contested. Whether Sharkey truly has been a rainmaker would be difficult to say. But some of the more prominent local Republican party faithful have been rewarded during this mayor's term in office. Not overlooked was one native Narberthian who, no sooner had he finished a long period of local government service that saw his rise from tax collector and borough manager to council president, than his son, civil litigation lawyer William J. Furber, Jr. of our town's zoning hearing board, was appointed a Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas judge (in 1993) filling a vacancy created by Judge Anita B. Brody's appointment to the federal bench. Of an old Protestant family living here four generation starting with Bill senior's parents, the proud father held the bible for his son to take the oath of office. Sharkey's immediate predecessor as mayor, J. Jeffries Eyster, who came, out of the long-established Presbyterian leadership tradition in the borough, can be considered the quintessential public servant of the postwar era in Narberth. For Eyster remains Narberth's classic example of a “citizen legislator” who even a dozen years after he last held public office here, still personified the spirit of volunteerism in Narberth more strikingly than any other individual, due to his continuing active leadership of N. I. C. E.

The widely publicized on-the-job capers of Patrolman Paul Grow were reportedly a major contributing factor to the apparent fall from grace within his own party of Mayor Eyster, and of his sudden resignation just after reelection. But soon after that, the then new Mayor Sharkey's police-

⁸⁰⁸ GOP man is paid his dues. Main Line Chronicle, 1982.

supervising capabilities were also put to the test, in the scandal of a patrolman, thought to be exemplary who, it is widely believed, sold dope to minors (his activity uncovered in a surveillance operation of Lower Merion police, it was rumored). This officer, of an old Narberth family, quietly left the force with the approval of council, and no public comment was ever made about the reason for his swift departure. So, the new mayor showed the luck of the Irish in weathering his first major crisis in office for the news media never reported that wayward cop episode.

Dennis Sharkey's career advancement at the county level flourished during the era of iron-man commissioner Paul Bartle of Wynnewood. Sharkey became a trustee of Montgomery County Community College, and he also still is a salaried member of the county's three-person Board of Assessment Appeals.⁸⁰⁹ In 1992, the county commissioners began to suggest that the job of appeals board chair be designated part-time,⁸¹⁰ and its salary reduced accordingly because it would require less work when the administrative and appellate powers were separated - a division the county commissioners are still seeking in 1996. After the chairman left in a dispute with the commissioners in July 1996, Sharkey and the other remaining board member, Floriana Bloss ran the board until Bloss was voted chairperson a month later without saying if she would agree to the separation. Explaining his vote (which went two-to-one in favor of Bloss, with the Democratic minority member preferring an outsider), Republican commissioner Richard S. Buckman declared that either Sharkey or Bloss could have handled the job.⁸¹¹ But, he said, because Bloss is no longer involved in politics, he favored her over Sharkey. Sharkey's current "involvements" of course include his being Narberth's mayor and head of the Lower Merion/Narberth GOP. For immediately after his successful reelection bid as mayor in 1993, Dennis Sharkey in late autumn that year rose from vice-chair to acting chair, then was elected to the coveted post of chairman of the Republican Party of Lower Merion and Narberth, besting as his rival for that job a local lawyer. Odds are that by the late-1990s, Sharkey is his own adviser and reports directly to county Republican chairman Frank Bartle, brother of Sharkey's old ally Paul Bartle.

Politics runs in the Sharkey family. The mayor's sister, Republican committeewoman Gerry Sharkey Walker, is married to businessman and local playground recreation booster Edwin O. Walker, Jr., a 1990 appointee to Narberth borough council who was later elected, and reelected in 1995.

⁸⁰⁹ Editor's note: Dennis Sharkey, Narberth's longest serving mayor, died in 2015. He served five terms beginning in the early 1980s until stepping aside in 2005.

⁸¹⁰ Main Line Times, Jan. 28, 1993, article by Joan Toenniessen.

⁸¹¹ Philadelphia Inquirer article by Karin E. Q. Miller, Aug. 9, 1996.

Meanwhile, the electronic business machines equipment service and supply firm that Dennis J. Sharkey was starting as he entered politics is said to service the business machines used by both Lower Merion Township and the borough, and local Democrats have been unable to discover any illegality in that. As for the celebrated and often victorious local girls' senior-division basketball team, Sharkey's Machine that lights up the outdoor courts on summer evenings, is as close as Narberth comes to owning up to any form of machine politics.

Partisan politics, a rampant trend nationally at present, has certainly had an areawide resurgence and Democrats, Republicans and the League of Women Voters (chaired by a Republican) have complained about this while Dennis Sharkey has headed the local GOP. One minority-party Lower Merion commissioner recently even decided not to run for reelection due to the oppressive climate such partisanship has engendered declaring that: "it feels like there's an iron fist that guides the board of commissioners."⁸¹² In another instance of partisanship Sharkey's name specifically came up in a rare public spat among Lower Merion commissioners. They squabbled over a piece of 1997 Republican campaign literature because it contained the official township seal, which though not illegal, does have a certain impropriety⁸¹³ for the literature stated in fine print that the mailing was paid for by the Lower Merion-Narberth Republican Committee Chairman, Dennis J. Sharkey. Shouting ensued at the Commissioners' meeting over the impropriety question, and at least one resignation from the party by a GOP resident of the township resulted from the incident - this individual the president of the Lower Merion Historical Society declaring at the noisy commissioners' meeting that he saw the impropriety as a moral issue, and as a matter of doing something deceitful.⁸¹⁴

Sharkey...has the gift of an easy-going temperament. He is one of those lucky people to whom life never seems to present itself as a struggle. In my presence, this mayor once casually remarked to another politician that he never reads a report that is more than one page long. Taking himself no more seriously in public office than Ronald Reagan did, Sharkey apparently has sought to be liked by making his own job look glamorous and easy. Also, he appears never to have felt the need to dominate, and in the 1980s used to doze off at council meetings fairly often. Paradoxically, yet ironically, Dennis Sharkey now seems fated always to be indissolubly linked with the 1990s, the period when tensions rose to unprecedented levels between the two major political parties in both the town and surrounding township,

⁸¹² Editor's insert from the author's writing:

⁸¹³ Philadelphia Inquirer, "No seal of approval in Lower Merion." article by Anne Barnard, July 18, 1997

⁸¹⁴ Resignation of Gene Silver (Penn Wynne), Main Line Times, June 5, 1997.

and when the number of registered voters became nearly equal on both sides of the aisle for the first time this century for still in this politically crucial decade, Sharkey's GOP held almost total control here in the borough, loosening its grip very slightly only in the township.

Civic Association Number Four — after 1975

By the mid-1970s, for Narberth Civic Association members, the rich sense of “identity” in living in a small town and of “knowing who we are” created confidence enough for true creativity in some of the projects undertaken. That new association flourished during its first sixteen years during which time, as part of its normal routine, it had a real role in coordinating the community and many of its activities, and acting as a watchdog for all the residents.

The group sponsored the celebration (1982) of the three hundredth anniversary of the settlement of our area by the Welsh, sponsoring also the annual Memorial Day Parade which is such an important event in this borough, the summer concerts, and American Legion activist Dewey L. Stuart's Veterans Day Parade.

But the structure of our community changed, and somehow our role became less essential.

By 1988, the association began to come apart at the seams, the immediate cause being due to a lack of meetings. Worried at this apparently sudden turn of events, the then president presided that year over the group's reorganization. Thus the association resolved for the future to try harder to incorporate the entire community in its activities. It vowed to encourage revitalization of Narberth's “downtown,” help prevent destruction of properties considered historic, and most of all support the passage of a borough ordinance both to ensure that empty spaces are not violated by overcrowded development, and to protect significant structures such as the O. J. Snyder house which, although very close to becoming the first Narberth building placed on the National Register of Historic Places had just been wantonly destroyed by a young developer embarking on his first full-scale project. Such losses, amid public outcry that the town's very identity might be slipping away unchecked, spurred citizens as nothing before related to preservation of architecture had ever done here, to rededicate themselves to strengthening their civic organization, which ever since has maintained a steady and upbeat course.

One of the ways after its “near death” experience in 1988 in which the civic association bounded back to life was by renewing its sponsorship of a meet-the-candidates forum and debate by persons

running for council (every two years) mayoral races being less frequent. Those October debates became more boisterous as the town's demographics changed and the party long in power faced for the first time a succession of challengers who themselves often seemed polite compared with certain vocal defenders of monopoly rule in the audience. These stinging attacks culminated in 1993. Thereafter the meet-the-candidates forums sought a more structured debate being co-sponsored in 1995 by the civic association and (for the first time) by the League of Women Voters of Lower Merion/Narberth - the League conducting its first Narberth debate, a subdued affair, that year and the civic group supplying prepared questions (drafted by one Republican and one Democrat) with audience queries submitted in writing during the debate. A single brief flare-up from the audience (expressing contentment with the present monopoly government) was the only outburst that evening and it was swiftly silenced by an icy stare and a "No, no, no!" from the presiding league representative - enough to deter even the most intrepid.

The civic association's 1988 wake-up call had several other noteworthy repercussions. It cleared a path for the current unprecedented standoffish attitude of the Republican council and mayor toward the civic association, seen by them increasingly as a mere safe harbor for Democrats. For with that 1988 turn-around, the council lost any "political control" it may have had over that civic group. Consequently it no longer seeks its Republican candidates among persons with Narberth Civic Association experience, as had been a venerable tradition. Instead it gathers prospects from other sources that in Narberth may be presumed to have a solidly traditional base such as the fire company (1993), junior women's club (1995) which is a "first," this group in recent years having more typically supplied a number of persons for positions **on** Saint Margaret's parish school board, as the club membership has gradually become more Catholic. Also tapped by the GOP was a businessman (1995) to whom it gave visibility by appointing him to that year's Centennial committee executive board as a prelude to naming him a council candidate.

By contrast, the Democratic Council candidates and one mayoral candidate have emerged since 1988, as previously, from the civic association ranks in a trickle that most recently became a stream. So far all of these (more than a half-dozen) individuals have been defeated, and have returned to the civic association to give further public service in its various elective posts. The current Republican arm's-length attitude toward the civic association seems an attempt further to isolate the growing ranks of defeated Democrat council and mayoral candidates who seek a public service role there. Such isolation of course thwarts the purpose of a civic association, and is one of the most troubling - and very **visible** - public-sector distortions caused by Republican determination to keep the lid on its control of local politics despite changing demographics.

The “Manhattanization” of Montgomery Avenue

The first public statement on the future of the Narberth public school soon after it was closed in 1976 by Lower Merion School District came in a joint announcement by Lower Merion school board president Henry Lucas and Narberth borough council president Robert Lambert. They declared at a school board meeting that they were working on a proposal which would return control of the school to the borough for community use.

This was done, only to the extent that the building was sold by the school district to Narberth borough council (conveyed to the Borough of Narberth School Authority) in February 1979. The contractual agreement contained a provision that allows the district to repurchase the property for use as a school at the end of intervals of ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five and thirty years from the date of acquisition: that is, in the years 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009. The district must give notice to the borough at least two years before the due date.⁸¹⁵ Since the borough obtained the school, it has been altered extensively and used for private business, with even the limited amount of night-time community use that a portion of the building had during the first seven years of borough ownership from 1979 to 1986 having been eliminated entirely.

The occupation of the public school by that first - and so far only - tenant turned out to be a case of the camel, its nose once in the tent, soon takes it over - or tries to take it over, in this case.

Nothing else had more ominously portended the “Manhattanization” of Montgomery Avenue (and posed the rhetorical question: “Are the moneyed interests just too powerful to prevent this from happening?”) than a citizens’ battle waged and won against a would-be developer here in the late-1980s. Calling themselves the Narberth Neighbors Cooperating, this small group by its strenuous efforts saved a children's park and defended the interests of the township board of education which wanted to retain its option to recapture that former school site for a future elementary school if deemed feasible in the years to come. The situation had classic attributes that have so often sweetened developers' projects for Narberth borough council in the past. And it may have been a coincidence, but a close relative of this developer had just come on the council (its first female member, Lisa Bottoms).

⁸¹⁵The terms of this (recapture) agreement were confirmed in a letter from borough public information Larry D. Rubin, December 11, 1996 to the author, in response to her inquiry. [Editor’s note: This section appears to have been written in approximately 1995-96.]

The developer-to-be was a mechanical and consulting engineering firm that had begun on a shoestring in Narberth many years before, led by a long-time local resident, Robert J. Sigel, affable, well-liked in the town and married into one of Narberth's old families, named Bottoms. That engineering firm had grown tremendously while maintaining low overhead, its rents here being so much more reasonable than if it were located in the city like its closest competitors. So, when Narberth public school closed its doors, and the borough wanted to recycle the building, Sigel leased it as its biggest quarters to date.

Initially, Robert J. Sigel Inc., [had] seemed the ideal choice to move in there on a thirty-year lease. What could possibly be better than a company founded in Narberth on a shoestring by a well-liked young Pittsburgh-born borough resident and ex-athlete, Robert J. Sigel, who had married his Narberth sweetheart, Elizabeth Bottoms, and raised two children in the town surrounded by close kin! Sigel was owner and board chairman of what had become quite a large company by the time he died at age 73 in 1984 and after Robert Sigel's death the firm stayed put in the not-so-old school and continued to grow phenomenally under a new head. In fact, by the time it made its splashy bid in January 1989 to build a large (32,000 sq. ft.) three-story office building and two-level parking garage for itself on Shand Field, the Sabine and Montgomery avenues' school-grounds park for toddlers' site, adjoining the school it occupied, the Sigel firm had already made a name for itself in the region. Trade journals were saying Sigel had become the second-largest engineering firm for the annual volume of work produced in the entire Philadelphia metropolitan area - second only to the higher-profile Kling-Lindquist Partnership in center city. This engineering office also absorbed a small architectural firm, so that it could offer in-house architectural services as well. From all indications, this tenant probably anticipated that its expansion plans here would receive a warm welcome from town council, never dreaming that the neighborhood would rise up against those plans, like a sleeping giant.

If anyone had laid odds on the outcome of Sigel's request to buy that land from the borough and build that behemoth structure on the public-school grounds it occupied when the matter was first presented to council, certainly Sigel would have been the odds-on favorite to win. For council at the time appeared very favorably disposed to assist one of its own.

[However, n]o sooner had Sigel Group declared its intentions than a new community group, Narberth Neighbors Cooperating, sprang into existence to oppose construction of that 32,000 square foot office building on the site of the existing Shand park and playground bounded by Sabine and Montgomery avenues. To provide the additional parking that a commercial building of that size would

call for, Sigel also sought to build a two-level parking garage for 292 cars, with its entrance and exit on Sabine Avenue, to replace the existing parking lot it had created, bordering the playground area.

In fact, council members seemed hard-pressed to hide their astonishment when this neighbors' group ... was formed to oppose this major commercial construction project in a residential neighborhood.

Apparently no one was more surprised to see citizens rise up and establish Narberth Neighbors Cooperating than borough council - more so even than the Sigel Group honcho William Leishear himself - to judge from my own observations of the demeanor of our elected officials as they discussed the subject at public sessions. Indeed, without timely intervention by that neighborhood group, Shand Field very likely would have been doomed. For the Sigel Group then was still regarded around borough hall pretty much as a Narberth "family firm," that perhaps felt entitled to preferential treatment for its planned expansion, since it already was providing an excellent income source that kept borough taxes down.

In a mailing circulated to every Narberth residence, the new organization declared:

We believe that commercial development on this scale threatens the residential, family-oriented character of our community. For that reason, we strongly oppose it. If this building were built, not only would it eliminate one of Narberth's scarce open spaces and a playground that serves hundreds of families, but it would introduce a level of traffic, congestion, noise, and concern for security that is wholly inconsistent with the surrounding neighborhoods' residential nature.

While Sigel was alive and in the saddle, it is significant that the public continued to have access to the building's former auditorium for performances there by the Narberth Community Theater. However, the thespians were forced to leave town when this engineering firm soon after the death of its benevolent founder, squeezed them out - something that, to judge from contemporary accounts, bothered the town fathers not at all. This theater group, one of the more spirited amateur theatrical organizations of its kind on the Main Line, has found a new home in neighboring Bala Cynwyd, but its banishment from the town has seriously hurt the closeness the townspeople used to feel to its productions. Many local residents are even surprised now to hear that there is a Narberth Players. Letting this community

group pack up and go elsewhere without seriously trying to find another home for it appears, in retrospect, to have been a serious mistake - but hopefully not an irreparable one.⁸¹⁶

Meanwhile, the extensive campaign that Neighbors Cooperating waged against building that big commercial complex on parkland took the form of written statements, massive turnouts at borough council meetings, a letter-writing campaign, use of signs with the slogan “Narberth is a Neighborhood, let’s keep it that way,” and widely distributed “Keep Narberth green” buttons. These things all helped keep up the pressure for several months while council deliberated the matter.

A major objection by this citizens’ group to the proposal was that the development would eliminate one of only two publicly-owned open spaces remaining in the borough - leaving only the main community playground. Other concerns included the deterioration of the residential character of the community due to the added traffic and loss of green space for recreation, as well as the erosion of residential property values caused by denser development of this kind.

The Neighbors Cooperating Group also focused attention on a potential conflict of interest involved in this matter, citing ties between a high-ranking current Sigel Group employee and a local politician. For that employee, a nephew of the firm’s founder (and at the height of this controversy sworn in as a member of the borough’s planning committee) also was the husband of a member of Narberth borough council. When asked if she would abstain from voting on this hot-button issue of Sigel’s expansion into a publicly-owned park. Lisa Bottoms (Narberth’s first female council person) initially seemed to see no conflict. But pressed for a more definite reply in that crowded February council meeting, she eventually said she would give “serious consideration” to withdrawal from the council’s deliberations.

Here was a valuable civics lesson for all present - and it stopped me cold. Because for a moment, this public gathering focused not on the controversial matter at hand but on how an elected official’s mind works. Consequently the citizenry - so seldom present in large numbers at any council deliberations - was able to see for itself that this one official, and by extension other members of council, were concerned about values the community held sacred, and were willing to abide by them. Recognizing this was in itself the best way possible for that audience - myself included - to restore its belief in the democratic process. Indeed, that night’s meeting changed the atmosphere of debate locally

⁸¹⁶ Editor’s note: The Narberth Players (now Narberth Community Theater) still exists as of this writing (2021). For years it performed in the Methodist Church in Narberth before moving to the Presbyterian Church at the corner of City Line and Lancaster Avenues.

and moved a small step closer to shoring up the sense of civility and civic spirit so much under siege in recent decades in our town, as elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Neighbors Cooperating took practical steps to thwart development at Shand Field by proposing a plan to upgrade the park grounds and play equipment. It sought repairs to existing infant swings, climbing bars and the slide as well as tree plantings, removal of a hazardous tree stump, and it asked that the sandbox be repaired and moved, and that a contest be held to select a name for the park (the old Shand Athletic Field name had yet to be rediscovered). Such beautification plans were already receiving help and encouragement from Jeff Eyster's N.I.C.E. group, but this was regarded as only a beginning.

When the playground takeover motion finally came to a vote in May 1989, council voted 6 - 0 against Sigel's proposal, thus following its property committee's recommendation which called the plan "not in the best interests of the borough." Among other things, Sigel's request had asked that the borough lease the playground site and the school to Sigel Group for fifty years and that the Lower Merion School District's rights to recapture the building be repealed.⁸¹⁷

Stung by the unanimous turn-down it received from the borough, Sigel Group soon started mentioning the possibility that it might relocate. A "definite" decision to move was reached on June 6, just after representatives of both the engineers and the residents' group met to discuss a slightly different plan whereby Sigel would construct its three-story building on the firm's parking lot instead of on the playground. Neighbors Cooperating stood fast, pledging that it would oppose the alternate plan too.

Six days later, tempers flared anew when Sigel Group erected a six-foot-high chain-link fence (a "spite fence," the neighbors' group said) that served as a barrier closing off three of the six points of regular access to the playground, and making it necessary for people with strollers and handicapped persons to climb steps into that community play area.⁸¹⁸ So, Neighbors Cooperating filed an appeal challenging the permit for the "hurried construction of a parking lot fence which limits access to a popular playground and park"⁸¹⁹ and forty adults and children picketed the site singing the 1944 tune "Don't Fence Me In."⁸²⁰ Many felt that the engineering firm was "punishing" local residents because they rescued the green space Sigel had wanted for construction of its building complex. A compromise

⁸¹⁷ Philadelphia Inquirer, Pat K. Scott, May 11, 1989

⁸¹⁸ Philadelphia Inquirer, Pat K. Scott, June 15, 1989

⁸¹⁹ Main Line Times, June 29, 1989

⁸²⁰ Philadelphia Inquirer, Pat K. Scott, June 29, 1989

acceptable to both aides was reached that summer when the borough approved construction of a “safe walkway” (or fenced passage) across the Sigel Group parking lot. Meanwhile, the borough vetoed Neighbors Cooperating preliminary plans for both an Octoberfest celebration at that little park and for the park-naming contest it had hoped to run.

Modest fix-ups and plantings at the park followed, and more extensive work has been discussed recently in connection with Narberth’s efforts to comply with provisions of Montgomery County’s much-esteemed open space grants now available to all of its municipalities.

By year’s end, William Leishear, safe keeper of Sigel’s thirty-year lease that will expire in 2009, sounded almost nostalgic:

We tried as hard as we could to stay in Narberth. It’s a shame. You get kind of attached, and you feel part of this town. ⁸²¹

At the time, Sigel Group had 230 employees and housed its subsidiary, Sigel Technologies in the old school, besides operating Solution Systems Inc., a computer firm at another location in town. By then, Neighbors Cooperating spokesman Larry Silver could say:

I think the overwhelming sentiment of the borough was Sigel shouldn’t expand into the playground. Nobody was saying ‘leave,’ ⁸²²

although he added: I think the borough is going to do very well.

Leishear, in his comment on the turn of events during 1989 that blocked the physical growth of his commercial firm, showed little comprehension of what it means to strive to keep a town vibrant and alive and a place to live that nourishes the soul, when he said:

I think the people of Narberth are losing just because of a small group [Narberth Neighbors Cooperating]. We’re an international business that puts Narberth on the map. ⁸²³

He’s got it backwards. Community interests won this David-Goliath struggle, not the mercenaries.

⁸²¹ Philadelphia Inquirer, Pat K. Scott, December 14, 1989.

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Ibid.

The Recycled Public School

The upshot of its success in derailing the development of Shand Athletic Field emboldened the hundred-family Narberth Neighbors Cooperating group to take on a new mission: in June 1990, it asked the school board to exercise its option to recapture and reopen Narberth School. Estimating there would be a need for twenty-two more elementary classrooms in the district by 1995, it was quick to recognize that the solution must be: add more classrooms to existing schools, reopen one of the unused schools, or else somehow combine both approaches. It also, in a lengthy statement in June 1990 to the school board made by NNC spokesman Larry Silver, identified five main reasons why some people were asserting that to reopen Narberth Public School would be a bad idea - distortions of reality or myths, it called these.

Cited as one myth was the notion of opposition to the re-opening by residents of the area immediately surrounding the school. Also seen as unacceptable was to have school buses rumbling down Narberth's narrow streets (but we already had those under the present system, and the very idea that all our students could again walk to school here was perceived by this neighbors' group as making Narberth an "elementary school paradise."). Also, some naysayers had complained that the school's tenant would prevent recapture from happening. Too expensive, protested others. And still others declared that our borough council would never allow it.

The Narberth Neighbors Cooperating statement, answering each of those five objections in turn pointed out that all the candidates for borough council in the autumn 1989 elections - Republicans and Democrats alike - had expressed in writing their unanimous support for reopening the school. And, while acknowledging that Lower Merion school board is not required to consult with a local municipality about reopening a school, the neighbors' group strongly recommended that the school district do so, in this case. That way:

You may find that the council strongly supports reopening the school and you may be able to work out a solution to the fiscal problems that satisfies the concerns of both sides.

For the neighbors' statement made the strong point that throughout its existence, from the early-1890s until it closed in 1978, that school was a center of life in the town - some would say the center. And the citizens' group earnestly sought such a center again.

The initiative by Narberth Neighbors Cooperating did not happen in a vacuum. That jump-start to reopen Narberth School was sparked by a rapidly expanding elementary school population in sections

of the township close to Narberth, and in Narberth itself. Public discussions of the matter became high-profile in the spring of 1990, continuing as a hot topic the rest of the year. The first statement urging recapture of Narberth School had been presented to the school board in late April 1990 by a Gladwyne parent (Kathy Anderson) representing parents from various elementary schools faced with crowding. Of the district's then five elementary schools, two were operating almost at capacity. Her declaration was put together by a group of elementary school parents who were presidents of home and school associations, parents on school education committees, and other interested parents. After gathering opinions from parents at each school, they submitted that summary statement to the Interschool Council Housing Committee for review before presenting it to the school board. The Lower Merion Teacher Association soon collected and analyzed data of its own on the same subject and filed a report in May with the school board advocating the reopening of either of two schools: Narberth's or Belmont Hills' empty one as the best solution to provide additional teaching space at the elementary level.

In response to these initiatives, the school district authorized an architects' study of reopening Narberth School, to determine costs and suitability for it to become the sixth elementary school operating in the system. At the time, elementary school enrollment was projected to increase from 2,400 in 1990 to between 2,700 [and] 3,100 in 1999 [- 2,000]. Narberth School, with a capacity of 329, sits on 3.78 acres. Narberth was then getting what seemed like a modest amount, \$126,000 in annual rent for its school building (about ten percent of the borough's revenue). Also, in 1990 about two-thirds of Narberth's 162 public elementary pupils were attending Cynwyd School and the remainder at Merion Elementary. It was estimated that a reconverted kindergarten-through-grade-five facility here would have about 162 pupils from Narberth, and another 167 would come from surrounding areas, making up the 329 total.⁸²⁴ Not exactly a neighborhood school, any more than the district's existing five elementary schools were.

When the administration study of Narberth School was presented in December 1990, it declared that although Narberth School would be "inefficient" to reconvert and operate, it was a "viable option."⁸²⁵ However, it recommended postponing any decision on whether the district should recapture this facility until the spring of 1992. Cited in the report as the major advantage of reclaiming Narberth School was its location - precisely where the district was experiencing the greatest growth and the

⁸²⁴ Main Line Times, Dec. 20, 1990.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*

greatest potential growth - across an area extending from Merion to Penn Wynne.⁸²⁶ The major disadvantage: this site was portrayed as a small property, with a structure of a very limited capacity.

Did many changes occur by spring 1992? A few, and our schoolhouse tenant, usually silent, was heard from in a round-about way. In that interval, local elementary school enrollment was still rising, and those same two schools, Penn Wynne but especially the Merion School, were bursting at the seams. A new feasibility study undertaken by architects Shapiro Petrauskas & Gelber to put a price tag on reopening the former Belmont Hills and Narberth schools - it included the cost of equalizing their capacity to accommodate day care and give each an overall capacity of 469 - produced almost a tie. Those costs, however, were pushed higher in Narberth's case because a 9,000 square-foot addition (of six classrooms) would be required to give it a capacity equal to Belmont Hills' thirty percent larger school. Besides, to reclaim Narberth school, the district would have to pay the borough \$566,657, and also wait two years for recapture, whereas it could reclaim the empty Belmont Hills school immediately. Whichever choice it finally made, the district intended maintaining its average student/teacher ratio of 21.1 to 1. Schools superintendent David Magill reportedly saw more flexibility at Belmont Hills but admitted that the Narberth area very clearly is where the greatest numbers of pupils are.

With May decision time near, discussions weighed the pros and cons of both possibilities, while some heated and unsolicited comment from the sidelines advocated a far less expensive option: adding onto existing schools in places such as Merion and Cynwyd, instead of completely new start-ups requiring totally new staffs. The school district was then anticipating a seven to twelve percent increase in elementary enrollment over the next four years, with a 1.5 to 2.7 percent increase in the 1992-93 school year. The district, while attempting to determine if Sigel Group were interested in terminating its lease, reportedly learned from borough manager William Martin that the engineering firm had already volunteered that it was "not interested." In May 1992, the borough decided not to seek a termination of the lease that year. And so they let the 1994 window of opportunity for recapturing the school pass, after the lease had been in effect fifteen years.

Months of community debate in 1996 brought the school board to the point of considering whether to open an elementary school or a district-wide kindergarten center. And should it be at Belmont Hills or Narberth? The big factors were cost, advisability from an educational standpoint, and

⁸²⁶ Philadelphia Inquirer, Dec. 20, 1990. L.M School Superintendent Ralph Vigoda, James B. Pugh's proposals (3 of them) for Narberth.

how many pupils would have to be redistricted for transport long distances to school. The school's superintendent had begun to get the picture of public sentiment on the matter last February when he proposed a plan for a district-wide kindergarten center, only to find that many parents preferred keeping five-year-olds in community schools, and liked the idea of a sixth elementary school instead.

Now it was a question of how parents might feel about massive redistricting that such a reopened elementary school might require - Belmont Hills being suitable for an elementary school but too big for a kindergarten center, and Narberth eligible for either use. By now, Narberth School was envisioned as serving students from the borough and part of western Wynnewood, utilizing the three-story portion of the existing building, and with all the rest replaced by new three-story construction, plus a bus loop. With this Narberth elementary plan, more than 580 pupils would be redistricted and 349 of these would be sent to Narberth School.⁸²⁷ If Belmont Hills were reopened as an elementary school, 790 pupils would be relocated with more than 400 of them being sent to Belmont Hills on a steep, isolated, quarry-land property with narrow access roads.⁸²⁸ An optimistic outlook on reopening was by this time September 1998 for Belmont Hills and September 2001 for Narberth. By September 1996, higher-than-expected enrollment figures suggested that removing kindergarteners from existing schools and placing them all together in one school may not be a drastic enough step to relieve overcrowding. The new boundary lines for a Narberth School, as they were being drawn up tentatively, would have had the borough's northside and southside attending different elementary schools.

At a special September 30 meeting to review Lower Merion School Board's "tentative proposal" to reopen the Belmont Hills facility as a sixth elementary school, the majority of parents present favored a neighborhood school - not Belmont. And some were vehement about it:

I hear economics. What I don't hear is Belmont Hills is in the best interest of the children in the community. I think this is appalling.⁸²⁹

True enough. A statement earlier had been made by a Narberth borough council representative that the reopening of the old school here for a district kindergarten center of elementary school would be a financial blow to the borough for the schoolhouse tenant pays \$175,000 in yearly rent and a business privilege tax, which is eight percent of current borough revenue. But as one close observer put it:

⁸²⁷ Main Line Times, Sept. 26, 1996, ditto, MLT, Sept. 12, 1996 (Magill said it twice).

⁸²⁸ Philadelphia Inquirer, Sept. 11, 1996 - 410 students - figure from A. Barnard.

⁸²⁹ Curt Heffler, Main Line Times, Oct. 3, 1996.

The objection should not be a matter of convenience. The intent should be to bolster the community. The decision is easy. The Narberth elementary school strengthens the community. The Belmont Hills school offers artificial boundaries and disassociated students.⁸³⁰

Said another person in the audience:

We need community schools and we cannot accept anything less. Reopening Belmont Hills fails to address the needs of Lower Merion. Narberth is the quintessential school. Hundreds can walk to the school. Only 72 students reside in Belmont Hills. It requires the reshuffling of five neighborhoods.⁸³¹

Yet another voice:

Any new school should be a neighborhood school. Transportation time to and from school should be minimized. As many children as possible should be able to walk to school. A neighborhood should not repeatedly be targeted for redistricting.⁸³²

And finally:

The Narberth building, even if there is a delay, would allow the more populous Narberth community to have its own school.⁸³³

A now strident voice heard in the background of all this is that of Bill Leishear, president of what has lately become Sigel Holding Company⁸³⁴ (the “little” fish has been swallowed by a much bigger fish, Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc., an international company headquartered in Pasadena, California, of which Leishear is a vice president). He says of his occupancy of the old Narberth school:

There is no intention to give up the lease. Giving up the building here was never an option.⁸³⁵

Reportedly this firm, Sigel’s parent company, has twenty to fifty employees in a leased building in Conshohocken due to overcrowding, and also has a four-story office building under construction in

⁸³⁰ Marianne Carbine, Main Line Times, Oct. 3, 1996.

⁸³¹ Meryl Gindin, Main Line Times, Oct. 3, 1996.

⁸³² Andrea Braverman, Main Line Times, Oct. 3, 1996.

⁸³³ Janet Sachs, Main Line Times, Oct. 3, 1996.

⁸³⁴ The Sigel Holding Company name dates from c. 1991, according to borough manager Bill Martin, interview Dec. 12, 1996.

⁸³⁵ Main Line Times, Oct. 10, 1996.

the same locality, to be completed in mid-January 1997. However, Sigel Holding Company reportedly expects to continue subleasing the Narberth school to a variety of tenants until 2009, no question about it. It has been suggested by one parent that the Narberth School should be reopened even if that means buying out the lease of the engineering firm. We could reimburse Narberth borough for the two years of tax loss. It's a small price to pay.⁸³⁶

Was Sigel Holding Company formed for the sole purpose of holding onto this lease for its full duration? If so, its subleasing arrangements must be very profitable indeed. Why else would it hang on so tightly to the school, considering how much interest has lately been shown in recapturing it?

We know that the Sigel lease was a very beneficial one for this firm from the start, with rental payments well, below the market value. But was this lease intended to be set up originally to guarantee such protection as this engineering company now has for its lucrative subleasing arrangements? This needs to be examined, some residents say.⁸³⁷

Finally, the school board spoke in October 1996, deciding unanimously to reopen the long-mothballed Belmont Hills Elementary School and redistrict about 800 children to fill it. And the school board has also proposed a one percent wage tax - sure to be controversial.

The Neighbors Cooperating Group, since disbanded, involved the talents of a couple of individuals who had sought or eventually did seek (unsuccessfully) a minority party seat on borough council and who also both served as civic association president (lawyer Larry Silver and businessman Dennis Mastriano). During the 1980s and the early '90s, civic association president was a glass ceiling that so many young Democrats interested in public service encountered in Narberth, and still do as the autumn 1995 election approaches.

Infrastructure in Need of Repair

Representatives of four borough groups - the police, ambulance corps, fire department and the borough's public works (highway) department - began early in 1990 to present their needs to the borough property committee. They discussed the possibility of creating more working space for themselves in and around the municipal building, where all were then housed except the ambulance corps, situated next door. It was suggested to keep everything on the same site and just make the

⁸³⁶ Meryl Gindin, Main Line Times, Oct. 10, 1996.

⁸³⁷ Conversation with Larry Silver Dec. 18, 1996. He also said courts tend to favor sublessees (or lessees?).

borough building larger - in addition to which the borough's present municipal offices were said to need expansion, one difficulty being that the existing structures occupy a flood plain. The borough talked of making land available to the ambulance corps. And for its part, the corps which now has close to a \$750,000 annual operating budget, declared that the estimated construction would require about a million dollars for the ambulance corps to raise from a "capital campaign."

As a first step in addressing the needs of all, each of these groups was asked to submit its proposed "wish list" in the form of an outline of what space would be required and why to a pool of architects, all borough residents, who had made offers of assistance earlier. This task force gave its time and professional services at this initial planning stage on a voluntary basis until one architect should be chosen.

Authorized to begin in November 1993, when council moved to float a \$2,060,000 issue of general obligation bonds, such municipal improvements were made possible by the then current state of the economy with its low interest rates, as well as by a competitive construction market and the availability of money. For suburban towns that, like Narberth, have low debt, the time was right for exploiting these advantages, noted borough manager Bill Martin.⁸³⁸ This municipal project for which a \$1,900,000 bond issue was approved, and which was (in late August 1994) about 65 percent complete, features reconstruction of a garage, turning over of space used by the fire company to the police (had been occupying an alcove), and construction of a fire company meeting room and quarters. It does not include quarters for the ambulance corps. The borough committee overseeing this project comprised councilmen Walker, Tyson and Henderson.

In November 1994, council agreed to remove the general contractor from the renovation project after an investigation of subcontractors' complaints showed many contract violations including unpaid invoices. Narberth had been paying the general contractor who, in turn, did not pay at least ten of the subcontractors. As required by municipal law, the contractors for individual services such as mechanical, electrical and plumbing, continued their work until completed, supervised by a new general contractor. And Narberth Fire Company members pitched in, donating their services to finish the work - the renovations were finally dedicated mid-way into the Centennial year.

⁸³⁸ Philadelphia Inquirer article quoting Bill Martin and spokesmen of other townships about their current expansion: "Towns find it's time to improve their municipal buildings," by Mary Anne Janco, Inq. corresp., "Neighbors," Aug. 24, 1994, p.1., MLD.

In September 1995, council voted to borrow a half-million dollars from Mellon Bank, mostly to pay money owed to subcontractors on that municipal building renovation and also for legal fees. At the same time it authorized its lawyers to pressure the bonding company that financially had backed the original general contractor (law requires that general contractors be bonded in order to be awarded a municipal contract) for the \$500,000 in bond money it owes Narberth. The expectation was that the bonding company (International Fidelity Camden, New Jersey) would pay before the loan was used. Its other options⁸³⁹ reportedly were to investigate the borough's claim and offer a settlement, or take the case to federal court. It chose the latter. But a day before the trial was to start in May 1996, the bonding company informally offered a settlement, and followed this up in writing.

Borough manager Bill Martin, characterizing an early-August closed-door session that Council held to discuss that settlement proposal and respond to it, declared afterward that Council totally accepted the agreement with all its stipulations, and the borough would release information about the document after the bonding company signed it.

Legacy of Secession: Avoiding Distress

The pros and cons of reversing Narberth's century-old secession from the township are never talked about any more. Our town fathers have kept the borough on a fiscally-sound, steady and ever-independent course. For the future, Narberth must bank on finding creative ways to stay out of the growing ranks of throwaway suburbs.

So far Narberth has escaped the fate of America's small industrial cities and inner-ring blue collar suburbs, many of them teetering on the brink of fiscal doom since the late-1980s. The Commonwealth began a recovery program at that time for fifteen municipalities (mostly steel towns close to Pittsburgh) described as “distressed.” Nearly every one of those communities depends economically on a single industry that collapsed or suffered cutbacks. Those cities and boroughs are like Narberth at least insofar as they all tend to be built up with older housing stock, have an increasing demand for services, and a scarcity of space for real estate development. Townships are the places with land that, if used for office parks and shopping centers, could build up the tax base. Designating a municipality as distressed is a drastic step - one that the city of Chester has not taken, that the well-managed but struggling steel town of Coatesville in an otherwise prosperous area just beyond the Main

⁸³⁹ Philadelphia Inquirer, J. Wing, Sept. 13, 1995.

Line stood on the brink of last autumn, and locally only Delaware County's tiny Milbourne Borough (its problems related to mismanagement) had bestowed on it officially.

Narberth does not find itself in any gathering constellation of suburbs in trouble. The borough has neither suffered a decline in median household income in the 1980s, nor did it see a sharp rise in its population of elderly, even though it is known that middle-class flight in America during that decade came out of the older inner-ring suburbs nearest to cities, and moved to the newest outer-ring suburbs along with many businesses that, in relocating, took jobs away from those older suburbs as well. Narberth does not appear to have lost businesses to that outer ring. Many of its younger generation did move out there, however, and in some cases their jobs are out there as well. Nevertheless, Narberth does not see its houses declining in market value or stagnant, nor does it see poor people moving in, or crime rising. The future bodes well for towns like Narberth to participate, from their position of strength, in some sort of alliance between center cities and inner-ring suburbs, something about which studies are now under way, called regionalism.

School Populations

Catholic high school enrollments in this five-county metropolitan area that had been plagued by a six percent annual rate of decline for a half-dozen years, down from a high of nearly 60,000 in 1970-1971, surprisingly slowed their slide in 1993-1994 reaching a stable 23,675 pupils enrolled. Six of those 25 archdiocesan high schools had lately been recommended to be closed outright and four of them merged into two schools. But the cuts to date have not been all that severe.

Meanwhile, as the 1993-1994 school year swung into high gear the individual parish churches in the archdiocese stepped up their parishioners' lobbying campaign on the State Senate and House of Representatives, the number one lobbying issue being to pass a tuition voucher bill (House Bill 1655) that would give \$1,000 vouchers to parents for each student in a private high school, and \$700 vouchers for kids attending private elementary schools. Some city and suburban parish churches (not Saint Margaret's) have wooden billboards out front stridently proclaiming how much each of those vouchers would save taxpayers long range.

By mid-term, Joseph P. Healey, the Haverford School headmaster, entered the public debate in this region by calling for lots of thoughtful open public discussion and fresh thinking on the matter of school aid for he feels that the private and independent schools do not have by any means an unlimited capacity to absorb large numbers of students who might consider alternatives to their local schools.

Healey pointed out that in the autumn 1993 California referendum on vouchers, the specter of anarchy was all too real, for it seemed possible that large sums of money would be dumped on over-enrolled or hastily-concocted schools. That way, fear and anxiety would just be added onto the divisiveness he sees as having roadblocked progress so far. He argues that since, sadly, so little systematic contact exists among the public, parochial and private schools, he proposed formation of a task force - representing all the traditions of education - to develop a team-effort approach to what he describes (and is, after all) a shared responsibility. He advocates asking questions about capacity and enrollment shifts, discussing ways to handle choice in and outside the public-school system, and establish provisional accreditation guidelines for newly chartered schools.

Narberth Summer Basketball - after 1975

Summer league basketball saw tremendous growth throughout the region during the 1970s and along with it came a sharp increase in summer camps for intensive basketball training. Also drawing players away from Narberth's ranks at this time was the great success of the large Sonny Hill Community Involvement League Inc. in Philadelphia, only two years older than the decade. Meanwhile, Narberth remained a top summer draw, some sportswriters reported, optimistically. Yet its programs evidently were hemorrhaging badly. And by one account, Narberth's basketball league was teetering on the brink of extinction when Don Hoffman took over as its director in 1973. He increased the number of senior and junior teams dramatically from seven each to eleven each, with more than 300 boys participating. In his ten years at the helm, Hoffman is credited with being the driving force that started the Narberth basketball league's effort to regain its position as a leader among the region's summer leagues. He also restructured the senior and junior leagues by abolishing their divisions so all the players in a league would play each other thus erasing any sense of inequality between divisions.⁸⁴⁰

Also introduced in his time as skipper (in 1982) was Narberth Booster Club, both to increase fan interest and underwrite operation costs.⁸⁴¹ By this time both the senior and junior Narberth leagues had sophisticated player draft systems in place. And one year (1982) both the senior team and the junior team that had drafted the first pick also captured the title in their league. Not surprisingly the stands

⁸⁴⁰ Hoffman's accomplishments - "Sports Talk" column devoted to him by Bob Lange, Main Line Times, Aug. 11, 1983, p.37.

⁸⁴¹ Booster Club - "NBBL set to open," article by Joe Schanne - Main Line Times, May 27, 1982.

were often full of college coaches scouting the teams. This seemed like old times, when the baseball scouts used to congregate here.

The next director, seasoned basketball official at the University of Pennsylvania's Palestra, Harry Parker, had the expressed aim “to make Narberth the showcase for suburban basketball talent.”⁸⁴² He advised his players to forget about the Sonny Hill League because he claimed Narberth had something better to offer, namely a chance to play in a competitive league with team-oriented players. Instead of resting content with the healthy growth rates that both the senior and junior leagues had shown during each of the previous five years, Parker took the added step of canvassing many area high schools during the 1984-85 winter, seeking more quality recruits for his teams. This initiative produced a record number of 1985 applicants in the two leagues, forcing him to split each into two divisions (Eastern and Western) as well as add several teams, and raise the number of players per team to thirteen.

The sign-up of 210 senior league players was a sharp increase over the previous record of 132 in 1984. A contributing factor to the increase in the number of players was the recent demise of some of the region's smaller suburban leagues. By 1985, the Narberth senior league had 26 players standing six-foot-five or taller. Noted Parker:

We also have most of the starters from nearly all the schools in the Western suburbs and that will certainly only increase the reputation of the league.

He also added Sunday evening games, and moved the all-star game from the end to mid-season to increase player interest. The playing area, resurfaced that year, got a bigger re-hab the following season through a Federal grant for playground improvement.

A defining trait of the league had made its appearance by this time. This was the sizeable clusters of family members - some as players, others as coaches - that were distributed through various teams in Narberth's two basketball leagues in the mid-1980s, causing comment in local sports pages.⁸⁴³ In 1986, a year the senior and junior leagues had another record turnout of players, Parker was named commissioner of those Narberth leagues. By this time, the junior league was gaining significance as a developmental league. And girls had come aboard with a Narberth basketball league of their own - the first of its kind in the region.

⁸⁴² “NBB League will open its ...season” by Joe Schanne, Main Line Times, May 30, 1985, p. 30.

⁸⁴³ Philadelphia Inquirer (corr) by John Knebels, Aug. 1, 1985, p. 34M; also (Ryan; Ray) Main Line Times, Aug. 22, 1985 (2 articles by Joe Schanne); (Maloney) Main Line Times, Aug. 29, 1985 (1 article by Joe Schanne); Main Line Times (Sunday ed.) (Seltzer) Aug. 3, 1986, (article by Joe Schanne).

With the opening of the 1992 season, Narberth Summer Basketball league was featuring a record 600 players on 40 teams made up of students from 80 schools. Newly formed that year was the seventh-grade division called Seven League, which joined ranks with the regular senior division (tenth through twelfth graders) and the expanded junior division (eighth and ninth graders). The players still are selected by the coaches in all subdivisions by means of a draft, put in place in 1978 as a major departure which has proven its worth since then. By the early-1990s many schools were taking full advantage of the Narberth league, one coach around that time typically having three of his promising players as participants, another coach with eight sophomores on various rosters in the Narberth senior league (1992). This way, a school does not have to wait until its own wintertime season starts in order to see its players improve for such athletes get to play with other good players and polish up skills they would be unable to do otherwise. The competition stimulates them and the players meet many new friends this way. Joe Deeney became director of the league in 1991.

In the senior league in 1992, the first-round draft picks were distributed as follows: four picks from three suburban public high schools, four picks from four city and suburban prep schools including elite and Catholic ones, and seven picks from five Catholic archdiocesan high schools including one in the city. At the start of the 1992 season, the senior league's top-rated player, standing six-feet-nine inches tall and hailing from one of the suburban archdiocesan high schools, was only the seventh pick in the preseason draft. This was because he could play in only four of his team's games, and would be playing basketball out of the country for most of the summer season.

For our boys' summer basketball league, celebrating its fiftieth anniversary during the 1995 Narberth borough centennial year, the numbers of players from all over the region are still up in the 600 range - the boys' senior league now comprising sixteen teams and the junior league another sixteen, plus the teams of the Seven League, and of the girls. Riding herd on this vast program currently is councilman Chet Tyson and league director Brian McBride.

Over the years, Narberth's basketball saga has been played off against a background enhanced by Philadelphia's wide renown as a basketball mecca principally during the two decades immediately following World War II. At the time, colleges in large metropolitan areas of the Northeastern United States and Midwest brought this sport from obscurity in small gymnasiums across the land to national prominence. With this change, Philadelphia won acclaim as a major resource relied on for the depth and breadth of its basketball-playing talent. It was a time too, when Narberth gained attention for producing

an unusually large number of professional basketball referees and other officials of that sport, who gradually fanned out to work in other parts of the country.

Practically on Narberth's doorstep during that peak period of Philadelphia collegiate basketball activity, Saint Joseph's College was a powerful exemplar to local youth, especially when its basketball team in the 1964-65 season ranked second in the nation, after UCLA. Not only had every player on the Hawks' roster that season come up through the Philadelphia Catholic League, but the same league had also been supplying much talent to Narberth summer basketball courts from the archdiocesan city high schools West Catholic and Saint Thomas More, attended then by many suburban youths.

By the late-1980s, the scene had shifted dramatically. The spotlight no longer shone upon Philadelphia-area basketball, and moreover this region ceased being a sure-fire source of Division I prospects, to use basketball scouts' terminology. Attention focused instead on Baltimore and Washington and points westward. Supposedly one key factor in a complex web of reasons why Philadelphia lost some of its luster as a basketball mecca by that time: there was no extensive system of youth leagues in the suburbs (Narberth's leagues being the exception that proved the rule, of course).⁸⁴⁴

Some close observers meanwhile remarked that these things happen in cycles, and that Philadelphia can expect to be in the vortex again. Then too, basketball is a tough sport that requires much time-consuming practice. With more alternatives to choose from today, many suburban youths and young women opt for less demanding sports activities. Certainly here on Narberth's basketball courts under the stars, the skills to be learned are the focus, not the wins and losses that are more of a concern to players during the school year. After all, this is a summer league, and its main purpose is to have fun.

Scouting

In the pre-World War II period, local scoutmasters included a number of Quaker men who were active members of Merion Friends Meeting.⁸⁴⁵ One was L. Fielding Howe, a man of military bearing, who had supervised construction of the Lantwyn Lane housing development. Also Merion Meeting's clerk Sam Bunting, a historian and brother of the realtor, as well as T. Cooper Tatman who became clerk of that meeting later. Another Quaker family, the Shallcrosses, donors of Friends' Central School's new

⁸⁴⁴ "Philly Basketball: Mecca no more" by Bob Ford, Philadelphia Inquirer, Mar. 29, 1988, p. 2-M-4M (Tues.).

⁸⁴⁵ Interview in early 1980s with Wm. W. McCay (Sr., Jr. or 3rd?).

hall in the early 1980s, also were prominent backers of local scouting traditions. Bunting was very intense about a troop, believed to be a very old one, that had a huge green flag with a large red Welsh dragon on it. Known as Merion Two,⁸⁴⁶ this troop was a force to be reckoned with in the early days of scouting in our area. At a later date, this troop and its flag were resurrected without the dragon, and with a different number.

Narberth scouting survived the early post-World War II period in very good form, to judge by the contemporary accounts. But reflecting a national trend, it took a tumble during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1980s, however, saw a national turn-around and steady upswing in the number of boys joining the scouts, community service goals receiving top priority perhaps more than ever, and thus helping to counteract the trend whereby young people were said (in 1990) to know less, care less and vote less than any other generation. The irony of this is that the Information Age has given birth to a population so uninformed and apathetic that ours is called “the age of indifference.”⁸⁴⁷ The good news is that for the first time in many years, our troop #196 registered more than 25 scouts in October 1991, at which time scout master Bruce McCluskey also announced the start of a marching bugle and drum corps,⁸⁴⁸ which has proved popular.

Centerpiece of the Narberth Cub Scout program, meanwhile, is Pack #212, founded in 1945 with Sam Barclay as its first cub master, and currently featuring a membership of about 65 boys.

A Girls’ Basketball League

A Narberth Girls’ Basketball Summer League, a first of its kind in the region, was launched at Narberth Playground in June 1985 by a group of parents to help young women improve their skills and play basketball two nights a week. Team director was Joe D’Antonio who for a decade had been a driving force behind the establishing of girls’ sports on the lower Main Line. The idea for the new league was his and Wynnewood resident Eileen Trainer’s. Sixty-five prospects for the five new girls’ teams were signed up at the Fire House. Eligible that first year were Junior girls going into seventh, eighth and ninth grades. In its final title-winning game that first summer, the Duffy’s Girls team had as its stars one girl from a Catholic convent school and two students from Catholic archdiocesan high

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁷ A report issued by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press on Today’s young people, 18 to 30-yr-olds - end of June 1990 – Mentioned in David S. Broder’s column in Inky, 7/2/1990.

⁸⁴⁸ A broadsheet from Troop 176, Oct. 1991.

schools in the suburbs. The other teams during the league's debutante season were McDonough's Camps, Mike's Marauders, Sharkey's Machine and Kramer's Raiders. The league's leading scorer that year, with 89 points, was a Haverford Township High School player.

The idea of a girls' summer league in Narberth with its teams consisting of pupils from area public, parochial and private schools caught on quickly and drew crowds. By season's end, a major expansion of league activities was being planned, including a Senior and Junior division, and an increase of more than double the previous number of teams - to five senior league teams and seven or eight junior league teams. New sponsors came forth, and word was being spread to attract players from the same sources that have supplied players for the boys' leagues, as well as to focus the attention of more high school coaches upon Narberth's new programs.

At the end of the league's first decade (1994), several of the original coaches were still in place. By then, twenty teams (ten junior, ten senior) featured 325 players. Also that year, the NCAA "sanctioned" the league, which placed it on a national list of NCAA-sanctioned events, and likewise officially enabled Division I college coaches to attend the Narberth games during the active recruiting period in July.

Tennis, after 1975

Tennis was the 1970s boom sport among the American middle class - a circumstance enlivened by the ballyhooed "Battle of the Sexes" between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs in 1973. But by decade's end, the spurt had subsided. Most of the daytime players had been women and they were now in the work force. Others were put off by this sport's elitist image or else discarded this sports fad for another. Upon Frank Feise's death at age 82 in 1986, the site by then known as his Suburban Racquet Club came within a hair's breadth of being cleared for an office development until the borough's new and increased parking requirements scuttled this plan. Instead an investor bought the club and reopened it in 1987 with South African-born Julian Krinsky as manager. A former world-class tennis champion and circuit player who participated in the Junior Davis Cup, played at Wimbledon in 1969 and in the French and Italian Opens, Krinsky now conducts one of the largest tennis school operations in the country, all of it centered at several Main Line locations. The Julian Krinsky School of Tennis' certified pros are now available at their home base at Narberth Racquet Club for lessons any time as well as at other locations. In 1988, Krinsky sought and obtained a 35-foot-high fabric dome covering two tennis courts to make a total of four of them usable in winter. This is not a private club, so there is room for the

paying public even though Krinsky's students and pros use several of the courts there each day. And so for seventy years now, tennis has been played on this land that used to belong to General Wayne Inn, and was the site of a Picket Post for Washington's Army at Valley Forge, and also the place where the Federalist Party held ox roasts around election time.

A Tennis Update

During the spring of 1994, tennis was "rediscovered" in the town with such gusto that people - even those adults most directly involved - seemed totally unaware how popular tennis-playing formerly was here between the early-1890s and the Depression era and later. Except that there was one major difference: the players in Narberth tournaments in those days were adults. Now attention is being focused for the first time in serious community-wide way on children's tennis and on formation of a Narberth team that could join the Philadelphia district of the United States Tennis Association and compete against other teams. With sufficient interest and some good players, tournaments may again (again is the key word) be held in Narberth - this time for kids. The pied piper who launched this project and is teaching our children to play tennis is local southside resident Kirby Mehrhof, a member of USTA and of the United States Professional Tennis Registry.

Soccer

The growing nationwide public interest in soccer as a sport was not only reflected in the sharply increased number of youthful soccer teams the Narberth Athletic Club did for a time field in recent years (but discontinued at present). It is also dramatized by the strong showing being made by the Lower Merion Summer Soccer League, operating continuously since 1975, but not reaching its full stride until the summer of 1981. By the mid-1980s, summer soccer in this locality was starting to edge American Legion Baseball in what used to be its sovereign territory. Lower Merion's is one of the most successful summer soccer leagues in the region and also one of the oldest. It was founded by Bob Davidson, co-commissioner. This league has two divisions: the open division comprising eight squads, of which the Narberth Real Pizza team (formerly Main Line Nautilus, known as one of the cleanest teams in the league) is one of the oldest, and an eight-team high school division.

The reason usually cited for the long continuity of the teenage soccer league in this immediate area is the good soccer tradition that exists in the township surrounding Narberth. This tradition stems from the combined impact of the soccer activity of Lower Merion and Harrilton public high schools and

that of The Episcopal Academy and The Haverford School, which are rivals and also active in Inter-Academic competition. Teams from the high school and open divisions no longer play across division lines, as they did earlier when the league had fewer teams. The open division is considered quite tough, and is not a hobbist league. One indication of this is that the open division teams do go out and recruit in the off-season. Several teams also are always waiting to find a berth in the league. Each team in both divisions plays a fourteen-game schedule, relying on nine players (eight, plus a goalie).

Ethnic clubs for men in their 20s and 30s had for many years kept soccer alive in the Philadelphia metropolitan area before its high school-age athletes adopted soccer with a frenzy. Soccer, which lacks fans in America, is the number one sport worldwide, so it is not surprising that men's teams hereabouts exist with German/Hungarian ties in neighboring Bucks County, a Ukrainian Nationals team in northeastern Montgomery County, a Greek-related one in nearby Delaware County and leagues such as the Irish-American (with about twenty teams) and the Latino leagues in Philadelphia, plus a women's league in the state-capitol area. Despite the slight increase in the number of these "ethnic club" senior men's teams locally in the past two decades, their ethnic flavor is steadily becoming less pronounced. Moreover, although most high school soccer coaches are also club coaches, the bustling metropolitan area high school soccer activity has changed the area's adult club soccer team activity very little, apart from producing some good players. Fans are still lacking. The fact that the World Cup, the world series of soccer will be held for the first time in the United States in 1994, is expected to change that.

Besides, more American children under the age of twelve now play organized soccer than any other sport save baseball, which also translates to a million more of them playing league soccer than the two and two-tenth's million playing Little League baseball. American colleges, meanwhile, have 609 varsity men's soccer teams compared with 561 varsity football teams, plus 446 varsity women's soccer teams. And a grassroots support-system exists for the United States Interregional Soccer League, a minor league operation with 72 franchises. Once regarded as a sport for suburbanites, soccer in 1994 is gaining rapid acceptance at six of Philadelphia's recreation centers located in inner-city neighborhoods.

Busy Hoops Court: Symbol of Harmony near the City's Edge

Narberth's summer basketball odyssey offers no cure-all that can erase the fear of encroaching city problems faced by other inner-ring suburbs - places like Philadelphia's most populous suburb, Upper Darby Township in Delaware County where racial tensions simmer along the city's edge and lately erupted into ugly incidents at the Cobbs Creek dividing line. But increasingly, Narberth's

successful long-running commitment to high-quality basketball programs for young people that bring together a comfortable mix of very diverse groups here, fairly close to City Line Avenue, is gaining recognition as a role-model, one that could be taken to heart as a way to promote harmony in municipalities such as Upper Darby and other potential hot-spots, especially now that, under neighborhood pressure, a number of basketball backboards at public parks and schoolyards in Upper Darby Township have been cut down in the summer of 1994 to prevent teenagers from gathering to play basketball at night, on the hasty assumption this is the best way to prevent trouble. Citizen complaints in various neighborhoods in that locality focus on a list of nuisances such as graffiti, broken glass and beer cans, and this rash of outcries has led school and municipal authorities to cut down those hoops which leaves many youths with little to do for recreation, and increasingly prone to vandalism.

A Philadelphia Inquirer editorial criticized this dismantling of backboards as a shortsighted way to resolve a problem about idle youth, changing neighborhoods and fear of encroaching city problems. It noted further that:

Kids from nearby urban neighborhoods are often the first to test the tolerance level of homogeneous suburban communities. And outdoor basketball courts are often the testing ground.

Some parents and neighbors seeing these different groups of youths mingle on Upper Darby playgrounds, had become nervous and apprehensive and wanted to back away from any unanticipated confrontations.

The editorial went on to point out the success story of two inner-ring playgrounds where the influx of outsiders has been made to work well, with very few hitches – namely at Narberth on this side of the Delaware River and in New Jersey's Mount Laurel Township on the other side. It also explained why those playgrounds are successful: First they are well-kept, so youths coming there have the intention of playing sports, not beer-drinking or dealing drugs. Also, it cited supervision by volunteers or others as a big factor, as well as a buffer area between the courts and houses, and mentioned support by the community and having police nearby.

Also noted was that black teens on up to middle-aged black men from the city play pick-up basketball games with local white youths here as a frequent occurrence, Narberth's outdoor courts today having powerful outdoor lights and an electronic scoreboard. The editorial highlighted the fact that Narberth's basketball program (under the direction for the past decade of Chet Tyson, councilman in charge of recreation) receives very modest support from the borough, including some supervisory aid.

This is offset by the \$25 cost each team player pays, and by team sponsors' fees ranging from \$125 to \$250 - monies earmarked for court upkeep. That lengthy editorial appeared the same week that a youthful Seattle team played a local squad on the floodlit courts which, it observed, were freshly painted red, white and green, with beds of impatiens and marigolds blooming nearby.

Nothing has changed at the Narberth courts, except that more than ever they have become a respected icon - a summertime harmony-building symbol of hope that America's besieged cities and their inner-ring suburbs can bridge the gap of mistrust and fear that grips so many people and sends them fleeing further and further into the countryside. Meanwhile, in inner-city Philadelphia, "midnight basketball" is on the upswing, with a two-year-old Salvation Army winter nighttime basketball league (from ten o'clock until two in the morning on Tuesdays and Thursdays that also involves participating in some other human service activity) considered a model of what such programs can accomplish. The first city-sanctioned midnight basketball league here, consisting of six teams of twelve players each between ages 19 to about 35, co-sponsored by the fairly new Father's Day Rally Committee (a group of black men) and the city Recreation Department, started August 29 in North Philadelphia. Although President Clinton had regarded midnight basketball as an important component of crime- prevention in his \$33 billion crime bill before Congress in the summer of 1994 (and although President Bush had praised a midnight basketball program he visited in Glenarden, Maryland three years ago), this portion of Clinton's bill was savagely attacked by many politicians as only an insignificant and wasteful slice of a huge side of social pork. This, even though our nation has tripled its prison population in the past fifteen years without putting a visible dent in the rate of violent crime. There seems to be the same underestimation of the value of "hoops-and-help" among many Washington politicians as among the citizens of Upper Darby, Again Narberth, where the tide of conservatism runs strong and deep, and yet hoops have long demonstrated a spirit of cooperation and mutual support among the races, can teach them otherwise.⁸⁴⁹

Narberth Ambulance – Update

Back in 1981, it was said that residents of Lower Merion and Narberth may stand a poorer chance of surviving a heart attack or serious injury than their neighbors in Haverford Township. Why? Because neither Lower Merion nor the borough then had a paramedic unit - a crew of emergency

personnel trained and equipped to administer life-saving drugs on location. The advanced life-support system of paramedics represented a virtual hospital on wheels, as it was a crucial time-saver, spelling the difference between life and death for some people by stabilizing their condition before they reached the hospital.⁸⁵⁰

But in September of that year, the local situation changed drastically. That month Narberth Ambulance (Volunteer Medical Service Corps of Narberth) undertook an enormous double-barreled task. It made a commitment both to upgrade the level of emergency services it provides and to expand the area to be served by the ambulance teams. To this end, six volunteers from the ambulance unit began a six-month paramedic training program, with four more volunteers following in their footsteps several months later. The county had been looking for a squad to participate in a paramedic program and the Narberth unit volunteered. Narberth Ambulance was already 37 years old at the time, and much of its activity had been transportation of its members (at ten dollars a year) to and from local hospitals and nursing homes. Others could receive the same service, for a fee. Narberth Ambulance approached the township with its proposal to take over the township medical calls and respond with the police to all emergencies.⁸⁵¹

The plan was that by early March 1982, our all-volunteer unit would for the first time be able to offer Lower Merion and Narberth full-time paramedic service on a 24 hour a day basis, 364 days a year. Besides the ten paramedics, two of whom were already certified, 40 other volunteers were to be available on standby and as backup. Reportedly, there were only 44 paramedics in all of Montgomery County in 1978.⁸⁵² According to the plan of Narberth Ambulance, its three emergency vehicles, plus another on order (classified as a mobile intensive care unit), were to work with Lower Merion police, receiving dispatch orders from the Lower Merion Fire Radio and/or the Montgomery County Communications Center, in addition to responding to calls from private citizens and, as it had begun doing two years earlier, covering emergencies, major fires and vehicle accidents.⁸⁵³

Times were changing, and as the equipment became more sophisticated, so too the need for increased medical expertise grew. Thus Lower Merion's Board of Health had been studying the

⁸⁵⁰ "Saving Lives" by John Hekking, Main Line Chronicle, Wed., Aug. 26, 1981. Note also Haverford Township reported their ambulance crew was receiving most of its funding from state and local taxes.

⁸⁵¹ Main Line Times, October 13, 1983.

⁸⁵² Main Line Times, Feb. 18, 1982.

⁸⁵³ Main Line Times, editorial, Feb. 4, 1982, p. 12.

advisability of upgrading its emergency services,⁸⁵⁴ and it found the level of training and equipment no longer adequate for modern rescue work in a township the size of Lower Merion.⁸⁵⁵ Until then, police manning the township emergency-patrol vehicles had EMT (emergency medical technician) training and had been providing basic life-support and advanced first aid during medical emergencies and accidents. Reportedly the typical basic life support system such as Lower Merion police were providing had a nationwide success rate of thirty percent,⁸⁵⁶ while the advanced life-support system used by paramedics was believed to be twenty percent higher in its effectiveness.⁸⁵⁷ Late that same year (1981), 85 percent of the Narberth Ambulance staff were certified EMTs, whereas in 1978 less than half of all the ambulance personnel in Montgomery County were certified EMTs.⁸⁵⁸

Meanwhile autumn 1981 had seen Narberth Ambulance step up its annual membership campaign throughout the township, targeting \$1,000,000 as its goal - half of which was reached by January. By then, Narberth Ambulance's calls had increased from 100 a month to 150 a month. And even during the exploratory phase of this cooperative venture it had already begun to free Lower Merion personnel and vehicles for police work. Narberth Ambulance assured the Lower Merion Board of Health it would go ahead with its upgraded service regardless of what agreements were, or were not, reached with Lower Merion Township as to the pending proposal to give it full status as the official emergency team with comprehensive coverage of the area.⁸⁵⁹ At the time, expansion was predicted to include a substation⁸⁶⁰ in the western part of the township (this was accomplished with a substation and a life-support vehicle at Bryn Mawr Hospital in December 1982), with the main station continuing here at the eastern end of the township where two-thirds of its calls were received.⁸⁶¹

Narberth Ambulance after becoming the first paramedic-squad in eastern Montgomery County (April 14, 1982)⁸⁶² undertook its responsibility for all medical emergencies in Lower Merion and Narberth on August 1, 1982, as the township began a six-month trial period to assess the emergency care services. That step followed more than a year's study and an endorsement by the Emergency Medical Services Task Force in July. During the first five months from August through November, the corps

⁸⁵⁴ Main Line Times, editorial, Feb. 4, 1982.

⁸⁵⁵ Robert Morris, Main Line Times, February 18, 1982.

⁸⁵⁶ Main Line Times editorial on "Narberth Ambulance," Feb. 4, 1982.

⁸⁵⁷ Basic and advanced systems said Decker, Main Line Chronicle, April 14, 1982, p.5.

⁸⁵⁸ Main Line Times, February 18, 1982 p. 12.

⁸⁵⁹ Editorial, Main Line Times, Feb. 4, 1982.

⁸⁶⁰ Main Line Times, Jan. 6, 1983.

⁸⁶¹ Main Line Times, Feb. 18, 1993.

⁸⁶² Main Line Chronicle, April 14, 1982, p.5.

answered 1,320 calls compared with 378 calls in the same time-frame the previous year. Its response time was not as fast as that of the police, but the Ad Hoc Committee was satisfied with it. The corps came up with flying colors from this task force and also from its peer reviews by hospital staff at Lankenau and Bryn Mawr hospitals which monitored the progress of the program. Narberth Ambulance also got high marks from Philadelphia Magazine in its annual Best and Worst series of “Best of the Burbs” that rated Narberth’s team the best ambulance rescue squad anywhere in the suburbs.⁸⁶³ (It also declared Lower Merion’s force the best suburban police department, and Narberth’s Fourth of July celebration and fireworks the best in the suburbs.)

A final agreement on the matter of “if and when” Narberth Ambulance would become the licensed provider of its services to the township was delayed to iron out differences over how much and what insurance coverage the group should have as well as some differing opinions as to the billing of non-subscribers.⁸⁶⁴ This ambulance crew was being called the township's “second” provider because the police still got the first call in emergencies, but this seemed to be more in the nature of a respectful technicality, the police preparing the way for the arrival of the crew. So, during that six-month dry run, Narberth Ambulance served as primary provider of emergency medical services for all of Lower Merion and Narberth, covering 23 square miles and serving a population of nearly 60,000 residents, every day of the year and around the clock. Thus in its September 1983 annual fundraising letter sent to 21,000 homes, Narberth Ambulance said it had answered 4,800 emergency calls - an increase of 300 percent in the past year alone.⁸⁶⁵

Under Chief Mark Scanlon's leadership in the early-1980s, Narberth Ambulance was awarded Voluntary Ambulance Certification by the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Although not mandatory, this licensure (renewable every three years) of ambulance services was established through the passage of Pennsylvania EMS Act 45 which defines standards ensuring that citizens and visitors are provided with quality basic life support and advanced life support in the event of a medical or trauma emergency. The local unit's license was renewed ceremoniously most recently in May 1992 at borough hall.

⁸⁶³ Philadelphia Magazine, July issue, 1982.

⁸⁶⁴ Main Line Times, October 13, 1983; see also Main Line Times, Dec. 15, 1983.

⁸⁶⁵ Main Line Times, Oct. 13, 1983; see also September '83 letter signed by John M. Decker, president and Mark Scanlon, chief of operations.

Law requires that paramedics work under direct supervision of a physician by radio contact - something it has with Lankenau Hospital. That facility's Emergency Room Chief, Dr. Earl Brown, became the Narberth Ambulance medical advisor on its board of directors in the early-1980s. Lankenau also set up a 400-hour course for Narberth EMTs who want to become paramedics. Cooperation from other hospitals has included donation by Bryn Mawr Hospital of emergency-use drugs.

Finally, after two years of responding to all medical calls and emergencies to which Lower Merion police are dispatched, with the goal of one day being officially designated the provider of emergency medical services in both Narberth and Lower Merion, Narberth Ambulance won its prize. All the key people on both sides of the question on April Fool's Day 1985 signed an agreement that is still in effect.

By 1992, Narberth Ambulance, now renamed the Volunteer Medical Service Corps of Lower Merion and Narberth, and receiving some assistance from the township in its work, was feeling very squeezed and bursting at the seams in the little structure Narberth Ambulance had built for it in 1951 at 75 Haverford Avenue next to the municipal building.⁸⁶⁶ By then it had 105 volunteers and needed more parking and storage space. That building housed three of its six emergency vehicles (one being the paramedic quick-response unit), and the squad had to shop carefully any time it bought new equipment, because hardly anything wide or tall fit in.

Even as Council was preparing to enlarge its municipal complex without including the ambulance corps, Narberth Planning Commission proposed a more consolidated plan for this complex in December 1992 that would have kept the corps there. But apparently the dye was cast for the paramedic unit to go its separate way. What followed was four years of looking around for suitable quarters and a fruitless and frustrating search within the borough itself, where the squad had been located forty-eight years with a dollar-a-year lease. This left the corps eyeing Ardmore sites. It finally agreed in November 1994 to purchase a thirty-nine thousand square foot parcel of land at 109-113 Ardmore Avenue in South Ardmore in hopes of building a two-story headquarters there at a combined cost of about one million one hundred thousand dollars - a matter that was awaiting full approval as to zoning and neighborhood acceptance. The corps' site Committee Chairman/past president John M. Decker stressed:

We've been a good neighbor in Narberth, and we want to be a good neighbor in Ardmore
We're concerned about the community's perceptions, and we want to let people in Ardmore know

⁸⁶⁶ Main Line Times, Jan. 16, 1992 and Nov. 26, 1992.

that we care.⁸⁶⁷

Meanwhile, this search for a new home had generated lots of press - editorials, editorial cartoons, letters to the editor - that were nearly all sympathetic.

With major alterations to the Narberth municipal building under way and running behind schedule, the ambulance corps had hoped to stay awhile longer in its double-width construction trailer on cinder blocks in the parking lot behind borough hall. It had been there since its eviction from its old home eighteen months earlier by council to make room for town hall renovations and additions. The corps wanted at least to be able to remain in its makeshift quarters until things got on a firmer footing about its move. But borough council wanted them out and granted only a thirty-day extension to February 5, 1995. After that, no more favors. So Narberth Ambulance, under pressure from all directions, moved hurriedly into a cramped temporary home at 134 Sibley Avenue, Ardmore. In no time it had neatly framed pictures of veteran paramedics hanging up on its freshly painted white walls.

Evaluations of Narberth Ambulance had given it high marks but also recommended that it receive stronger community and municipal support both in searching for a new home and in the crucial areas of long-term funding and coordination with all emergency services. The Lower Merion township manager's speedy response was to appoint a site review committee to explore a short-term and a long-term answer to what the location should be.

The next step advocated by many was a community town meeting so that all the pros and cons of the site and the various concerns of any neighborhood groups such as Ardmore Progressive Civic Association and of individuals could be aired and resolved. This much was certain: as soon as Narberth Ambulance had taken over as the official licensed ambulance service for the township, it knew it had outgrown its old site. Starting then, it began looking off and on for another location, finally going full-tilt on its quest by 1989. A constant reminder of just how pressing that need is throughout the transition period from temporary to permanent quarters: all six of the ambulance crew's six vehicles must remain outdoors even in the most frigid weather. Thus the engines of those vehicles have to stay on twenty-four hours a day to keep medicine warm.

Like Vesuvius the protests erupted by neighbors in the Ardmore Avenue residential area near a post office, a library and two senior centers against the ambulance service and its plans. And the

⁸⁶⁷ Quote Philadelphia Inquirer Neighbors, G. McCullough, December 4, 1994.

complaints persisted including the strong objection that the immediate neighborhood had become a “dumping ground” for whatever the rest of the municipality did not want, including group homes and student housing.

Finally over the summer of 1996, a furniture warehouse became available at 101 Sibley Avenue a few doors away from the Narberth Ambulance temporary site. The corps jumped at it, and the township commissioners unanimously voted their approval of it on October 16 as the official home of this emergency unit. By this time, Bruce Tribken had stepped down as executive director of the corps, and was succeeded by Shauna Poach. One headline writer best captured the decisive moment: “Rescue squad sews up new site.”

Closer to home, it seemed like “Narberth makes, the world takes.” Consider the irony: a venerable Narberth nonprofit institution gets a new lease on life, becomes a major success story, even. But it cannot get a new lease on a place to be so it can go on living here. The ambulance service - a red, white and blue Narberth “original” if there ever was one - banished because of its very success. The attitude of borough council in this matter still strikes me as exceptionally callous toward “one of its very own.” Is nothing sacred? Besides, this departure of Narberth Ambulance comes at the oddest of times: just when EMS as a whole has become a hot-button issue - one that is being looked at all over the nation, and the American public is clamoring about the inadequacy of many of the overburdened and understaffed EMS facilities across the land.⁸⁶⁸ Our ambulance service ranks with the very best and was a good neighbor. Why the hurry to see it leave?

Med-Evac Helicopters

Early in 1989, the local ambulance corps headquartered here asked borough council to allow medical helicopters to land in the town's community playground - a big question, considering that this is probably the busiest playground on the Main Line, and also in Montgomery County.

It requested that the community field be designated as an emergency medical-helicopter-evacuation site. This landing spot would be used to airlift critically injured patients to a state-approved trauma center. The only other nearby sites being used for this purpose at the time were in Radnor

⁸⁶⁸ Public outcry – Philadelphia Inquirer, Mar. 13, 1995, “City boosts system by hiring 35 paramedics” by Suzette Parmley, part of a major EMS overhaul.

Township and two locations within Lower Merion Township's outer rim - at Penn Wynne and at City Avenue near the Schuylkill River,

Narberth Ambulance felt that the number of trauma patients needing transportation had increased beyond its ability to manage on its own. And it stated that the playground location was especially desirable because the borough is in the middle of the township this ambulance corps serves. This matter languished for some months without any decisions having been reached due to complicated insurance questions that had to be addressed. Meanwhile, the subject came up often briefly at the regular council meetings.

Just after I attended one of those public sessions that had mentioned the unresolved affair, I was planting flower bulbs directly across from the crowded playground. There on a Saturday afternoon a Little League game was in progress with lots of young parents in attendance, when the first big medevac helicopter arrived to pick up a patient from a waiting ambulance. The crowd took it for a drill, and so did I, when the loudspeaker asked that the playing field be immediately cleared, and the game put on hold. The evacuation of a real patient (who later died) went off without a hitch.

These occurrences take place now at the field fairly often, at irregular intervals day and night. Neighbors by now have gotten used both to the noisy craft swooping low on its approach, and at night to the bright landing lights and the drone of the copter engine as it prepares to take off and head, usually, for Philadelphia's Hahnemann Hospital.

Women's Lives

It is not easy to assess where Narberth women's lives have changed the most. Among the most visible ways, however, are the distinct differences in attitude women have toward the work they do depending on whether they were born in the first half or the second half of the century. Local women born before 1950 tend to be focused on helping other people through their work and on gaining appreciation, whereas their male counterparts have tended to be wedded to the idea of individual achievement and climbing up the ladder. Women on a traditional path typically work at "jobs" or do volunteer service through their church, their clubs or other non-profit groups in and around the community.

By contrast, the attitudes toward work of the younger set of people under age forty-five in Narberth are more than ever before shared by men and women. Both sexes now seem centered in their working life on the goal of gaining greater independence and on the opportunity for self-development.

Meanwhile, the present generation of younger Narberth women is trying hard to lead a balanced life without sacrificing either their family or their “career.” Changes in family structure and how women socialize are other big factors discernible today.

Women's diversity and the relationships among a whole set of issues such as the workplace, the home, marriage and sexuality, have been of great concern to feminism throughout the twentieth century, ever since the vote was won. Here as elsewhere, one would like to see the focus of today's mass audience movement, which “women's lib” now seems to have evolved into, emphasize that women belong in the public arena and that they undertake some sort of collective social and political action in our town and further afield on behalf of social justice rather than be content just to advocate self-improvement.

Volunteerism

Contrary to rumor, volunteerism is not dead. Certainly not in Narberth, although volunteer efforts here are probably most often directed toward some project that comfortably can be attended to in one's own immediate neighborhood, be it church, school, community library or on the athletic field. Substantial numbers of other volunteers, above all firemen and emergency medical team personnel, flirt with danger all the time in their public service.

Meanwhile, there is hope and encouragement for Narberth in the findings of a recent Gallup poll, stating that professional women (a category including managerial and entrepreneurial women) volunteer more than any other group in America. Some 76 percent of them volunteer compared with 69 percent of professional men, whereas 55 percent of women in sales or service do volunteer work, and 47 percent of women who are not employed outside the home. This study suggests that the professional women are delivering public service of a high quality because of their capabilities. And at the present time, the activity of such women in Narberth civic life can definitely be felt.

Likewise, the continuing barrage of borough Centennial events and celebrations has clearly shown what is possible with concerted volunteer effort by our citizens. Hopefully such bountiful activity will not only blaze a path for the immediate future, but will set a lasting precedent as well. It is fairly obvious, however, that a deeply entrenched “spoils system” mentality did influence the choice of persons appointed to the borough's key Centennial committee posts, with only Republicans permitted “to serve. The same thing prevails with the borough's various standing committees and boards. Far more essential at present than impressive credentials for candidates to such posts seems to be the

“requirement” of party affiliation and family ties with a current or recent borough elected official. Somehow this is the litmus test for advancement and recognition.

Probably the insistence that an individual jump these particular hurdles does more to discourage public service by qualified people in Narberth than any other single thing. Indeed it is more suffocating to real talent, male and female, and more troublesome to endure the rigors of strictly-enforced one-party rule than even the pervasive “Me Generation” attitudes of our society that are so often blamed for cynicism and a steep decline in civic life in America today. Possibly the persistence of the local professional women volunteers may change that.

Junior Women’s Community Club of Narberth

Celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary in 1995 and so far showing no ill effects from any shortage of volunteerism in our day, the Junior Women’s Community Club (JWCC) of Narberth has always had a reputation as a lean group in actual numbers that compensates for this by its tremendous energies that are well-focused. Such traits may bode well for the future well-being of this club.

This group was organized by the (senior) Women’s Community Club of Narberth in 1920 in recognition that a “junior” club was needed. Most of the young women enrolled that first season were fourteen and fifteen years old. When it reached fifty members strong and the median age had rapidly increased, this club in 1925 began its program of welfare and charitable work. Its motto “Fellowship, Service and Sociability” comes into play whenever the club tries to devise new ways to raise money for its charitable projects.

The outstanding activity during World War II was the club’s publicly recognized participation in the Red Cross drive. During the cold war era of the late-1950s, the “Narberth Juniors” sponsored civil defense meetings and kept an eye on area movies and periodicals to determine if they were morally objectionable to youth. By the 1960s, the club was assisting third-world countries overseas both by its involvement in the CARE package project and by raising funds to assist the S.S. Hope, a ship supplying medical care to needy nations. The Vietnam conflict saw JWCC sponsor an Amerasian child via the Pearl S. Buck Foundation. Since then, the club has supported local women's shelters to help women and children in need. Originally involved in starting our community library as well as the Girl Scouts and Brownies, this club supports locally organized volunteer activity and continuity improvements in the town as well as the Lower Merion scholarship fund. Programs of this group, many of them emphasizing traditional American women's club recreational and charitable activities, continue to find support in a

town where stay-at-home mothers with five children are still plentiful in comparison with young mothers who work two days a week, or more.

During the borough centennial year, these clubwomen donned turn-of-the-century garb and sponsored carriage tours of Narberth's historic architecture.

As no “juniors” have switched in recent decades (and seldom did, even long ago) from this group to join the “senior” women's club, the latter organization has, especially since 1980, become more confirmed in its seniority than ever before. Thus it appears inevitable that some year fairly soon the younger women's group will drop its “junior” designation and be thrust into top billing as the Narberth women's club. Meanwhile, the junior club is led by its 39th president, Anna Hillman, a young business executive in the cable television industry and a fourth-generation borough resident. (Her great-grandparents who settled here were Dr. and Mrs. Steddem and a Mr. Becker).

American Legion Post— update

The Harold D. Speakman Post of the American Legion enjoyed a rebirth in the early-1990s. Individual membership had dwindled alarmingly to six. But under the current post commander Pete C. Roeser, this figure has surged upward to its present strength of 63, including two women members. And a flurry of programs of traditional interest to veterans' organizations including some of them new to the local post have been instituted. The Speakman Post accomplished this recent sharp increase in the number of “recruits” resourcefully by scanning zip codes of veterans on Legion membership lists. Among the Pennsylvania veterans eligible to belong to the Legion (namely those who served their country during wartime) some have joined the Legion in Harrisburg, which offers a free-range affiliation known as Post 945, a statewide Pennsylvania “undesignated number.” The Speakman Post then contacted the Post 945-linked veterans of foreign wars with local addresses, and persuaded some of them to switch their affiliation to Narberth's Post 356, thus boosting membership rolls here substantially.

The American Legion's monthly magazine suggests that this organization (still the nation's largest source of blood donors) has both community and national objectives. And the Speakman Post wants to alert eligible vets to the advantages of local membership. For example, the Narberth post hosted a traveling exhibition of war posters from the National Archives on the Fourth of July 1994 here. And the post's long-standing support of local sports activity continues, the latest instance being its presentation of a \$250 check to the Narberth Athletic Association in September 1994. To its credit, the

Narberth post also lately withstood a proposed takeover of its quarters in the community building during an expansion drive by its next-door neighbor, the community library.

Raymond L. Woodall, Jr. aided the recent successful membership drive and comes by his Legion-boosting naturally. Kin of the Randolph family of Virginia and a CPA, he served in the Air Force during the Korean conflict, and his grandmother was president of an American Legion post auxiliary. Woodall has filmed nine half-hour video programs of local Memorial Day and Veterans' Day observances that subsequently have been screened on cable television, most recently in November 1994.

During our borough centennial year, the Speakman Post hopes to host the American Legion baseball program's state contest at Narberth playground. For, as Woodall explains, Narberth has been "quite important" insofar as Legion-linked baseball is concerned. Such a spectacle would remind people of this, and also of the fact that in the recent past some 60-to-80 percent of American baseball players grew up playing on American Legion teams.

Community Library: Update

In the first dramatic sign of what is proving to be the most spirited and energetic period of growth of this organization since its founding, the Narberth Community Library announced a five-year plan in December 1989 to build a major addition to its present accommodations where it has occupied the central and largest portion of the three-unit Community Building complex since the mid-1920s. The library's eleven-member board of trustees, headed at the time by Fred Hansel, Jr., suggested that while it undertook a fund drive, the borough council buy a modular unit to be placed near the rear of the library so that the facility might expand without further delay.

At the same time the library also outlined two options, namely to be permitted to expand into other areas of the existing community building where it now is - into either the American Legion Room or into the Girl Scout Room. Or, to build an addition to the existing structure, which is more costly but less of a hot potato. Early indications were that the second option offered the more acceptable community-wide choice, and consequently the library began to prepare itself to raise major capital funds.

After embarking on this plan, the library has continued to flex its muscles in ways that prompt admiration and approval in the town. True, a facelift that the front of the building received in 1991 ruffled a few feathers in the architectural community and among other close observers because it seemed rushed into without due consideration from an architectural and "community symbol" standpoint. But

interest continues to grow in the planned expansion project. In June 1993, the library initiated an annual architectural tour of the town as a fund raiser. And in May 1994, it announced the founding of the Friends of Narberth Community Library, to provide volunteer activities and future fund-raising.

There remains a question of whether the borough council will take the same attitude toward the community library's spurt of growth as it lately has done toward another Narberth-born community service organization that has grown big and strong and is bursting at the seams here: the emergency volunteer medical organization. Is council really saying to both: Nice job you're doing. But now that you are well launched, you are on your own?

Town Watch⁸⁶⁹

Rising crime rates have spawned a variety of volunteer citizen's patrol groups across the country, perhaps none more controversial than the Guardian Angels, famous for their tough-guy New York subway patrols. Guardian Angels, the "red berets," were founded by Brooklyn's Curtis Sliwa to voluntarily patrol New York City subways. A voluble self-professed voice of the little people, Sliwa, a high-school dropout now 39,⁸⁷⁰ is still living down the fact that in 1982 - a total of six times, he recently said - he filed false reports with the New York Police Department of heroism to expand the Guardian Angels' visibility. In February 1994, at the suggestion of New York's new mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Sliwa launched his own new mid-afternoon talk show on the city-owned public-radio station WNYC, amid cries from some people upset that a politician can place a political commentator on the air.

Neither so high-profile as the Guardian Angels nor as provocative, one of the most dedicated and efficient citizens' watch groups in the nation is Lower Merion Community Watch (founded 1978), a nonprofit organization made up of doctors, lawyers and construction workers and nationally recognized as the model community watch. It even spawned the first national organization of its kind when Wynnewood's Matt Peskin in 1981 formed the National Association of Town Watch (NATW), a crime prevention organization based in Wynnewood that works in cooperation with more than 2500 law enforcement agencies and crime watch groups in North America. Peskin, a businessman (in real estate), is also the originator of the annual "National Night Out" anticrime grassroots event that began in 1984 and in 1991 involved over 23 million people participating in 8,300 communities. This leadership

⁸⁶⁹ The author had intended this section to be in a sub section of Chapter 10 called "Problems being faced. The Region's Problems, Crime."

⁸⁷⁰ Editor's note: Curtis Sliwa was born in 1954. This section was written, I calculate, in 1993.

initiative came forth in a Commonwealth in which the prison population has quintupled over the past generation - from 5,300 prisoners in 1971 to 26,000 in 1994. The borough launched its own Narberth Community Watch in 1979 with 37 citizens under the direction of a Narberth police officer. The watch volunteers ride in their own automobiles, two to a car, patrolling neighborhoods day and night, looking for suspicious activity. In the first five years the Narberth unit logged 7,736 miles and 3,150 man-hours. Using a CB radio, they call in what they see to a third, stationary watcher in Narberth who relays the information to Lower Merion police. The Narberth group, which acts as the eyes and ears of the police, averages some fifty-plus members and sees its ideal membership as about eighty. The members on their tours of duty carry no weapons and do not leave their cars.

Within a six-month period after Lower Merion's then 675-member watch group became a full-fledged branch of the township police department in mid-summer 1982, that department saw a 24 percent drop in the crime rate - a trend that has held steady especially with regard to reduction in the number of burglaries in the area. By contrast, Narberth's crime-fighting achievement is measured more modestly in terms of an improved traffic safety record on weekends and the discovery of incidents of underage drinking, open manholes, minor drug offenses, vandalism and now and then a burglary. For the Borough of Narberth remains a low-crime area where some people still routinely leave their houses and their cars unlocked - a reminder that in the borough more so than in the surrounding township, a venerable tradition lives that was begun by our Welsh Quaker forefathers. Foreign visitors sojourning here among the second and third-generation Welsh nearly two centuries ago were astonished that their Quaker hosts living comfortably in fine houses close to Merion Meeting on a major highway never locked their doors. Even now, burglar alarm systems are a scarce on houses in the Borough of Narberth as they are plentiful on houses in the surrounding township. And when you do see those alarms with their posted warning, they look out of place.

Neighborhood watch-type groups are today seen as an extraordinarily successful way of getting citizens to work together on crime-prevention programs. One indicator of this success is that Matt Peskin, then 37, in 1991 was named by the United States Justice Department and the National Crime Prevention Council to serve on the National Steering Committee of the Crime Prevention Coalition in Washington, D.C. - the committee that also oversees the "McGruff-Take a Bite Out of Crime" campaign.

Also helping to take a bite out of crime at the nearby City Line Avenue corridor (stretching from the Delaware County line at Rolling Road in Penn Wynne to the Schuylkill Expressway) is a formal

alliance between the Lower Merion police and Philadelphia's nineteenth police district that began in 1992, aimed at making life, limb and property as safe as possible on both sides of that street. Besides the constant contact the two police units now maintain about crime on the avenue, the continuing agenda also includes crime prevention seminars at Saint Joseph's University, meetings in private homes attended by neighbors within a four-block radius that feature police showing a video about protection of houses, autos and property, and other programs. At the outset in 1992, Pennsylvania's community affairs department gave Lower Merion and Philadelphia the largest grant (\$7,000) in the Southeastern Pennsylvania region to create and produce crime prevention videos and related written material. Communities and civic associations on both sides of the corridor are now cooperating on various prevention and educational projects to address the stubborn crime problem on the heavily trafficked avenue. Initially, businesses in the area were slower to respond.

Business, after 1975

In 1979, Narberth imposed a business privilege tax on most businesses in the borough, including rental properties, health, legal and personal businesses. It is a one percent tax on every \$100,000 that a proprietor takes in, and Lower Merion has the same tax system. When Narberth's tax was established, the number of businesses throughout the town was estimated at 225. A proposal to increase this tax by 50 percent was tabled in December 1982.

The aim of the town's current business association is to cultivate a spirit of cooperation and goodwill among business and professional persons in the community, also to develop and encourage high ethical standards hereabouts, to encourage buying locally and provide helpful information to merchants in the development of their businesses. Early in 1990, the group, known as the Narberth Business Association during the 1980s, adopted a new name, Narberth Business and Professional Association (NBPA) and charted a new course in an effort to become a force that would move forward to assist the community. Several new committees were formed at that time: Good and Welfare, Crime Prevention, Membership, Traffic and Parking. Monthly dinner meetings are held, with a guest speaker.

At the time the association was very aware that two other Main Line business groups were leading the pack with well-planned activities of this kind: Wayne had gathered a considerable treasury being used to promote their business community, while Ardmore at that very time was interviewing applicants for the position of manager whose primary function would be to improve the commercial posture of that business district. Both central districts are much larger and on a fast-paced highway

(Lancaster Avenue known as U.S. 30), while the ambience of Narberth's main street is intimate by comparison.

Business District

Fortunately, the spirit that has animated Narberth borough for a century is the same spirit that enlivens its un-gentrified downtown business district, where shoppers hustle from store to store on this very busy walking street despite the nearness of strip centers and malls a short drive away. This section of town at the rail station has weathered rather well what is considered to have been an era of decline during the past two decades for downtown business districts generally. This, despite rumors that a landlord who owned about five properties on the street was considering replacing them with other buildings, setting them thirty feet back from the street so that there was room for parking spaces in front. Rumors flew around in 1987 and 1988 about this intention to turn Haverford Avenue into a suburban strip, but little came of it.

“For Rent” signs have always been scarce on that main street, until 1995 (see below). And when a recent president of the local civic association took up a careful survey in 1987⁸⁷¹ of the hopes, plans, fears and complaints of the businesses there (now numbering 100⁸⁷²), he came away convinced that small, downtown districts like Narberth’s have a momentum of their own that moves them ahead at their own pace. He, an architect, backed off to see where the merchants would be heading. He now says he is amazed at the changes (for the better) there within the past five years. He likes the fix-ups that individual store-owners have done, including the bright awnings some have put up. And he is relieved that they have avoided a “matching” strategy in their design improvements - something that had been sought earlier by some as desirable.

The backbone of this district that survives in the Age of Malls has always been certain individual very successful shops of long duration - hardware, groceries, bakery, a vintage movie theater, general store/five and dime, and in recent decades the State liquor store. This cluster of main street shops survives because they are needed by their customers - both the local residents arriving on foot and affluent customers from surrounding communities. Both groups equally relish a bargain. And there are more and more places for browsing along the avenue.

⁸⁷¹ Editor’s note, incomplete date in the original.

⁸⁷² C. 100 retail, professional and wholesale businesses.

Narberth has not formally joined the Main Street Manager Program the state has that pays for advisers to small-town business communities on the subject of revitalization. But the civic association several years ago did sponsor a walk-through discussion of the district by a Main Street spokesman who afterward lectured here on the subject of options regarding a comeback, insofar as any were needed. You could have heard a pin drop when that speaker disclosed the Main Street program's opposition to parking meters.

So Narberth has not yet followed Ardmore business district's lead in climbing aboard the Main Street program. Nor has it established a group comparable to the new Ardmore Business District Authority, a taxing authority founded in January 1994 within the Ardmore business community, and that was endorsed by most property owners there, and is operating under a five-year mandate.

Meanwhile, for the first time in memory, Narberth's mainstreet in 1995 had stores empty a long time - most conspicuously two that were gutted by fire and were still boarded up a year later in September 1995. But there are others as well. Mapes has just occupied its third building (this one a toy store) after the former Farmers' Market stood vacant. Thus, campaign literature from the three Democratic candidates for council in autumn 1995 complained that Narberth borough council "has not taken a leadership role in filling empty stores on Haverford Avenue or in effectively managing growth in the Montgomery Avenue area." That minority party set as one of its goals to identify businesses that might want to locate here, also to achieve balanced business districts on Haverford and Montgomery avenues, and to meet the needs of residents living in such districts for a safe and livable environment. So far Mayor Sharkey has held only one gathering - the first ever meeting of all the businesses throughout the borough - as an informational and get-acquainted session, and it took place in May 1993. Lengthy new vacancies are still occurring (1996).

Recycling

The mid-to-late 1980s saw considerable local progress made in matters of recycling. Delaware County's Haverford Township, one of the most enthusiastic municipalities anywhere in the near suburbs in the recycling push long before it became mandatory, was clearly the local pacesetter. Delaware County's mandatory newspaper recycling program that diverted some 32 million pounds of newsprint from the upstate county landfill in 1985, the first year this program was in effect, confounded the local naysayers. That same county meanwhile declared itself committed to expanding both its newsprint

recycling program and adding to it glass and aluminum. This was a wake-up call for Narberth, which had seen Lower Merion begin mandatory newsprint recycling in October 1982.

By 1987, Governor Robert Casey called on all Pennsylvanians to change their “attitudes and lifestyles” and begin recycling all glass and aluminum. The state, which at the time produced about eleven million tons of trash a year (this region was tossing out two million-plus tons a day compared with the national average of 225 million tons disposed of per day), was facing a crisis because many landfills around this metropolitan area and some other cities were at or near capacity, and only five percent of the waste was being recycled or used to produce other products. Governor Casey outlined amendments to a solid-waste legislative bill that would set the goal of recycling a fourth of the state's trash (a less ambitious goal than the bill passed days earlier by Philadelphia city council that targeted twenty-five percent recycling by 1989 and fifty percent by 1991).

It was in the midst of this heightened awareness of the nation's landfills overflowing with trash, a substance that has come to symbolize our throwaway society, and a vision of lawmakers clamping tight restrictions on waste disposal, that communities like Narberth joined in earnest this effort to learn to cope with this growing ecological problem. Narberth had already looked squarely at one of the controversial issues of trash disposal, the highly emotional debate concerning proposed trash-to-steam plants when, in 1989, it confirmed its 1985 letter of intent to Montgomery County acceding to its request to join its Solid Waste Management Plan which calls for the building of a Resource Recovery Facility in Plymouth Township.

Up until considerably after World War II, borough employees (a six-man squad of graying first-generation Italians from Brick Row) collected Narberth trash in borough trucks. They picked up the trash containers inside the yards on private property and returned them inside those yards, so that trash containers were no more visible on public sidewalks on collection day than at any other time. Garbage from the start was a separate collection, and it too was gathered from inside the yards of private residences, often from containers that were recessed in the ground. When contractors took over the by then combined trash/garbage collecting, containers had to be placed curbside, and trash was collected twice a week, and still is. Newsprint, glass and metal are collected regularly on specified days of the month, with glass and metal placed in a special (yellow) receptacle marked with the borough seal and a recycling slogan.

The recycling boom of the late-1980s, sparked by the state's passage in 1988 of Act 101, requiring municipalities of more than ten thousand residents to recycle three of eight items, has lately hit

a snag with regard to newsprint recycling by that old recycling warhorse, neighboring Delaware County, where costs of collecting and disposing of newspaper rose after it hauled a peak of 24,096 tons for 1990. Meanwhile, the temporarily sluggish market for newsprint is gradually improving and looks bright for the future. But counties and towns need to be more aggressive to find those takers and go after long term contracts.

Growth Management - Yes or No

A citizens' group, Penn Valley Civic Association, took the initiative in 1953 to recommend strongly to the Lower Merion Board of Commissioners that a comprehensive master plan of the township be developed. The township adopted one in 1979. So far, the borough has not followed the township's exemplary lead in this, even though master plans are an accepted fact of life for many built-up boroughs, no less than for rural townships. In Pennsylvania, master plans for municipalities are highly recommended, but not required by law.

As recently as 1993, at a meet-the-candidate political forum sponsored by Narberth Civic Association during the general election, the incumbent Republicans running for reelection and their one neophyte candidate (representing the fire company) all spoke out against such a master plan for Narberth. And all their Democratic opponents for council and mayor spoke in favor of it. Noteworthy is that when a fire company candidate tried to run for commissioner in Lower Merion several years ago, he was called a "special interest" candidate and spurned for that reason. In Narberth, which elects all its council members "at large," (not to represent a particular ward as Lower Merion does) such a criticism would seem less apt.

The background on this is that Narberth established its planning commission in 1938 when faced with the pressing problem of meeting the borough's storm water drainage needs along the course of Indian Creek. Some 25 percent of these drainage-sewer systems were subsequently built with labor supplied by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1938 and 1939 and aided by a \$20,000 bond issue (1940) to provide materials. The first woman named to this planning commission (Constance Stelzenmuller, 1978) became the group's current chairman.

The incumbent council candidates that evening in 1993 did not explain their blanket, unanimous opposition to embracing growth management for the borough. Theirs was more of a gut reaction to an issue, captured best by a jovial declaration by one of them from the rostrum - a man with a background in real estate and development (he was subsequently reelected, and now serves as council president).

Motioning to the ranking senior councilman who was not then up for reelection, a popular figure who heads the borough's building and grounds committee, the candidate beamed: Chet Tyson is our comprehensive plan—the only one we need.

If nothing else, such public utterances are a mark of respect paid, like dues, to senior Republican Protestant councilmen that seems to enable the town's Catholic politicians of the same party, but of Irish backgrounds, to cement their rather new alliances with the old local Protestant leadership and to advance themselves in some cases within the same-party group, as lately has happened with the blessing of their colleagues.

For conservatives, a master plan is anti-growth and must be offered up like a sacrificial lamb during our tight economic climate of the 1990s. What Narberth's anti-master plan politicians do not realize is that their continuing failure to support growth management fosters an antibusiness climate. This not only hurts local economic development but it also reveals a cavalier attitude toward protecting quality of life, while neglecting even the bare minimum of defining where development shall not occur. This leaves us with an unwanted welfare program for developers that benefits the few at the expense of the many. The public debate on the issue fell silent after the autumn 1993 election, when all the anti-master plan candidates won.

A Concern about Open Land

If we want a town where the only thing that is important is the continued escalation of the price of real estate and the filling in of lots, then the heterogeneity of the town, that which made it great in layer over layer of construction, will be dead and our spirit and our culture will be dead too. Destruction of neighborhoods and of pockets of open land in a town as densely settled as Narberth can kill.

The crucial battle over the increasing spread of the commercial strip and housing subdivisions is at hand. Residents must take note and join in to support this fight. A win here will be a signal to other towns that these matters are important. The signal to our county and region as a whole will be even bigger. Fortunately in this battle we do have friends and a measure of support. Montgomery County is maintaining that it is of primary concern that any vestiges of open land here be preserved and it has stepped up its efforts dramatically to ensure that municipal governments all around us march together to the beat.

Thus Montgomery County in October 1993 adopted a very progressive, ten-year, hundred million dollar plan to acquire and preserve open space throughout the county, thanks to a bond issue that

was approved without a vote and that the commissioners floated. Prepared with surprising speed for the county commissioners by a 26-member task force they appointed in April 1993, the plan provides money for each of the county's 62 municipalities, presenting ten separate programs to those townships and boroughs for possible funding. Thus it offers something for almost every need - funds for parks (especially meaningful in a town like Narberth with little or no open space - indeed, it has less than any other municipality in the county), as well as funds for fields, farms, trails and tree plantings.

The project, being called the county's biggest single initiative since it built the community college (1964), aims at curbing suburban development that has been overtaking this region for decades. Another long-range benefit is that it stimulates communities to do comprehensive planning, something in which a number of towns and townships, both densely settled ones and rural communities, have lagged.

Chester County was clearly the local pacesetter with its open-space initiatives, when its residents approved a fifty-million-dollar bond issue in 1990 to preserve farmland and open space in the county's 67 municipalities. This provided funds to rewrite zoning laws, buy parkland and spruce up recreation facilities. Delaware County's response to its neighbors' open-space initiatives has been a disappointment considering that pressures for development have devastated large areas of that region. Hundreds of strip malls, unsightly signs and serious flooding along creek beds are the most obvious concerns. With that county's population decreasing, a serious plan has yet to be developed to reclaim areas that have fallen prey to unrestricted development. Although it was considered, a bond issue of a hundred million dollars will not be on the November 1995 ballot, but a referendum on the subject may come up in the spring 1996 primary. By contrast to this slow-moving scenario, there is a healthy desperation in an idea for a dramatic land grab being mulled over (September 1995) in Central Bucks County that proposes that a quarter-billion dollars should be raised at taxpayer expense to buy what is left of the countryside so as to halt the bulldozers and prevent overdevelopment of that very fast-growing population area. Hovering in the background of such goings on is the hope that before long the state legislature may give counties more clout in land-use matters than they have at present.

Meanwhile, Montgomery County's distribution formula for its popular current open-space plan gives each municipality a flat sum of \$530,000, plus another \$33.83 per person, based on the 1990 United States Census. In return for these municipal grants, towns and townships will be required to produce open-space plans, and to put up ten percent in matching funds. These open-space plans must include creative zoning measures focused on preserving, rather than simply buying open space.

Moreover, the grants must be used to acquire park land. A municipality with little or no open space can use the funds to improve existing parks or for urban renewal. An example of the latter would be the acquisition of deteriorated buildings that could be demolished and the land used for open space. Communities have four years to comply with these mandates for open-space planning and site selection.

Lower Merion's response to this windfall initially was to name the two-year-old Lower Merion Preservation Trust, that previously had been limited to identifying resources and serving as a preservation advocate, as its agent for spending the township's two-and-a-half million dollar share of the county's hundred million dollar bond issue for open-space preservation. Lower Merion's choice was the 88-acre Walter Pew property in Gladwyne, for which it made settlement on December 20, 1994. Here in the borough, several locations at first were under consideration for small parks while tree plantings elsewhere in town were also under discussion, as no fields or farms remain.

Council started out by bypassing a proposal that an ad hoc task force be formed to oversee this effort, and instead put it in the hands of a standing committee, Building and Zoning, whose goal it would then be to recommend to Council specific options available for maximizing the use of the open-space funds. In November 1994 the borough awarded the contract for the consultant needed in order to submit the open-space plan to the county commissioners to Waetzman Planning Group, Ardmore, as a result of a competitive sealed bid - their fee being reimbursable under the Open Space grant. By the end of August 1995, the overseeing group, calling itself the Open Space Steering Committee, had expanded to include besides its original nucleus, members of Narberth planning commission and Narberth shade tree commission. Working together with the Waetzman Group, this large committee had by then reviewed all the available options. And the conclusion was that only two programs from the menu of ten were suitable for the Borough of Narberth to pursue - the tree planting program and the municipal acquisition and development grant program. The percentage of matching funds will depend on which specific options Narberth chooses.

The perspectives Waetzman explored in its role as consultant were given their clearest definition by 1990 Federal Census statistics that throw considerable light on Narberth's current open space needs.

According to that census, this town then had 4,278 people living in its half a square mile. This translates to 8,556 persons per square mile density here in the borough which is far above Montgomery County's 1407 persons per square mile average. Narberth's seventeen percent decline in population since 1970 represents mainly a trend toward smaller families, for the number of households actually increased here from 1,897 to 1,981 in the same period. The ratio of 2.7 persons per household had

dropped to 2.16 in that twenty-year interval. Also, in 1990, 53 percent of those households were family groups. Likewise, the median age of 36.4 years hovered close to the county's median age of 35.8 years. The largest segment of the borough population at the time (1990), 38.8 percent, was in the 25 to 44 age bracket, while the next-largest segment, 16.7 percent were 65 and older, and the next most numerous group, 10.9 percent of the population, were between five and fifteen years old.

Another consideration in exploring open-space options is: what are the local living conditions? How cramped are they? Narberth housing types in the 1990 census featured 1195 single-unit detached and attached houses (751 of which are standing alone, the remainder being either twins or attached on both sides). Also, there are 833 apartments and condominiums, of which 436 are located in buildings containing between two and nine units, and almost as many in buildings with ten units or more. Among all types of housing, the 1112 owner-occupied units (slightly more than half of the 2,044 housing units in Narberth) have a median value somewhat above the Montgomery County average of 143,400, while the renter-occupied housing units (prospective apartment-dwellers please be advised) have a median rent that is slightly less than the county's \$521 median. Also noteworthy, the town provides employment for 1,602 people in areas clustered in the central business district and along Montgomery Avenue.

As Narberth has as yet no comprehensive plan, the Waetzman consultation report (July 11, 1995 draft) noted that the borough consequently relies on the Statement of Community Development Objectives in the Zoning Ordinance for planning policy. And that ordinance statement declares Narberth is a suburban community primarily residential in character, almost completely developed and aims to maintain its natural amenities and to encourage only such changes and development as will least disrupt the continuance of that residential character. A preliminary open-space preservation study (1994) by the Narberth planning commission meanwhile had shown that open space here in the town is not a wide-open land area but the shared "open space" of the streets and front yards where residents interact and children play. That study set three goals: first, to optimize the existing playgrounds and vistas; second, to focus community awareness on Narberth "streetscape;" third, develop pedestrian traffic opportunities and amenities in the business district; and four, raze obsolete buildings to provide open space.

Waetzman further identified three "permanently protected" land categories in Narberth - borough-owned, homeowners' association open space, and the railroad right-of-way. In the first category are the town's two parks - the high-profile six-and-one-half acre playground at the site of the community building and the smaller Shand Field that had served the adjacent, former public school - a park saved from extinction only a few years ago by a well-organized citizens' rally. As for the

homeowners' unusually early initiative on behalf of open land, Narbrook Park, the fourteen-acre "garden city" model community of 1915 featuring thirty-six houses, has a central expanse of about two and one-tenth acres containing a stream. This open land is owned and maintained by Narbrook Park Improvement Association. Finally, the four railroad tracks with a combined breadth of nearly fifty feet are situated on a high embankment covering about three acres, its Haverford Avenue expanse established with flowers, shrubbery and small trees planted and maintained by N.I.C.E. community group.

Viewed from any perspective, Narberth is appallingly deficient in open land areas. According to the open space standards for the region that were drawn up by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission in December 1977, Narberth should be providing six acres (four acres active and two acres passive) of recreation area for each one thousand inhabitants. That classification is based on a density of between six and twenty persons per acre. By those regional planning commission criteria; Narberth's 1990 population figures of 4,278 people call for about 25.67 acres of open space (17.11 acres active and 8.56 acres passive). Still tougher standards and guidelines to meet would be those of the National Recreation and Park Association (1983) stipulating that between six and one-quarter and ten and a half acres of developed parkland per one thousand people should be available to residents, which for us translates to between 26.7 and 43.8 acres. At the present time, the borough has just over seven acres of active recreation area; located at two park sites and these both are already fully utilized and need some improvements.

One large piece of undeveloped land with some potential as a park is a portion of a residential lot in a flood plain south of the railroad underpass at East Wynnewood Road and Elmwood Avenue. More compelling however - and surely the strongest candidate for a building to be demolished for a park - is an ethnic neighborhood restaurant, Giuliani's, located in the midst of the town's most densely populated residential area, at Iona and Woodbine avenues, and currently for sale and finding few takers so far.

Historic Preservation in Narberth – 1980s

Narberth's preservation profile was typical of many old suburban towns in America just after World War II: plenty of middle-aged and Victorian housing stock, some houses endangered because they stood on sizeable tracts, and it was tight going to think of expanding the business district. Narberth felt very strong pressures toward redevelopment - something that when it did happen, occurred

piecemeal style, these gradual changes at first attracting little attention, much less controversy. Consequently, the need for a comprehensive plan to guide development went unmet.

The concept of historic preservation as it evolved in this country after World War II and came to maturity in the 1970s, was late in arriving here in the town. Finally, it came crashing into view a decade later with a community-wide battle to save the Dr. O. J. Snyder house at the northwest corner Narberth and Woodbine avenues, a Bungalow-craftsman-style design (1908) by the Main Line architect D. Knickerbacker Boyd which was arguably the finest house ever built in Narberth borough. This large shingle and stone house boasted such architectural details as interior wooden pilaster capitals carved in a style resembling cubism.

The redevelopment plan to demolish Snyder House, subdivide its land and build two-twin-unit houses on it, was to be the first full-scale project undertaken by a new young developer whose family were major landlords in the Narberth business district. This was the type of subdivision housing project that might have expected smooth sailing through borough council reviewing procedures in the past, when demolition and redevelopment was so often viewed as both inevitable and a boon to the community from any standpoint. Two sets of petitions opposing the project were taken up (1987 and 1988), various professional opinions were gathered, several nonprofit institutions and prominent individuals gave advice, assistance and sent letters. And the press covered the subject.

Brandywine Conservancy meanwhile advised the ad hoc “Save Snyder House Committee” (headed by architect David Brawer and journalist/historian Victoria Donohoe) to call itself “Narberth Preservation Committee” and to hang in there, in the expectation that when its work of saving Snyder House was done, the logical next step could be taken: prepare an historic preservation ordinance - one or more such documents, depending on the number of historic districts sought. That way, the purely voluntary “committee” could be transformed with some changes, into an official “Narberth Historical Architectural “Review Board” to oversee those districts for the borough. The conservancy was the first organization to give Narberth (through its voluntary committee) a copy of a basic ordinance format helpful to various municipalities when they write preservation ordinances for their own use.

Then came the unforeseen tragedy. Two months before the O. J. Snyder House was expected to go on the National Register, its young owner demolished the house, sending some rare, built-in, 1908 Cubistic wood-carved architectural elements to the dump.⁸⁷³ At the time, the price the owner /developer

⁸⁷³ Cited from Preservation News, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C., January 1989, p.1, item from Chapter 10 Page 552

was asking hovered very close to what architect Edward Harrison Bernstein (a member of the historic preservation committee of the Philadelphia chapter American Institute of Architects) was willing to pay to rescue the house and adapt it for reuse. He had insisted on a fair market price, not an inflated one. The outcome: the young owner (Gregory Wax) eventually lost the undeveloped property.

The stage was set for some changes of attitude on the part of the borough council after that, but nothing noteworthy happened until autumn 1989, when council president Bill Furber circulated an election-eve letter to local citizens summarizing the achievements under Republican rule, asking support for the current slate of candidates and declaring the intention to establish a preservation review committee headed by a prominent lawyer. The purpose of that review was to decide if the borough needed an historical-preservation ordinance and to study the legal ramifications of creating one.

This sudden move was local Republican leadership's way of recognizing that lightning would strike here or there when a building was threatened, and maybe they needed to do something the citizens wanted about this. Some observers wondered if this move made a lame, token gesture toward historic preservation in a meek avowal of a protected position, reflecting the paranoia that conservatism sometimes shows. Was this belated gesture the smallest concession⁸⁷⁴ toward what was already accepted policy in the surrounding township and elsewhere? That would be a pity for it would suggest that full-fledged change is impossible, and that change occurs instead with the faint incorporation of the neutralized. We would not know the answer to this for a while.

The choice of highly regarded and venerable Desmond J. McTighe (born 1902) a civic-minded trial lawyer who had been Pennsylvania Bar Association president in the early-1960s, to head the new preservation committee was a strong one. Yet it appeared to have been arrived at hastily, for it came as a bit of a surprise to McTighe himself when he read Furber's letter. Nevertheless McTighe, who had given his time very generously to civic causes such as setting up police pensions, helping found the current civic association and saving the Fourth of July celebration from extinction at a critical point, had one more feather in his cap that made him right for the Job. He had been a stalwart identified with resistance to developers' efforts at subdivision of land to build high-rises in the town on a couple of occasions. He cared deeply about preventing sharp upturns in Narberth's population density. Also he was an old-time

National Trust Mid-Atlantic Regional Office about the loss of Snyder House, discusses the problem, quotes a preservation committee member as stating, "This reckless, mindless trashing of our cultural heritage must stop."

⁸⁷⁴ Kay West of Narbrook Park enlivened these discussions at the time, mentioning this particular concern to the writer, late February and early-March 1995.

Republican with no taste for the growing tendency of the 1980s toward partisan politics, and he “could not comprehend how members of one party in this town are all saints while those in the other party are all jackasses,” as he put it.⁸⁷⁵ McTighe had often said that the town council should have a broader representation of the major parties on it as well as women. Looking back now, it is fascinating to speculate what Desmond McTighe's leadership might have meant to the advancement of historic preservation in the borough. But it was not to be. In poor health when he took over the post the following January, McTighe died shortly before hosting his first committee meeting.

Partisanship quickly surfaced in the selection of that committee's first members. No Democrats initially were permitted to serve (and Dave Brawer, registered as an Independent voter, who was an obvious and willing choice, was passed over). Eventually this policy changed and some Democrats came aboard, but not Brawer. A borough preservation committee headed by a Republican lawyer was retained as the operative framework of choice. Also a lawyer/councilperson whose law office is here in town, became the liaison between borough council and this committee. That individual, Kathleen Valentine, before long found herself running that committee, on up through its final embattled days. And a very revealing several years it was, if you look closely at the attitudes expressed during that period by both our local governing body and the people they serve. Significantly too, from the start of her association with this preservation committee until the conclusion of its work five years later, Valentine gave the impression that hers was a dull and tedious assignment, one for which she felt no zest. She seemed to be marking time.⁸⁷⁶

By contrast, the grunt work of the preservation committee was carried on with concentration throughout and with considerable flair by a half-dozen persons including Narberth planning commission head, Republican Constance Stelzenmuller, slate-roofer Bill Brinkmann, real estate agent Maureen Sexton⁸⁷⁷ and by the first chairman of that ordinance review committee, lawyer Walter L. McDonough. Two members who undoubtedly worked hardest to achieve the goals of this committee were Dennis R. Montagna, and James P. Cornwell.

As an architectural historian with the National Park Service, Dennis Montagna was particularly interested in the necessity of using educational means to stimulate public awareness of what could be

⁸⁷⁵ From a McTighe interview with an anonymous canvasser in the fall elections as he showed him some Democratic campaign literature.

⁸⁷⁶ Editor's note: Valentine may have been borough president at the time.

⁸⁷⁷ Editor's note: not sure of the correct name of this person.

accomplished by historic preservation legislation in a small community like ours. He also zeroed in on the problem-solving that goes into setting up such a municipal board, doing so without the expectation of serving on it once that board was established (for a federal employee is obliged to avoid conflicts of interest). Jim Cornwell, an architect in private practice, shouldered heavy burdens to aid this work also, perhaps most wholeheartedly in the initiative he took to compose a draft of a necessary and complicated zoning document - only to be reprimanded⁸⁷⁸ by councilperson/liaison Valentine because he had not been asked to do this. It was becoming apparent that progress, if it was to be made at all in this crucial matter of preservation would not be allowed to happen swiftly under one-party rule.

Borough-sponsored committee work on preservation nevertheless spun into action with an intense four-year period of correspondence with Michel R. Lefevre,⁸⁷⁹ the community preservation coordinator from the state Bureau of Historic Preservation at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg with a background as a political scientist - these contacts starting in January 1991 and interspersed with four visits by him. During his first tour of Narberth which was a “windshield” survey by auto in May 1991, Lefevre gave a preliminary opinion that the entire borough might be eligible for designation by the state as an historical district. This is because the town has such a large concentration of buildings constructed during the teens and 1920s that remain intact, rather than due to any individual buildings here claiming historical interest, although certain specific buildings and neighborhoods do have marked historical significance - for it is our concentration of buildings that gives Narberth a character and a feel that is unique to it. And thus creation of a historical-preservation ordinance would serve the function of protecting the town's character.

In early March 1992, Walt McDonough presented to borough council the Narberth preservation committee’s findings, and he urged the passage⁸⁸⁰ of such an ordinance. Legislation of that kind, designating either the entire borough or only certain neighborhood districts, was set forth as a prime means of protecting what is distinctive about Narberth. Designations of that sort must be approved by the state, based (eventually but not initially) on detailed block-by-block surveys of the proposed districts. The obvious next step: a decision on which type of designation to seek. Also, Dennis Montagna faxed a first draft of a “procedural outline” for creation of a historic district to Lefevre, who responded

⁸⁷⁸ The writer’s interview with an anonymous source, October 1, 1995.

⁸⁷⁹ Compiled after this writer’s interview with Lefevre, October 13, 1995.

⁸⁸⁰ Philadelphia Inquirer Main Line “Neighbors” section, article by Kathi Kauffman, March 8, 1992.

with comments.⁸⁸¹ This was followed by another Lefevre visit and talk session here with the committee, focused on the relative merits of several small versus one large district.

Meanwhile, Lefevre was uncomfortably aware of a blip passing across the screen of people's minds in Philadelphia, making for an “unhealthy climate” to develop preservation initiatives such as Narberth’s at that time. For in July 1991, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court declared Philadelphia’s historic preservation law unconstitutional when Justice Rolf Larsen wrote the original opinion that Chestnut Street’s Art Deco ornate Boyd Theater could not be preserved over the objections of its owner. This created a long period in “limbo,” when the city was unsure about the future of the law, besides being unable to finish the historical designations that were part of its historic preservation program. Eventually (in November 1992) the court straightened things out by reversing itself, just after Judge Larsen had been released of his duties as a judge due to an unrelated, high-profile matter and subsequently impeached by the State Senate. Also causing a more localized static around the same time, were outcries in the press⁸⁸² by some Ridley Park residents annoyed at having to conform to guidelines for house exterior renovation as outlined by a preservation ordinance in their Delaware County town.

Narberth faced another type of high hurdle - trying to choose a consultant from a wide array of interviewees. The job: to perform a “reconnaissance survey” of its buildings, numbering about twelve hundred. Mrs. Valentine had envisioned a task far more extensive than the norm (and thus prohibitively expensive— to include both a file-card and a photo for each structure, with the sky’s the limit as to price) while attempting to comply with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Historic Districts Legislative Act 167. At this time, two things happened that really ticked Valentine off: the preservation review committee wrote her a letter⁸⁸³ stating it thought she was leading it in the wrong direction. Also, Lefevre was summoned to straighten her out. The prospects for success of Narberth’s preservation initiatives are said to have nosedived permanently at this point, due to Valentine’s handling of the personal embarrassment she felt over these two incidents. Nevertheless, after state official Lefevre did arrive, usefully pointing out that a modest agenda was sufficient, a consultant was swiftly hired - within budget. Lefevre, not wishing to attach blame on anyone for the earlier confusion, explained:

Some information got lodged in people's minds that what was needed was a

⁸⁸¹ Lefevre, *ibid.*

⁸⁸² Article by Claire Furia, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 16, 1994; “Preservation Blues” column in *Inquirer* by John Corr about Ridley Park; and the upcoming decision about passing a preservation ordinance, *Inquirer* Feb. 17, '94.

⁸⁸³ The writer interviewed committee member Connie Stelzenmuller about this, October 20, 1995.

comprehensive survey of all buildings in the borough Not so, as long as there's some understanding of the overall concept of what is there.⁸⁸⁴

What is most abundantly there, according to the consultant⁸⁸⁵ who finally did the survey, is "a true American style" called the American Modern movement and representing the period from the early 1900s through the 1920s, before technology began to overshadow and replace craftsmen's construction skills. He also documented that a great many buildings had been destroyed in the town.

These revelations came on the heels of a committee-led effort made during 1993 to zero in on "getting the message out" about the importance of historic preservation to the community at large. Such an effort had aimed to counter a number of widespread public misconceptions about preservation: that historical regulation is unduly burdensome, that it lowers property values, and infringes on the rights of homeowners. On the property values point, Dennis Montagna of the National Park Service declared historic preservation to be cost effective and on the national level it adds value⁸⁸⁶ to communities. He also likened historic preservation to the environmental movement insofar as both movements are about saving resources and enhancing them.

Meanwhile, Moody's Municipal Credit Report (October seventh 1993) reported that fifty-six and one-tenth percent of Narberth's housing was owner-occupied in 1990. And this drove home the point that a large amount of our housing and our entire commercial district is revenue-producing and therefore, if in a historic district, would be eligible for tax credits for improvements and renovations.

Furthermore, from a neighboring Eastern Montgomery County community to the north, attorney Paula Goulden who chairs the Wyncote Board of Historical and Architectural Review, was invited to give testimony at a 1993 Narberth gathering about her municipality's experience with preservation initiatives. Goulden credited her group's success in obtaining an historic preservation ordinance to communitywide public meetings, public discussions and an effective public relations effort. Each local residence also had received in the mail a draft of the proposed ordinance.

And speaking of public relations and the role it can play to support (or undercut by its absence) a community effort like this, the Main Line Times took its lumps among some Narberth people for the

⁸⁸⁴ Interview with Michel R.Lefevre, 13 October 1995.

⁸⁸⁵ Robert E. Bartmann of Reading, PA – his "Narberth Survey" is in our borough office. "In Narberth, the true American style is found," stated Jennifer Wing in her article Philadelphia Inquirer, February 20, 1995.

⁸⁸⁶ Montagna's statements in article "Borough historical committee getting to work: by Anita Davidian, Main Line Times, July 8, 1993, p.5. Montagna also had sent a letter to the editor, Philadelphia Inquirer.

skimpy coverage it gave the deeper concerns of preservationists here, while the Philadelphia Inquirer gave the subject only brief news coverage.⁸⁸⁷ The accusing finger pointed at Joan Toenniessen who, as managing editor of the Main Line Times until July 1995 was both a writer of editorials and also very often covered nighttime government meetings in our borough hall like a beat reporter. Her editorials were especially known for their crusading advocacy of certain causes - one being historic preservation in Lower Merion Township. Yet she never took the same subject seriously in Narberth, and this is seen by some as a considerable loss, coming at a time when hers was the only editorial-writing voice being raised on behalf of historic preservation in the lower Main Line area. (Editorials in the competing new weekly newspaper Main Line Life had not yet ventured into such terrain.) This skewed perspective of hers was said to have been arrived at - or reinforced - after a noisy late-night borough meeting she was covering (as a reporter), when Toenniessen sought out Mayor Sharkey to discuss the growing local preservation effort, and found he was against it. Whereupon she backed off the controversial side of the subject - permanently. So, by contrast to her exemplary service to preservation causes in Lower Merion over many years, this much is certain; editor Joan Toenniessen never took a public stand on the hot-button issue of historic preservation in Narberth.

And despite the closure the Republican majority government placed firmly on the subject of preservation in Narberth at a March 1995 public meeting with virtually no explanation - it felt like a great iron gate slamming shut as one heard what sounded like a carefully orchestrated chorus of naysayers intone their shrill and divisive "us" against "them" message - the topic seems certain to bob up again. After all, a great number of our town's newer, younger residents (the "them" who were assailed that evening) favor historic preservation initiatives, as do a select number of public-spirited older long-time residents of both major political parties. It was never in the cards that these two latter groups old-timers and newer arrivals, would come up with the same old answers in new circumstances such as we are experiencing today.

Mary-Jo Pauxtis, a well-known political presence in Narberth and the region (who has resumed her maiden name, Mary Jo Daley) saw the turn-down of our whole town's anticipated listing on the

⁸⁸⁷ "Certifying Narberth may be history," 1 March 1995 and "Council ends effort for historic district," 14, March 1995, both by Jennifer Wing Philadelphia Inquirer Main Line "Neighbors" section; "Narberth historic district evokes mixed reviews," 23 February 1995 and "Historic District fails committee review," 2 March 1995, and "Historic district plan now history," 16 March 1995 - all three articles by Joan Toenniesson in the Main Line Times.

State Register as a considerable loss by persons “in the trenches⁸⁸⁸ working for preservation in their town.”

In her defense, however, it can be said that Mrs. Toenniessen backed off not because she felt convinced or had been talked into silence, but simply because she “did not understand the mayor’s/borough’s negative slant on the subject.” She says that she “could not fathom it at all.” Actually, Toenniessen’s own private perception of the Narberth preservation battle was, she said, “shock and amazement that the Borough of Narberth did not follow through so as to obtain a listing for the whole town on the State Register.”⁸⁸⁹

She drew a parallel between this lack of official backing in Narberth for the protection of resources that people want to see protected, and the analogous situation with the Lower Merion School Board and its failure to protect the Ardmore Junior High School building which resulted in the irreparable loss of that landmark even though public sentiment strongly favored saving it. For her, this caused deep disillusionment when she realized that citizens can no longer count on official bodies to act in the public interest, but must fight on as best they can individually to attain these protections – that building’s loss being, she emphasized, the recent worst-case example of this. Toenniessen pointed out the irony that the decision to demolish was made by the head of the school district’s finance committee, who lives in a suburb far from Lower Merion Township.

Lefevre’s take on this setback Narberth preservation efforts have had during the borough centennial year is that he wonders whether a sufficiently long-term effort was made to educate citizens about preservation here in the town. Without that, he cautions long-term problems can be created. He explains:

It doesn’t have to be Draconian. It’s a matter of weighing the benefits and other factors including culture and heritage. You have to convince as many people as possible that it’s a good thing. Typically a group of people is concerned. But as a voluntary group they may not have had time to circulate their message.⁸⁹⁰

Lefevre went on to say that among the 2,573 townships and boroughs in Pennsylvania, only about a hundred (mostly in southeastern Pennsylvania) have some kind of ordinance that protects

⁸⁸⁸ Interview with Mary-Jo, August 3, 1995, by the writer.

⁸⁸⁹ The author’s interview with Joan Toenniessen, December 7, 1996.

⁸⁹⁰ Lefevre, *Ibid.*

historic resources. So, he ventured, why is it only that many communities are ready to bite the bullet and do some kind of regulation? Treasons are not hard to find. We do not have sufficient esteem for our communities, for one thing. For another he noted that some people ask incredulously: What is so historic about my house? They forget, he explained, all the different periods of the development of our nation - everything from railroad towns to industrial neighborhoods. The truth is that for many people, the only things they regard as historic are battle scenes and locations where it can be said "Washington slept here." Lefevre sees that as a failure of the schools.

Lower Merion-Narberth Watershed Association

In Narberth's long-playing problems with the oil pollution of the East Branch of Indian Creek from September 1967 through 1969, a leaky oil tank on the grounds of Wynnewood's large Thomas Wynne Apartments complex was found to be the culprit, spewing contamination into the Narberth stream. Eventually the governing bodies of Narberth and Lower Merion provided matching funds (\$2,000 each) toward paying an engineering consultant to study the problem by test-drilling the site. There was no local environmental group to lead the fight then. But the subject, constantly in the news, was a wake-up call for some.

In 1974, a Lower Merion High School science teacher, Art Wolfe, conceived the idea of helping his students increase their interest in the environment, and that year founded the Lower Merion-Narberth Watershed Association, a non-profit conservation group of volunteers. They began small, concentrating their attention on installing gabions on eroding stream banks and restoring trout, in both instances to Penn Valley's Mill Creek. Through their efforts, Mill Creek became the first stream in Pennsylvania to be included in the state's Adopt-A-Stream program.

Since then, activities have mushroomed and include educational programs at area schools, a recycling program, study of storm water ordinances with a view to improving Lower Merion's, development of standards for erosion control at construction sites and efforts to identify and preserve open space. The late-1980s would see a sharp upward surge in membership, and some of the original Lower Merion students were still active in the organization, today known as Lower Merion Conservancy.

Volunteer Firemen⁸⁹¹

Uncle Ben Kramer once editorialized – and very convincingly – that, speaking from personal experience, if he were to hire a man to do a job, the fact that he is a volunteer fireman would weigh heavily in his favor as a recommendation, the idea being that a man who will race to put out a fire at all hours from a sense of public duty without expecting a reward, can be depended on to give an extra measure of effort at a task for which he is paid. With technology supplying more chemical-based building materials, firefighting has become more difficult, requires more training time, and costs more than ever now.

Of course, volunteer brigade service is older than the nation, Ben Franklin having started America's first volunteer company in 1736 in Philadelphia. Until the 1960s in this country, the local fire hall was the center of town life in our nation, and being a volunteer firefighter was a status symbol. At that time, only the large cities had paid fire departments. Today some of America's suburban communities are beginning to have tax support for firefighting because fewer men are available and they have less time for fund-raising, which is part of a national problem. It is a problem that is not going to go away in Southeastern Pennsylvania where the more than 230 volunteer fire companies now find it more and more difficult to recruit volunteers.

By the 1990s, Narberth Fire Company still enjoyed a relatively strong position in relation to other suburban fire companies insofar as it is still able to draw many of its volunteers from the ranks of men with jobs in the town. So their response time to alarms remains excellent compared with some other groups.

⁸⁹¹ Editor's note: Vicky had this section in an envelope marked "later period: after 1945"

About the Author

Victoria Donohoe (1929-2018), was an extraordinarily accomplished woman, one well ahead of her time! The only child of Daniel J. and Anne O'Neill Donohoe, both artists, Vicky was born and raised in historic Narbrook Park in Narberth, PA, and remained in the family home for her whole life.

For many local residents, it was her red hair, her lithe figure, her purposeful walk and her striking clothes as she went about in Narberth, that distinguished her. Never having driven a car, she was dependent on mass transit, the kindness of friends, or her own two feet to travel the region. But for those who knew her well, it was Vicky's elegance, her graciousness and independence, her role as an involved citizen, her knowledge of local history, and her tireless efforts to preserve it, that she is remembered for.

Vicky graduated from Merion Mercy Academy in Merion, PA in 1946 and received her B.A. from Rosemont College in 1950 following which she spent a post graduate year in Florence, Italy studying art and Italian at Villa Schifanoia (Pius XII Institute for Advanced Study in the Fine Arts). Then, after pursuing an art scholarship at Boston College, she earned an MFA degree in 1952 from the University of Pennsylvania. For three years, she served as an Adjunct Professor of Art at Rosemont College. In 1985 Villanova University granted her an honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, Vicky pursued a career as a painter before becoming an art historian and critic. Her work included landscapes, still life, and illuminated manuscripts, but portraits and group scenes ultimately became the focus of her work. In 1950, she was the First-Place winner of Mission Poster Contest 1950 - Archdiocese of Philadelphia Society for the Propagation of the Faith, and in 1958, she exhibited several of her illuminated manuscripts at the Woodmere Art Gallery in Philadelphia. She held exhibits of her paintings in Florence and Philadelphia and entered large juried exhibitions in New York and locally. Vicky also completed a number of commissioned oil portraits – of senators, bishops, and other high ups in the church – including a portrait of President John F. Kennedy and another of Pope John XXIII! These were undertaken for colleges and institutions in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. She also performed commissioned works in calligraphy involving use of parchment, gold leaf and miniatures. A couple of her parchments, presented to popes, are in the Vatican collections.

From 1959-1962, Vicky was a columnist on art and architecture for the *Standard & Times*, Philadelphia and for several years she was a correspondent for *Art News*. In 1962 she joined the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as the art critic, where for fifty years until her retirement in 2012, no matter where the art show or gallery might be ... or what the weather ... Vicky would be there by public transit, notebook and pen at the ready. Every week Vicky would write a review – often of several exhibits each

week as she covered the Philadelphia five-county region. Of her role as an art critic, judging from the many thank you letters and articles she preserved over the years, much has been said. Vicky must have seen and/or reviewed and even attended every opening of every art show in this region over a fifty-plus year period! Her associations and correspondence with countless artists and architects, and her insightful but honest interpretations of their work, not only launched the careers of many of them, but also earned her respect throughout the art world. And she, herself, over the years received many honors and awards. For example, in 1998, Vicky was chosen as a recipient of the Lower Merion Township Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) Preservation Award, “recognizing her years of outstanding service, so generously given” and in 2013, she was honored by The Philadelphia Tri-State Artists Equity Association.

Vicky took a special interest in contemporary architecture, writing pieces in the *Inquirer* about Louis Kahn, Robert Venturi (with whom she maintained a lifelong friendship) and others. In fact, Vicky was the first art critic to write in support of Venturi’s work. She wrote the introduction to his Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture and was praised for her support of Venturi by noted Yale Art Professor Vincent J. Sully. In the early 1980s she wrote two chapters for Montgomery County’s *Second Hundred Years*, one on Architecture (comprising an introduction and checklist of c. 3,000 buildings listed by architect, the data having been gathered in a direct-mail survey she took up of architects and institutions) and the other on the history of Narberth (published in 1983).

Other writings of hers were published in various anthologies, including: two essays for Philadelphia’s Treasures in Bronze and Stone, Walker & Co., N.Y., 1974 (“Swann Memorial Fountain” in Logan Square by Alexander Stirling Calder and “General Meade Equestrian Monument” by Alexander Milne Calder); submissions to *Knight-Ridder Newswire* ’73; an essay on artists’ groups for Invisible Philadelphia: Community Through Voluntary Organizations, 1995; an essay in Stained Glass in Catholic Philadelphia, 2002 (“Aesthetics in Liturgical Art from Mid-19th Century to the Post-World War II Era”); and writings for encyclopedias and dictionaries. Vicky also illustrated a book called The Triumph of Trust – The Story of Mother Connelly by Mother Mary Eleanor SHCJ, The Peter Reilly Company, Philadelphia, PA, 1950.

Over the years, Vicky served as art consultant or advisor for a great many art events being planned in the Philadelphia area: for example, in 1964 Vicky organized a large, competitive-and-invited East Coast liturgical art exhibit (multi-media) at the Philadelphia Civic Center that was favorably reviewed in the *Sunday New York Times* by John Canady.

In the mid-1970s, she became the Director for Selections, Liturgical Arts Exhibition, at the

Philadelphia Civic Center for the 41st International Eucharistic Congress which took place in Philadelphia in 1976. This was a multi-media event, involving 364 works, of which 10% were commissioned. The event was reviewed by the New York Times by Vivien Raynor.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1976/08/01/archives/the-church-as-art-patron-why-it-doesnt-work.html> For this event, she personally wrote to 800 artists, painters, and sculptors urging them to participate – and very many did. She also wrote the “Introduction” for the Exhibition Brochure.

In 1977, Vicky served as advisor to Philadelphia Craft Show, sponsored by the Women’s Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in Memorial Hall and at Philadelphia Museum of Art and in 1978, Vicky was a member of the American Crafts Exhibit planning committee in New York for the Vatican Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome, with Lawrence Fleischman and Nancy McNeil.

Also, for more than a decade, Vicky was a member of the Committee of Sacred Liturgy for the Philadelphia Catholic Archdiocese. Meetings were held at St. Charles Seminary in Wynnewood, PA, where she worked tirelessly to preserve portraits by Thomas Eakins and other notable artists that hung in the Seminary. A devout Catholic herself, Vicky worked very hard to have the church not only recognize and support the talent of local artists, but display their work, too and she organized singlehandedly art exhibitions to bring about that recognition.

Her other activities were widespread and diverse. They included, among other things, her being a member of the Mayor’s Committee for the Newmann Monument, Philadelphia and a consultant to Franklin & Marshall College on awarding of tenure. Her resume states she was on “stand-by” for Haverford College. In later years, Vicky provided assistance to Professor John A. Dick in Leuven, Belgium in his biography of Archbishop Jean Jadot. She arranged for portraits to be done of Cardinal Krol and other eminent ecclesiastical figures.

Vicky was a member of the International Association of Art Critics, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Museum of Modern Art, NY, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, the America Italy Society, the Society of Architectural Historians, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Mediaeval Academy of America, the Irish Georgian Society, the Fairmount Park Art Association, Delta Epsilon Sigma (national scholarship honor society), the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, among others.

Vicky was also deeply involved in her community. Her volunteer work included the preparation of several successful nominations of buildings or districts for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Noteworthy was her successful nomination in 2003 of Narbrook Park as a Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places. Vicky also wrote nomination proposals for several

official State historical markers, including one placed on Haverford Avenue in Narberth, PA, to honor NFL Commissioner Bert Bell, and another on Montgomery Avenue in Merion, PA, honoring John Dickenson. Vicky also participated with other Narbrook Park residents in writing a book entitled Narbrook Park: A Garden-City Experiment, self-published in 2015, celebrating a hundred years of architecture, landscaping, and personal family histories in Narbrook Park. Vicky attended Narberth Borough Council meetings, committee meetings, and Civic Association meetings, and wrote many letters to public officials and other prominent citizens expressing her opinions on topical issues.

Yes, Vicky was outspoken. Always polite, subtle, diplomatic, yet not holding back her punches, she spoke her mind letting people know how she felt about their policies, actions, and (in her opinion on occasion) their shortcomings. Her letters (copies of many of which she preserved among her other papers) always showed a respectful affection toward each recipient yet always contributed thoughtful and relevant information. Not intimidated by rank or position, she could admonish a person without offending him. “Dear Archbishop, I would have expected more of you!” “Dear President or Ambassador, I would like to compliment you on...” Dear new neighbor, Say it isn’t so!!”

It was in the early 1980s, while working full time for the *Inquirer* or maybe even before that, that Vicky began her research for the chapter on Narberth that she would contribute to Montgomery County’s *Second Hundred Years*. This surely was what grew into this book of the cultural history of Narberth, which she began writing then and continued writing after her retirement in 2012.

Vicky loved Narberth. She also loved history and genealogy. She combined all of this in her lifetime study of Narberth, a book tracing the area’s inhabitants and developments from precolonial times up to the mid-1990s, when the town was celebrating the centennial of its establishment as a borough.

In my opinion, what set her apart from other historians was her love of people. She was an extraordinarily good judge of character. Vicky wrote of the earliest Native American settlements in the area, of the colonial era people who came to Narberth to live, and of later Narberthians and their families, interests, occupations, accomplishments, and connections to other notable people around the world. She wrote of organizations in Narberth and how they evolved: the volunteer fire company, the YMCA, the Women’s Committee, the Junior Women’s Committee, the Narberth Playground, Narbrook Park, the school, the various churches. She wrote of the waves of immigrants who came to live in Narberth. An artist who loved and appreciated architecture, Vicky described the many houses in Narberth and their architects and owners. She chronicled everyday life and special events. Vicky wrote in a colorful, appealing way that brings the many periods and characters of Narberth to life.

Thorough and exacting, her research was extensive: she wrote letters to people (thousands of them) asking them about their relatives, their connection to Narberth. She interviewed the descendants of people who were here when the borough was founded. She looked into and copied state, city, county and borough records, church records, school records. She poured over thousands of plats and deeds (from colonial times to the present), Federal census entries, wills, birth, marriage, death and tax records, plus obituaries. She researched annual reports and records, including both published booklets and original sources of information, for all of the churches in the borough as well as the many other organizations mentioned in the text. She read countless published sources that related directly or indirectly to Narberth, including books, periodicals and newspapers. She researched all of the Our Town newspapers (Narberth's local newspaper) that existed between 1914 and 1945 and the other early newspapers published in Lower Merion Township. And all of this while maintaining a brutal schedule of reviewing art shows in the greater Philadelphia area and participating in and advising on city-wide and national endeavors.

All those letters, copies of deeds, notes of interviews, and old newspaper articles were in her house, but sadly, very soon after she moved out of her house, much of what she had saved or written was discarded by people who were unaware of their importance. Thus it is impossible to know which parts of her book are in fact lost. But what remains has been a delight to read and a pleasure to work with. And while there may be jumbled or lost pages, Vicky has left us a meticulously researched and richly recorded history of Narberth's development from those earliest of times.

Note from the Editor

How did I become involved?

I met Vicky soon after my husband and I moved with our children into Narbrook Park in 1989. We became good friends and for many years Vicky regularly joined us for dinners and parties. A history major myself, I appreciated her insights on all manner of subjects, but more especially I loved her sense of humor, her deep gentle voice and her keen ability to grasp the essence of a problem and deliver an honest opinion. We especially loved her affectionate letters filled with interesting bits of history.

She told us of her research supporting her application to nominate Narbrook Park for designation as a National Historic District and I offered to help her type it (along with another Park resident). It was during our work on this that I learned she was writing a book about Narberth. Thinking I might be able to help her with this also, I volunteered to help with the typing of this too. She gave me several packets of paper – some handwritten, some typed on a manual typewriter – which she randomly took from the plastic bags she stored them in. Thus began our collaboration!

Knowing Vicky's age, I encouraged her to complete her book so that it could be published while she was alive, but she told me there were things that still needed research. So while she continued her research, off and on I typed more pages, which she again randomly gave me from different chapters. Despite having cataracts in both eyes, Vicky reviewed and edited all that I typed. This exchange went on until the day she moved into a retirement home. Then, because a friend of hers and her niece knew I had been helping Vicky with her book, they let me go into her house to get her book and whatever supporting information I could find in order to continue working on it with Vicky. There was much material to go through as Vicky had saved all of the documents she had reviewed and written. Unfortunately, Vicky died before the book could be completed so was not there to give advice on how she wanted it to be done.

While Vicky had typed some pages on a manual typewriter, most of her work was handwritten in beautiful, legible cursive. She lacked a word processor and so cut and pasted sections of her work the old-fashioned way – with tape, glue or staples! Many of her handwritten “pages” were more than two feet long with corrections and updated information layered on top of earlier writing! Almost everything was footnoted. Generally, the footnotes appeared on the back of each page or were listed as endnotes, but sometimes they were missing or separated from the text. So, it was sometimes difficult to discern where they were supposed to go. Also, included with her own written papers were newspaper clippings,

letters and notes of things that related to her text – a bit of a jumble.

In an effort to save time, rather than type her writings “from scratch,” a friend, Mike Shwager (and later I) scanned Vicky’s typed pages and ran them through OCR (optical character recognition) software so that they could be organized into a complete book. Doing this, however, ended up taking more time than typing from scratch as I ended up needing to correct all of the computer’s mistaken interpretations of her typed words. It may well be that I may have lost a word or two here or there. All the while I was basically teaching myself how to work with “Microsoft Word.”

After about a year working on this, I found I had typed close to a thousand pages. The reason there were so many pages was that, over the years, Vicky had rewritten many sections and reorganized them within the different chapters. This proved challenging for me not only as a typist, but as an editor: while it often seemed I was typing identical segments two and three times, in fact, for each version, she had found new information or new angles. Aspects of each segment were worth keeping, and I found it difficult to consolidate the elements worth preserving while eliminating duplication. Vicky also saved multiple drafts of each chapter but without dating them and often included the same material in several different chapters. It was difficult to know which material she wanted in which chapter, and which draft she intended as the final.

Surprisingly, the chapter on Narbrook Park was particularly difficult for me to put together. Vicky had written about Narbrook Park many times and for many purposes and I wasn’t sure how Vicky wanted it to be in the book. As mentioned, she had written the chapter on Narberth for Montgomery County’s *Second Hundred Years*. She also had written the application for the National Register nomination of Narbrook Park as an Historic District. She had kept all of her drafts and all of her notes for these publications. Moreover, when the National Register nomination was approved in 2003, Pennsylvania’s historic preservation officer asked Vicky to submit a new application to upgrade the Pennsylvania listing for the Park to National Landmark status which Vicky started working on in 2003. Thus I found Vicky’s original application materials and her new materials upgrading the listing mixed among all of her papers on Narbrook Park. Much of what she wrote is very academic and I hope will be useful for future scholars.

With some small exceptions, I have kept Vicky’s work exactly as she wrote it and in the order it appeared to me she wanted. I also kept her section titles (although I created a few new ones when the sections seemed overly long or confusing). Writing from today’s perspective, I would normally have changed the tense of many verbs. But I kept them as she wrote them. Because we were in somewhat of a

rush gathering up Vicky's papers, we surely mixed up some of her work and it seemed that pages were missing. Often I could not find the first page of a chapter, and quite often too a section ended in mid-sentence, with the rest lost. It made putting the work together a challenge, but I think for this first effort that it is ok. One small change I made was to her numbers: she spelled out almost all of her numbers, including dates. For example, "... forty-five thousand five hundred thirty-two people voted in favor....." I initially typed the numbers as she wrote them, but then changed many of them to Arabic numerals for the sake of readability. If I added or changed text (which I didn't do very often), I put it in brackets; for omissions, I often used ellipses. I also provided a few definitions of items that I suspect most modern readers wouldn't know. In her footnotes and sometimes in the text, Vicky referred to herself as "I" or "the writer." When I added a comment in the footnotes, I referred to myself as "editor."

It might be of interest that Vicky wrote another chapter she called "Outlaws." This chapter included stories of various crimes and other nefarious events that took place in Narberth over the years. Some of the early events are included in this book. Those occurring in the 1980s and 90s will be published later. Not all of these stories have been found.

Finally, among the papers I was able to preserve are photos, newspaper clippings, letters, and other documents that would be wonderful to include as "illustrations" for her history.

Reading Vicky's book and going through her papers, I've come to realize what a marvelously creative person she was – fascinated by all that was going on in the world and making meaning of it as it related to Narberth. Vicky was a joyful historian, a storyteller, a prolific writer. At heart an investigative journalist, she found everything interesting and she loved doing the research.

My work editing Vicky's manuscript is a way of honoring her incredible life's work, bringing to light her delightful, dynamic history of a small town that is at once like so many others in America, and yet unique. This is a jewel of a history – wordy (at times), but a one-of-a-kind piece that I hope is as much of a delight for others to read as it was for me to help put together.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank three people without whose steadfast support and encouragement I would not have been able to complete this project.

The first is Michael Shwager who, from the beginning, has spent a great amount of time and effort helping me save and type the manuscript, work out challenges using Microsoft Word, and has encouraged me to complete the job. Michael came into this project in a funny way. I had thought of getting Vicky a word processor and had put out a search notice on the Narberth Freecycle. Somehow, Michael responded and, after a few minutes talking to me, guessed that it was Vicky I was getting it for. He had been the editor of the Montgomery County Two-volume *Second Hundred Years* and knew her well. He told me that her work was always well done. Mike, being an editor, was especially encouraging as I daily fought my computer.

The second is Peter Grove, my husband, who has patiently lived for two years with our basement and guestroom filled with the many boxes containing the papers we collected from Vicky's house, and who, at the end, took the time to read and provide detailed comments on the draft – the only person who has done so.

The third is Marian Ingrams, our daughter, who came in at the end, with clear edits and suggestions (especially of the sections on Vicky and on the work itself), and, above all, encouragement.

Nancy A Greene

February 1, 2021