The completion of Chestnut Hill’s first railroad in 1854 marked its beginnings as a flourishing commuter suburb in Philadelphia. But for decades before, Chestnut Hill had been molded by a welter of forces and events that would affect its suburban development. It was during this early period that Chestnut Hill developed a community of economic interests, that its first churches and schools were erected, that its two main streets were laid out, that it forged a tradition of local associations, and that its village identity emerged. The memories of this early period, before Chestnut Hill’s annexation by the city in the mid-nineteenth century, helped to give residents a sense of autonomy within the larger municipality. During its decades as a gateway village, Chestnut Hill had formed important economic bonds with Philadelphia. By the time that annexation took
place, Chestnut Hill had already developed a sense of local identity that mitigated its growing dependence on the city below.

Yet before any of these forces emerged, there was the land and its abundant resources. A range of forested hills passed through the future site of Chestnut Hill, reaching a peak near the spot where two Indian trails and later two highways would converge to form a fork in the road. Not far beneath the soil was layer upon layer of stone, a sparkling gray, blue, and brown mica-schist that would prove an excellent building material and provide jobs to masons and quarriers. Below these slopes to the north and east, there were huge beds of limestone that over the years would yield lime for the soil, mortar for building houses and barns, and the impetus for laying out several roads that made their way up from the pits and lime kilns into Chestnut Hill. In the valleys surrounding the hill, there were thousands of acres of rich soil, waiting only for the axe and plow in order to grow an abundance of fruits and grains.

It is impossible to say exactly when a portion of this landscape became the village of Chestnut Hill. In 1683 the land formed part of the 5,700 acres that William Penn sold to two German/Dutch interests, the Frankfort Company and the Crefeld purchasers, which both engaged Francis Daniel Pastorius as their agent. The 5,700-acre tract was named German Township because of the predominance of German-speaking residents during the first decades.

The settlers divided the land into four segments: Germantown proper, in the southernmost portion, and three other villages northwest of Germantown (i.e., the township contained the village of Germantown and the three other settlements). Moving from south to north, these outlying settlements were Kriesheim (later spelled Cresheim), Sommerhausen, and Crefeld. Kriesheim, the original home of an early contingent of settlers, eventually became the neighborhood of Mount Airy. Sommerhausen and Crefeld, named, respectively, for the birthplace of Pastorius and the hometown of the first group of immigrants, combined to become Chestnut Hill. Sommerhausen extended from the present Mermaid Lane to Chestnut Hill Avenue, and Crefeld from there to the present city limits at Northwestern Avenue.
Because the modern boundary of Philadelphia corresponds with the northern limits of Crefeld, there has been little dispute about the upper border of Chestnut Hill. For many years the southern boundary of Sommerhausen (at Mermaid Lane) was considered to be the lower limit of Chestnut Hill, but the creation of park land a little further south along Cresheim Creek has led many twentieth-century residents to view the creek as Chestnut Hill's southern extremity. During the early nineteenth century some residents even considered Allen's Lane, several blocks south of the creek in the present Mount Airy, as their lower boundary. (Mount Airy would develop as a fashionable railroad suburb much like Chestnut Hill, with its western portion containing large, architect-designed houses similar to those on Chestnut Hill's West Side, and its eastern segment comprising smaller dwellings, much like Chestnut Hill's East Side.) But in the 1980s, when the Chestnut Hill Historical Society successfully petitioned to have the entire community designated as a historic district, it adopted the Cresheim Creek border. It seems likely that this division will be accepted into the foreseeable future, in part for convenience and in part because of perceived urban decay in Mount Airy.  

A logical eastern boundary for Chestnut Hill is Stenton Avenue, which separates Philadelphia from Springfield Township in Montgomery County. Lying directly across this line is the community of Wyndmoor (formerly Springfield Village), whose demographic contours are similar to Chestnut Hill's. Until the mid-twentieth century, inhabitants of Wyndmoor frequently listed their addresses as Chestnut Hill, and even now Wyndmoor residents have Philadelphia post office addresses, sharing Chestnut Hill's 19118 zip code. Yet for the purposes of this study, the author will follow the decision of the Chestnut Hill Historical Society in accepting Stenton Avenue as the community's eastern limit. By contrast, there has been little problem over the decades in regarding the rocky Wissahickon gorge as the Hill's western border. Within these somewhat irregular boundaries, Chestnut Hill occupies an area of 2,200 acres—or 3.4 square miles.

It is unclear just when and why the name Chestnut Hill replaced the earlier Sommerhausen and Crefeld. The earliest written mention
of the name occurs in a deed from 1711, but it could have been in use for some years before that date. “Chestnut” may refer to an abundance of chestnut trees in the vicinity, but because there were no more of them there than elsewhere in the region, such an explanation remains conjectural. The word “hill,” on the other hand, was obvious and appropriate: The land occupied by Chestnut Hill rises steeply from 294 feet above sea level at its southern boundaries around Mermaid Lane to 446 feet at Summit Street, and then descends to 152 feet on its northern limits at Northwestern Avenue.\(^4\)

It is equally difficult to determine just when Chestnut Hill emerged as a settlement. Because Germantown’s leaders forbade residents to build on outlying properties before they had erected structures along the main road in Germantown itself, very few people lived in Chestnut Hill during the first two or three generations.\(^5\) In 1710, for example, Quakers to the north in Plymouth Meeting complained about having to travel through “the wilds of [upper] Germantown” on their way to Philadelphia.\(^6\) Twenty years later there were only two dozen landowners and renters in all of Chestnut Hill. Understandably, it was often known as the “back part” of Germantown. Not until the 1740s and 1750s did Chestnut Hill begin to grow appreciably, benefiting from the heavy immigration into Pennsylvania during the middle of the eighteenth century, and from the growth of German Township as a whole. By 1800 the population of Chestnut Hill had reached about 600, and by 1850 it had risen to around 1,000.\(^7\)

Physically, early Chestnut Hill might be described as a strip village, with its houses, shops, and stores strung out along the main road (later Germantown Avenue), no real cross streets, and few structures built beyond the central thoroughfare. This same pattern existed throughout German Township (which continued to comprise the village of Germantown, Chestnut Hill, and several other small settlements). This arrangement of plots arose from a decision by Germantown founder Francis Daniel Pastorius to divide the land into long strips, with a minimum frontage of 125 feet, that ran back in either direction from the main road. Larger parcels lying beyond these long, narrow lots were also assigned to the first settlers. This arrangement, so familiar in Pastorius’s native Germany, allowed each
Landholdings in Chestnut Hill, colonial period. Note the narrow strips running back in both directions from the main road (Germantown Ave.). Roach, "Back Part of Germantown."
landowner to build a house on the main road. Some of these were farmhouses, but from the beginning merchants and craftsmen erected shops and dwellings along the thoroughfare. Although they made their livings from handicrafts, they and their families typically used the large lots behind their dwellings to plant vegetable gardens, to cultivate fruit trees, and even to raise a few pigs, cows, or chickens.⁸

By the early nineteenth century one- and two-story stone or wooden structures lined both sides of Chestnut Hill’s main street. These were simple in design, executed in the plain vernacular style of the day, with unadorned facades and small-paned sash windows
Germantown Ave. as it crossed the Cresheim Creek bridge in 1884. Even at this date, Chestnut Hill's main street was often a muddy and deeply rutted road. The old Mermaid Hotel can be seen at right center. Photo by George Bacon Wood. LCP.

punctuating both the first and second stories. Most of them were built with pent roofs, shingled eaves that hung down over the first story in order to throw rain water away from the walls and foundations.

The main road itself was an expanse of mud or ice during much of the year, becoming a long carpet of dust in the warmer months. In all seasons its surface was deeply rutted and covered with bone-jarring potholes. Despite its deplorable condition, this road was an economic lifeline for Chestnut Hill, Germantown, and the other settlements along its route. Originally it had been an Indian trail that followed the contours of the land. European settlers widened it to make a narrow cart road. Later it became a wagon route and was known for years as the Plymouth Road, after its northern terminus at the Quaker settlement in Plymouth Meeting. In 1801 a private turnpike company obtained a charter to extend the road further north and west to Perkiomen, and still later to Reading, Pennsylvania. Depending on its destination, residents knew it as either the Perkiomen
or Reading Turnpike. In the twentieth century, it has been known as Germantown Avenue within Philadelphia, and as Germantown Pike (State Route 422) outside the city.

Branching off from the main route at the very top of Chestnut Hill, and thus forming a fork in the road by the mid-eighteenth century, was another important highway. The owners of lime kilns in nearby Whitemarsh Township, who needed a way to transport their bulky product to Philadelphia, opened it in 1703. A century later, in 1804, a turnpike company acquired the route, extending it to Springhouse and eventually to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Although the turnpike company has long been defunct, the label Bethlehem Pike survives, and is the official name of this still-busy thoroughfare.9

For three centuries these two routes have served Chestnut Hill. Even in the late twentieth century, they provide the only direct roadways through the center of the community. During the early decades, these roads allowed Chestnut Hill to function as a what might be called a “gateway village.” Like Charlestown and Cambridge outside
Boston, and similar fringe communities near Baltimore and New York, Chestnut Hill sat astride a main road (in this case two of them) that ran into the city and allowed the village to serve as commercial gateway to the metropolis beyond.\textsuperscript{10}

By the late eighteenth century, this commercial gateway opened into the largest city in British North America and, after independence, in the entire United States. Not until 1820, following completion of the Erie Canal, would New York City overtake Philadelphia as the largest city in the country. Philadelphia would then hold second place until the very end of the nineteenth century.

Philadelphia’s growth and prosperity stemmed initially from William Penn’s welcome to settlers from all over Europe, regardless of their religious or national backgrounds, and from the cheap land prices that he offered to prospective immigrants. But it was Philadelphia’s prime location that ensured its continued success: the city lay about midway between New England and the South, and was thus in a good position to undertake a lucrative coastal trade in both directions. Its sheltered seaport at the head of Delaware Bay also offered an excellent harbor to ships from all over the world. Spreading out north, west, and south of the city were thousands of acres of rich land that soon became the bread basket of the American colonies, and a source of trade and wealth to Philadelphia merchants in the grain and shipping businesses.

Philadelphia’s wealth was invested in further business ventures, as well as in paved and illuminated streets, elegant homes and churches, and handsomely crafted furniture, portraits, and silverware. Leading citizens also created schools, libraries, and other such institutions, including North America’s first hospital (the Pennsylvania Hospital) and North America’s first learned society (the American Philosophical Society). Because of its central location, Philadelphia hosted the First and Second Continental Congresses and witnessed the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Its convenient location also recommended it as the nation’s capital during much of the American Revolution and again between 1790 and 1800.

Chestnut Hill thus flourished on the fringes of a prosperous and growing city. The gateway village was a suburb in the most literal
Yeakel General Store, c. 1870, which stood inside the forks of Germantown Ave. and Bethlehem Pike. Although not a "great store," this establishment served the needs of local residents and neighboring farms. This was later the site of the Maple Lawn Inn (nicknamed the Dust Pan) and still later of two successive Gulf Oil stations. GHS.

meaning of the term: A settlement located near the city with which it had strong economic ties. Indeed, its reputation as a processing center for raw products, such as leather and grain, accorded well with pre-nineteenth-century definitions of the suburb—as an often unsavory place where such obnoxious trades as tanning were carried on—before the railroad permitted suburbs to become attractive residential communities.11

During Chestnut Hill’s gateway village period (c. 1740–1850), nearby farmers brought their produce into the village to be sold at one of the "great stores," so called because of their relative size and importance, thus avoiding the extra ten-mile trip into Philadelphia. In the very early period it was farm women who commonly made this journey into the Hill. The roads were often so impassable for wheeled vehicles that they brought their produce in on horseback, loading it
into side "panniers and hampers." In Chestnut Hill they exchanged their wares in the stores for such items as "salt, fish, plaster of Paris [for the soil], clover and grass seed, groceries and dry goods." Philadelphia merchants periodically came up from the city to buy the vegetables, fruits, and cured meats that farm women had exchanged in the stores. The most prosperous of these establishments in the 1760s belonged to Abraham Rex. His two-and-one-half-story stone building still stands as part of 8031–8033 Germantown Avenue. Once the turnpike companies had made the main roads more passable, local farmers hauled their produce all the way to Philadelphia themselves and the great stores in Chestnut Hill disappeared.12

Fortunately, the new turnpikes stimulated an already existing trade for innkeepers in Chestnut Hill. Over these improved roads came teamsters driving heavy wagons filled with grain, hay, and other farm products destined for city markets. They, as well as passengers on stagecoaches traveling to and from the city, often interrupted their trip at Chestnut Hill for a meal or an overnight stay.

The first regular stage line through the Hill was begun in 1763 by George Kline of neighboring Flourtown. It ran from Philadelphia to Bethlehem once a week and, by the end of the century, every day. The opening of the Reading and Bethlehem turnpikes soon after 1800 stimulated stage traffic, and by 1820 there were six stage lines passing along the streets of Chestnut Hill. One of them, owned by Jacob Peters, used the Bethlehem Pike to reach Montrose, Pennsylvania, and from there travelers could go on to Buffalo and Montreal. Vacationers heading for the Poconos or the Delaware Water Gap also took stage lines that passed through Chestnut Hill.13

Catering to this traffic were the local innkeepers. The cruder establishments, known as wagon stands, served passing teamsters, many of whom slept on bags of hay thrown down on the barroom floor. The better houses refused to admit these drivers and sought business from passing stage travelers. Among these was an inn (now demolished) just opposite the forks of the two pikes, owned by Edward Scull and later by Henry Antes. Another flourishing establishment, a long stone structure built about 1790, was Henry Cress's hotel at the northeast corner of Germantown and Highland avenues,
Mermaid Hotel (Inn), built c. 1795 at the southeast corner of Germantown Ave. and Mermaid Lane. The original building has been demolished and replaced by an early twentieth-century structure. Photo by G. W. Williams, c. 1895. LCP.

which now houses Robertson's Flowers. During the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, it attracted prosperous Philadelphians fleeing the deadly disease.\textsuperscript{14} According to local tradition, it was these unlikely guests at Cress's and other inns on the Hill who alerted well-to-do Philadelphians to the pleasant summer breezes of Chestnut Hill and surrounding communities, and that launched the Hill's nineteenth-century reputation as a summer retreat.\textsuperscript{15} 

Also depending on Chestnut Hill's road system were a series of mills along the Wissahickon and Cresheim creeks on the western and southern boundaries of the village. Grain from the fertile farmlands surrounding the Hill was hauled down into the Wissahickon valley along especially built mill roads, some of which, like Bell's Mill Road, still exist and, widened and paved, carry traffic. Still other mill roads or their extensions have been given modern street names. Among these are Henkel's Mill Road (now Springfield Avenue) and Spruce's Mill Road (a former segment of the present Highland Avenue).\textsuperscript{16}
Robert's (or Townsend's) Mill in Germantown, a grist mill begun in the late seventeenth century, and which was similar to many of the mills along the Wissahickon and Cresheim creeks in Chestnut Hill. GHS.

Beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century, Chestnut Hill's grist mills ground out tons of flour for Philadelphia exporters. One of these belonged to Joseph Paul. His and other mills along the Wissahickon were so busy that it was not uncommon, according to local historian John J. Macfarlane, to see "on various mill roads a long line of teams carrying flour to the city."\textsuperscript{17}

Equally important were a series of paper mills along the Wissahickon. Among these was the second paper mill in North America, established in Chestnut Hill about 1708 by William Dewees. Now demolished, it stood on a property near Germantown and Northwestern avenues that forms part of the Chestnut Hill College Campus. (The first such mill had been established downstream in
Germantown by William Rittenhouse in 1690.) Paper making continued to be an important industry in the area until the Fairmount Park Commission acquired properties on both sides of the creek in the 1860s, shut down the mills, and eventually destroyed them. The largest paper manufactory along the Wissahickon was opened in 1858 by Edward Megargee, who used pure spring water to produce a paper of unusual whiteness. There was also a calico mill on the creek, established by Issachar Thorp in 1836 and located just above the bridge at Thorp's (later Bell's) Mill Road.\(^18\)

The same roads that served Chestnut Hill's mills, inns, and stores were also major routes used by both American and British forces during the Revolution. In 1777 and 1778, when the British attacked and then occupied Philadelphia, the residents of Chestnut Hill on several occasions found themselves in the path of large armies. On 8 August 1777, nearly 11,000 men from General George Washington's Continental army marched through Chestnut Hill on their way from the falls of the Schuykill near Germantown to Whitemarsh Township and points further north. On 26 September, a large column of British troops passed through the Hill en route to Germantown. Following Washington's defeat at the Battle of Germantown on 4 October, colonial soldiers streamed through Chestnut Hill in retreat, pursued for a time by the British. During the night of 22 October, Washington himself led part of his army through Chestnut Hill on his way back to Germantown, where he failed to locate the enemy. Early December found the British in Chestnut Hill once more, with about 12,000 men. Taking the home of Mathias Busch (no longer standing) at the forks of Germantown and Bethlehem pikes as their headquarters, the army spent 5 and 6 December on the Hill. The British reportedly plundered a number of houses, setting several of them on fire.

For several months thereafter only small contingents from both sides passed through the Hill. Then on 20 May 1778, about 2,000 British troops appeared and spent several hours at the forks before returning south. On 18 July the British evacuated Philadelphia altogether, ending any further danger to Chestnut Hill. Some ninety men from Chestnut Hill also served in the militia during the War for Independence, although it seems that many of them did only token
service during the conflict. In any case, the village's unwanted participation in the Revolution had no lasting effects, except to give future residents a feeling that they and their community were somehow connected to a distant and romantic past.¹⁹

Two or three centuries later, it is difficult to determine just what sort of communal identity the residents of early Chestnut Hill may have felt. Although later generations have wanted to see the old gateway village as a closely knit community of German settlers who had imported ancient folkways to the Hill, such a picture appears to be false. As in Germantown itself, from the beginning there was a mixture of nationalities, despite a majority of German-speaking inhabitants in the early decades. Unlike many later immigrants to the

United States, early residents in the area appeared to take little interest in what was happening back in Europe—or with family and friends whom they had left behind—probably because of the virtual impossibility of returning to their homelands. There was also a great deal of intermarriage of German- and English-speaking residents throughout German Township. Neither strong ethnic loyalty nor serious ethnic divisions seem to have played a significant role in early Chestnut Hill.20

Religion also failed to provide a sense of community in the early generations. Close to half the families in the township did not go to any church at all, and the great majority of those who did attend religious services were Lutherans and German Reformed.21 Because of its sparse population and lack of churches, it is likely that the number of churchgoers in Chestnut Hill was even smaller than in Germantown proper. In 1710 a group of local men, all with German or Dutch surnames, established the Whitemarsh Reformed Church in Chestnut Hill. It met in the two-story house of mill owner William Dewees, a structure (now demolished) that stood on Germantown Avenue opposite the present Chestnut Hill College grounds. The congregation broke apart, however, following Dewees’s death in 1745. For the next eighty years, anyone from Chestnut Hill who wanted to attend church services had a choice of the Reformed congregation in Germantown or St. Peter’s Lutheran a mile or so north at Barren Hill. There was also an Anglican parish at St. Thomas, Whitemarsh, which probably had little appeal to Chestnut Hill’s nominal Lutheran and German Reformed population.22

Although itinerant preachers held services in the open air on occasion, Chestnut Hill did not enjoy any permanent church building until 1822, when a Scotch Presbyterian farmer named John Magoffin raised enough money to build the Union Chapel. Built on land donated by fellow farmer Abraham Heydrick, the edifice held about 150 people and stood at the northwest corner of what became Shawnee Street and West Gravers Lane. The chapel was open to all Protestant faiths and, lacking any permanent clergy on the Hill, Magoffin himself often led services by reading from a printed sermon.23

In time the different denominations using the Union Chapel
formed their own congregations and erected separate churches. The earliest to do so were the Baptists, who built a small edifice in 1835 at the corner of Germantown Avenue and Bethlehem Pike. Although rebuilt and enlarged several times, the church stands at the original location and is the oldest religious structure on the Hill. The Methodists also built a small chapel in 1845 (later replaced) just north of the intersection of Germantown Avenue and Chestnut Hill Avenue. But unlike the established churches of Europe, where the local church of an established religion was often a focus of community life, these small Chestnut Hill churches did not become major meeting places or sources of community identity for local residents. This was likewise true of the churches in Germantown.

Chestnut Hillers also failed to forge a sense of community through a stable population. For as Stephanie Grauman Wolf’s study of migration in and out of German Township in the eighteenth century
shows, there was a considerable turnover of people in the area. Ex-
aminations of land tenure in Chestnut Hill by Hannah Benner Roach
demonstrate the same pattern. What both studies reveal is that in-
dividuals and families came and left Chestnut Hill primarily because
they wanted to improve themselves materially. In the last analysis, it
was the opportunity to acquire and speculate in land, to own or work
in a mill, or to set up as a craftsman or storekeeper that attracted the
great majority of people to Chestnut Hill in the presuburban period.
Similarly, it was a degree of success in these endeavors that kept some
of them on the Hill. This should not be surprising in a country that
has always attracted the vast majority of its immigrants for economic
reasons—however much this fact may contradict the long-held but
erroneous view that most people came to the United States for reli-
gious and political freedom.

Philadelphia’s City Directory for 1855, the first to include Chestnut
Hill, offers some helpful insights into the variety of economic activity
in the village just as it was entering its transition to a railroad suburb.
That directory listed 255 householders on the Hill. The total pop-
ulation, including children and other dependents, was of course
larger than this, probably 1,000 to 1,200 persons at the time. In any
case, the listed occupations indicate that Chestnut Hill was still es-
sentially a gateway village. It is clear from the addresses that most of
the population remained clustered along the two gateway pikes.

A numerical analysis of occupations in 1855 shows that the great
majority of residents were laborers, skilled craftsmen, or local store-
keepers. Forty men were listed as laborers, meaning that they did not
possess any particular skills and depended on physical strength to
make a living. Although some of them may have worked on farms, it
is likely that most found jobs in the local mills.

Just over 100 residents worked in skilled crafts or trades. Among
these were twelve butchers, whose number suggests that farmers in
the area were still having their cattle slaughtered on the Hill. The
livelihoods of some sixteen shoemakers were also linked to cattle rais-
ing in the area. Other artisans supported themselves by serving the
daily needs of the local population. In numerical order these were:
carpenter (21); blacksmith (5); painter (5); weaver (4); stonemason
(4); mason (4); tailor (3); cooper (or barrel maker) (3); coachbuilder (2); cabinetmaker (2); seamstress (2); wheelwright (1); contractor (1); printer (1); pump maker (1); slate roofer (1); and brickmaker (1). The number of carpenters (21) seems unusually large, but it is consistent with numerous carpenters in Germantown. In both places the mills, which were largely made of wood, probably required the services of many carpenters to build and maintain them.²⁸

Several other categories of skilled workers were more obviously associated with the mills. There were five millers, three dyers, one color maker, one cloth lapper, one calico printer, one calico finisher, and one grindstone manufacturer. Three carpet weavers also appeared in the directory, but it is unclear whether they worked as hand weavers or were associated with one of the mills. In all probability, it was the latter.

Some thirty residents made their livings from a variety of commercial activities, nearly all of them located along the present Germantown Avenue, then known as Main Road Pike. There were six hotel proprietors, four grocers, two shopkeepers (the nature of whose business was not revealed), a victualer (or food wholesaler), the owner of an oyster house, the owner of a feed store, a milliner, nine men who simply listed themselves as dealers, and a man who put himself down as a trader.

Others who served local needs for goods and services were the owner of a stagecoach line; the proprietor of a livery stable; a postmaster, who doubled as a tollgate keeper; a driver; a teamster; two nurses; two gardeners; and three carters (or haulers). There was also a lone mariner, whose residence in a community so far from the sea, or even from Philadelphia’s port, is a mystery.

The professions were represented on the Hill by five men claiming to be physicians, two clergymen, and four educators. There was an overlap in these last two categories, because the Reverend Roger Owen was also the headmaster of the newly formed Chestnut Hill Academy (a short-lived institution that apparently is not related to the present academy of the same name). Included also in the directory were ten “gentlewomen,” probably widowed or unmarried women who had sufficient property or income to live without working, and
five "gentlemen," who seem to have inherited wealth or were retired from active work.

Besides these listings, some forty residents described themselves as farmers. According to the property tax lists for 1854, only seventeen of them owned over ten acres of land. Conspicuously absent in the directory were the occupations of lawyer, banker, broker, insurance underwriter, and corporate executive—all of which would be very common in Chestnut Hill once it had become a commuter suburb.

However, the City Directory, tax lists, and other sources indicate that there was another small but significant element in the local population. This might be called the gentlemen farmers, who owned large estates on the Hill. From the beginning of colonial Pennsylvania, wealthy men had bought country estates, in imitation of their counterparts in Great Britain. Some occupied these seats all year, whereas others spent only summers in the country. Among the gentlemen farmers in Chestnut Hill were Samuel Hildeburn, who was a shipping merchant in Philadelphia and owned seventy-one acres of land west of Germantown Avenue. There was also Joseph Middleton, who was president of the Wissahickon Turnpike Company and in all probability the possessor of inherited wealth. Middleton owned a total of 66.5 acres, including a tract at the corner of Germantown and North-western avenues on the future site of Chestnut Hill College. Just above the main road he built an attractive brick residence and called it Monticello in honor of Thomas Jefferson, whom he greatly admired. The house still stands, but it has been absorbed into a later structure and is no longer recognizable.29

The most impressive of all these establishments was Union Place, the property of Owen Sheridan, a long-time director of the Germantown National Bank. With 220 acres located near the present Highland railroad station, Sheridan was the richest man in the area; his property was valued for tax purposes in 1854 at $19,450. A description of his holdings in the Germantown Telegraph for 2 July 1845 leaves no doubt that Sheridan’s property was impressive:

The farm is about three-fourths of a mile south of the main street of Chestnut Hill. . . . It is most beautiful, romantic, and if we may so express ourselves,
Joseph Middleton's Monticello, built c. 1850 near the northeast corner of Germantown and Northwestern avenues. The house is now surrounded and completely obscured by a larger structure that serves as the mother house of the Sisters of St. Joseph. GHS.

...tract of land, highly improved with superior mansion, tenant houses, barns, etc., and produces probably equal to any farm of its size, or as much per acre as the best managed plantations in the country.50

For some residents, Chestnut Hill was thus an attractive locale for a country seat. For humbler citizens, the Hill was a good place to make a living. Both sorts of people were free to pursue their own economic self-interest, without—especially after the American Revolution—undue interference from government, tradition, or neighbors. In this sense, too, the Hill was far different from the old European village, where individuals were restrained in many ways by custom and belief. Yet like other villages and towns in America, Chestnut Hill was not large enough to create a community in which a formalized local government and highly structured organizations provided a means of cooperation. Thus Chestnut Hillers and their counterparts throughout the country formed small associations to satisfy their public needs.31 This was a habit that struck Alexis de Tocqueville forcefully during his visit to the United States, and about which he remarked in his classic Democracy in America:
Owen Sheridan’s residence at Union Grove, which stood on or near the present Tohopeka Court on East Highland Ave. Photo c. 1870. LCP.

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, constantly form associations. . . . The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; they found in this manner hospitals, prisons, and schools.32

Although Tocqueville discovered this practice to be widespread, political conditions in colonial (and later) Pennsylvania may have made it especially necessary. For the Quakers, who founded and dominated eastern Pennsylvania politically, disliked powerful government at any level. Unlike the Puritans of New England, they did not believe in governments led by members of a divinely appointed
elite. With their insistence on the equality of all human beings, the Quakers preferred local governments based on community consensus, a method that they also used for governing their religious bodies. Nor did the Quakers in Pennsylvania create powerful town governments, like those in New England, with wide grants of authority. Instead the Quakers located political authority at the county level, with little or no official power going to the towns and villages themselves, very few of which were incorporated in any case. Even these county governments in Pennsylvania were confined to minimal functions, such as collecting modest taxes, caring meagerly for the poor, punishing criminals, recording property transactions, and maintaining courts for civil suits.\(^{35}\)

The political experiences of both Germantown and Chestnut Hill illustrate how this system operated. From 1683 to 1691, the German Quakers and Pietists who lived in Germantown formed a loose community order under the leadership of Francis Daniel Pastorius, who was the land agent and legal representative of the Frankfurt Company. This company had been established by a group of investors in Frankfurt, Germany, who purchased land in Pennsylvania but never came to occupy it, thus forfeiting the property. Pastorius had also agreed, after arriving in Philadelphia, to represent a group of immigrants from Crefeld, Germany.

Under Pastorius’s guidance, in 1689 Germantown obtained a borough charter from William Penn that was approved in England two years later. From 1691 until 1707, when the charter was rescinded, Germantown enjoyed its own government, complete with bailiff (or mayor), recorder, clerk, treasurer, sheriff, coroner, constable, and general court. However, it often was difficult to find men willing to fill these positions, as many objected that office holding violated their religious beliefs. There also were disputes over jurisdiction between Germantown officials and Philadelphia County. Thus in 1707 colonial officials closed the Germantown general court and effectively ended the community’s existence as an independent borough.\(^{34}\)

Unlike neighboring Germantown, Chestnut Hill was never an incorporated borough, though it seems to have been under the jurisdiction of Germantown until 1707. Between that time and its
annexation by Philadelphia in 1854, Chestnut Hill was an unincorporated village within Philadelphia County. With a system of such weak local government, Chestnut Hillers had no choice but to form local associations to secure schools, cemeteries, or other public amenities. In New England, by contrast, the towns were required by law to found churches, schools, and other such institutions.

The creation of a semipublic school in Chestnut Hill offers a good example of how civic-minded residents, bereft of compelling political forces, functioned as an unofficial board of education. During the earliest days, schools on the Hill were opened sporadically by self-appointed teachers who offered classes to those who wished to attend and could afford the modest fees. One such school was opened by Robert Loller in 1771 near the site of the present railroad station at Bethlehem Pike and Chestnut Hill Avenue.\textsuperscript{35} In 1794 his schoolhouse (no longer standing) and land were acquired by a board of trustees, who established a neighborhood school. Reflecting their decision to admit children from adjoining parts of Montgomery County, they called their institution the Harmony School. This board of trustees, and others like it at the time, did not act under an official corporate charter, but existed legally under common-law provisions for holding property in trust. The school was semipublic in nature, in that it was seen as a service to the community and was open to anyone in the area who could pay the modest tuition. In 1841, soon after the establishment of a public educational system in Pennsylvania, the Harmony trustees sold their property to the new school system.\textsuperscript{36}

Another group of local trustees organized and superintended Chestnut Hill's Union Burying Ground. The name signified that it was open to all religious faiths, which in fact meant that it was available to all Protestants, because at the time there were few if any Roman Catholics and no known Jews in Chestnut Hill. Approximately 150 residents, representing virtually every household on the Hill, donated money for the burial ground and elected a three-member board of trustees. The trustees purchased one and a quarter acres between West Gravers Lane and Meade Street at a point where Millman Street intersects Gravers Lane. Thus, the site was near the Union Chapel, where funerals might take place. All contributors and their
descendants could use the cemetery free of charge. Noncontributors and nonresidents, the latter defined as anyone who lived south of Allen's Lane, would pay one dollar per grave site. In 1869, the trustees voted to charge contributors and their descendants one dollar and others two dollars. This surcharge for outsiders did not appear to arise from any social animosity, but rather from fears, groundless as it turned out, that the cemetery would fill up too quickly, as did the burial grounds in Germantown, if it were too open to nonresidents.

The establishment of cemeteries by both the Baptist and Methodist congregations caused Chestnut Hillers to abandon the Union Burying Ground for the most part. The organization of a Chestnut Hill Cemetery Company in 1855, with grounds at the intersection of Rex Avenue and Thomas Mill Road, also may have failed because of the two church graveyards. By the early twentieth century, the Union grounds had become an overgrown, weed-infested lot. In 1913 the title was obtained by Dr. George Woodward, who removed and reinterred the bodies in another cemetery (unknown to the author) as part of his real estate development in the neighborhood.37

Local residents likewise joined together to provide their own fire company in the early nineteenth century. In 1815 they organized the Chestnut Hill Company, changing its name to the Congress Company in 1835. Like volunteer fire brigades throughout the region, the local company was as much a fraternal club as a public service. It held frequent meetings, dances, fairs, and other fund-raising events. After the consolidated city/county government took over fire fighting on the Hill in 1871, the Congress Company lingered on for many years as a social club.38

It is not surprising that such initiatives occurred during Chestnut Hill's early decades. What is impressive is that they would continue and increase after the city/county consolidation of 1854, when the city of Philadelphia was supposed to provide necessary public services. In the latter half of the twentieth century, such local organizations would become the basis for a sophisticated system of quasi government in Chestnut Hill (see chapter 8).

By the middle 1850s, Chestnut Hill was thus a flourishing gate-
way village, with a sense of its own past, a reputation for economic opportunity, and a habit of creating local associations to meet specific community needs. It had also experienced a growing economic dependency on Philadelphia's expanding markets and population. Even before the arrival of suburban commuters, Chestnut Hillers had experienced both local and urban ties. Over the next several decades these connections would develop into a powerful sense of dual identity between suburb and city.