COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT

The Progressive Suburb

As residents of a suburb in the city, the inhabitants of Chestnut Hill had discovered soon after the city/county consolidation of 1854 that they could not depend upon Philadelphia's government to provide all the services and public works that they might want or need. Three decades later little had changed. Partly in response, local leaders created two different improvement associations, one in the 1880s and the other soon after the turn of the century. By raising its own funds for improvements, the earlier of these organizations provided a number of public works for the Hill. The second association was formed in cooperation with residents of Mount Airy and Germantown, thereby reaffirming the common history and common circumstances of these suburban communities within the city of Philadelphia. By lobbying the city to achieve their
goals, and by becoming active in city reform movements, the three communities (Chestnut Hill, Mount Airy, and Germantown) also exhibited their belief in an organic city, with separate but mutually dependent parts. Other local organizations, some of which remain active at the time of this writing, also joined in improvement activities.

Although similar improvement groups existed in other urban neighborhoods and in suburbs outside the municipal limits, those in Chestnut Hill, Mount Airy, and Germantown became partial instruments of local autonomy and laid the groundwork for quasi government in Chestnut Hill several generations later. Such organizations emphasized the dual identification that commuters felt between their jobs in the city and their homes and community activities back on the Hill. They also demonstrated the persistence with which the inhabitants of Chestnut Hill worked to maintain a privileged way of life for themselves and their descendants.¹

In virtually all such undertakings, it was the upper-middle- and upper-class residents of the Hill, or their counterparts in Germantown and Mount Airy, who took the lead. These were men—and sometimes women—who prided themselves on their abilities to discover problems and provide rational solutions. As bankers, lawyers, manufacturers, and corporate executives, they had presided over an industrial and urban revolution that literally changed the face of America.² This experience of success, combined with a habit of working on a problem until they had solved it, doubtless contributed to their persistence in creating and sustaining a high quality of life in Chestnut Hill. Also, because they were successful in their careers, the leaders of local civic groups were unlikely to be impressed or intimidated by politicians downtown. Their high social standing conditioned them to expect a degree of deference from others and gave them a large measure of self-confidence. All these factors led Chestnut Hillers to demand, maintain, and realize a pleasant and privileged way of life in their suburb in the city.

Such efforts, whether at work in the city or at home in Chestnut Hill, depended very little upon government initiative. According to Sam Bass Warner, E. Digby Baltzell, and others, this insistence upon private rather than public actions has been particularly noticeable in
Philadelphia, where a strong opposition to governmental compulsion may stem from early Quaker traditions of voluntarism, combined with a distaste for powerful government at any level. It is also true that business managers and executives at the time had an almost religious devotion to the principles of laissez-faire economics, except for the contradictory issue of protective tariffs, which they generally favored. Somewhat paralyzed by their own political and economic philosophies, many well-to-do Philadelphians moved to suburbs outside the city, where they could take voluntary action to control their surroundings and provide themselves with the most advanced services.

Such a restricted approach to urban problems was consistent with the thinking of moderate reformers during the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century (c. 1900–1917). These Progressives were largely Republican in politics, Protestant in religion, and upper-middle to upper class in social background. They crusaded against political corruption and inefficiency, supported limited public health measures, advocated parks and municipal beautification projects, and supported private reform efforts such as settlement houses and the Social Gospel movement. But by emphasizing private or largely local measures, moderate Progressives often failed to understand that most problems in the urban/industrial age were regional, national, and even international in scope. On the local level, as in Chestnut Hill, their Progressivism was often, though not always, a self-serving attempt to preserve their comfortable way of life. But if these Progressives shared an opposition to strong government with the Quaker/Pietist settlers of the old German Township, they most certainly did not agree with their ancestors' egalitarian principles and disdain for elite leadership in the community. The men and women who would run Chestnut Hill's civic and improvement groups believed that professionally skilled and socially prominent residents should dominate the organizational life of the community.

From the late nineteenth century until World War II, Chestnut Hill's improvement efforts were in fact characterized by a spirit and form that many would associate with the Progressive Era, even though that period of national history has been associated with the
first two decades of the twentieth century. This survival of Progressivism in Chestnut Hill thus lends support to the argument that Progressivism is as much a state of mind as it is a movement that took place within a brief period of American history.7

The continuing appeal of Progressivism also stemmed from the fact that Chestnut Hill remained inside the city of Philadelphia, a municipality that was notorious for its corrupt political machine. Unlike prosperous Philadelphians who moved to suburbs on the Main Line, where they were free from the city and could create their own government and local services, Chestnut Hillers had to improvise ways of working around or through the city hall machine. In the process, Chestnut Hill residents were forced, more than suburbanites outside the city, to examine their relationship to the larger metropolis.

For these reasons, civic-minded residents of the Hill organized themselves during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These organizations helped them to pave and maintain streets, secure a new public school, launch conservation and beautification projects along the Wissahickon Creek, and battle attempts by the machine in city hall to divide their ward and weaken their strength as independent Republicans. During both world wars and the Great Depression, Chestnut Hill’s improvement groups also became involved in war work and in private relief efforts.

The earliest of Chestnut Hill’s improvement groups actually anticipated the Progressive Era by two decades. Founded in 1882, it was called the Village Improvement Association.8 The organization was also known in the press as the Improvement Company, the Village Improvement Company, and the Chestnut Hill Improvement Association. Whatever its precise designation, this local group was not unique; there were hundreds of improvement associations being founded all over the United States at the time. In fact, local residents may have been influenced by an abundance of books and articles on the subject.9

As these writings made clear, there was a growing disgust in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the ugliness of rural villages. Such sentiments were particularly evident among successful businessmen, who placed a premium on tidiness and order. As they fled
One reason that Chestnut Hillers joined improvement associations was to obtain better streets. This poster, from around 1910, advertises an annual meeting of the Germantown and Chestnut Hill Improvement Association. GHS.

from urban ills and into the gateway villages that surrounded cities such as Philadelphia, they were determined to rid their new homes of rural slovenliness. Although they wished to live in “the country,” they also wanted to transform it into the sort of picturesque village that existed more in their imaginations than in reality. The early improvement associations were thus important vehicles for creating the suburban ideal. 10

What distinguished Chestnut Hill’s improvement association was its persistence and resourcefulness. According to the Germantown Guide, which reported on its founding, the goals of the organization were:

The trimming of trees on the highways, planting trees at proper places, the removal of those improperly placed . . . , compelling laws and the health, safety or convenience of the inhabitants to be enforced, procuring the sidewalks to be kept in a safe, proper and neat condition, and, as far as it lies in their power, endeavoring to introduce and maintain a general attention to the
comfort and neatness of the streets and other thoroughfares in and about Chestnut Hill.\textsuperscript{11}

The article went on to point out that the association wanted to have the city pave Germantown Avenue from Gorgas Lane in Mount Airy to the present Northwestern Avenue at the municipal limits. A recent investigation of the lower portions of the avenue had revealed serious "damage to teams and injury to horses occasioned by the billows of mud and beds of mire through which they are compelled to pass. . . ."\textsuperscript{12}

The principal force behind this ambitious improvement association was Colonel Samuel Goodman (1834–1914), one of its early presidents. Goodman was a Civil War veteran who had grown up on a farm near Limekiln Pike and Washington Lane, in the present West Oak Lane section of Philadelphia. After the war he was associated with a New York City textile firm. Other early leaders of the organization were Samuel Y. Heebner (1857–1917), president of the Market Street National Bank and son of pioneer suburbanite Charles Heebner; and the Reverend J. Andrews Harris (1834–1922), the influential long-time rector of St. Paul's Church.\textsuperscript{13}

Minutes, correspondence, and other records of the Chestnut Hill Improvement Association have apparently not survived, forcing the investigator to rely on newspaper accounts. These reveal that Goodman and his fellow improvers dedicated themselves primarily to paving and maintaining roads in Chestnut Hill. By 1893 they had resurfaced or constructed over fifteen miles of roadway and had collected some $200,000 in private funds ($2 to $3 million in 1990) in order to finance them.\textsuperscript{14} In 1886 and 1887, for example, they applied several layers of crushed stone to Gravers Lane and Highland Avenue, employing a method of street paving known as the macadam process, named for its Scotch inventor, John MacAdam. The following year, the association "macadamized" both Stenton and Evergreen avenues. In 1892 they shared with the Philadelphia city government the expense of resurfacing Germantown Avenue from Gorgas Lane to Northwestern Avenue—a distance of almost three miles. They had been pressing for this improvement since their establishment ten
years before, but it was the decision to install the first electrified trolley cars on the roadway that probably did more than anything else to force the city into action.¹⁵

Once the roads were resurfaced, the association did its best to maintain them. Each spring it filled hundreds of potholes that had broken numerous axles and buggy wheels during winter thaws.¹⁶ In the early 1890s the group organized itself to combat clouds of dust thrown up by horse-drawn vehicles during dry summer months along the Hill's dirt and gravel roads. They bought ten wagons equipped with water tanks, which they employed to sprinkle the roads whenever possible. They even constructed their own reservoir in Mount Airy to ensure enough water for sprinkling.¹⁷

The association also set aside funds for building sidewalks, then generally constructed of wood and known as boardwalks. In 1898 they built a boardwalk from Stenton Avenue on the far East Side of the Hill to Houston's Wissahickon Inn on the West Side, which coincidentally provided a walkway along Willow Grove Avenue to St. Martin's Church.¹⁸ Because both the church and the inn had been created by Houston, it is likely that the Houston family helped to finance this undertaking and was a regular and substantial contributor to the association.

The Chestnut Hill Improvement Association proved so effective that a writer for the weekly Germantown Guide regretted in June 1889, "that the city government itself cannot be transferred to such management," an obvious reference to the increasing belief by reformers that government should be run like an efficient business.¹⁹ Two years later the same newspaper asserted that the association "would be justified in applying for an act of separation from the city. . . ."²⁰ This would not be the last time that Chestnut Hillers, frustrated with a lack of municipal services, contemplated secession from Philadelphia.

Instead of breaking away from the metropolis, which even then would have been difficult if not impossible, the local improvers decided to pressure the city to assume more financial responsibility for Chestnut Hill. Association president Samuel Goodwin himself won a seat in the city's Common Council in 1892, a position that he held until ill health forced him to resign in 1899. His place was then secured for the Hill by Dr. George Woodward.²¹
For Common Council

GEORGE WOODWARD, M. D.,

Of Chestnut Hill,

Subject to the Rules

OF THE

REPUBLICAN PARTY

Advertisement in the Germantown Telegraph, 19 August 1899, for George Woodward’s campaign for Philadelphia Common Council. GHS.

It is impossible to determine just how successful the improvers were in their lobbying efforts with city hall, but it appears that the municipal government did begin to allocate more funds for Chestnut Hill streets and roads in the 1890s. This greater cooperation from the city, combined with Goodman’s ill health, may also explain the apparent decline in the Chestnut Hill Village Improvement Association by the end of the century. Although there was no public announcement of its official demise, no further stories about its activities appeared in the local newspapers, leading one to conclude that it had become inactive or was disbanded altogether. Although Chestnut Hillers have shown a remarkable persistence in using such organizations to preserve their way of life, such efforts have been punctuated by periods of decline, followed by bursts of civic renewal.

One of these renewals was prompted in the early twentieth century by the escalating corruption of Philadelphia’s city government. Despite improvements in city services to Chestnut Hill, Philadel-
phia’s city government remained one of the most corrupt and inefficient in the nation. As journalist Lincoln Steffens put it in his *Shame of the Cities*, Philadelphia had one of the most “corrupt but contented” governments in America. Although Steffens may have exaggerated, Philadelphia’s municipal government was in the grips of a corrupt Republican machine that cared far more about distributing patronage and staying in power than it did about addressing urban problems.

Indeed, many of the same conditions that had caused prosperous citizens to leave the city a half century before for places like Chestnut Hill continued to exist. Although Philadelphia had now fallen to third place in population (behind Chicago), the city’s expanding economy continued to attract thousands of newcomers each year. Between 1901 and 1915, its population rose from 1,293,000 to 1,684,000, approximately one-quarter of them foreign born. About one-third of them were so-called new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. For these most recent arrivals, home might be a back-alley shack with primitive sanitary conditions. Under the circumstances, with teeming slums and a city government enmeshed in patronage, no section of the city could expect that municipal funds and services would be distributed on a rational, nonpartisan basis. Instead, neighborhoods that commanded the greatest political influence usually enjoyed a larger share of appropriations.

It was partly for this reason that several dozen men from the old 22nd Ward, made up largely of Chestnut Hill, Mount Airy, and Germantown, met in December 1906 to found the Germantown and Chestnut Hill (G&CH) Improvement Association. In its initial letter to solicit members, the officers wrote that the purpose of the association was “to concentrate and intelligently direct all efforts for improvements of whatever sort needed to receive complaints and remedy them. . . .” It went on to propose that the recent and rapid growth of the ward made improvements more urgent than ever before:

Germantown and Chestnut Hill, now comprising the Twenty-second Ward of our city, have a population upward of 70,000, and covers an area of [10.7] square miles. It is nearly twice as populous as Lancaster, Pa. Harrisburg, Pa.,
and Charleston, S.C. have about the same population as this one ward. If it were not part of a city, it would, by virtue of its size and population, be ranked as a city itself. Its outlying position gives it a peculiar character, and the steady opening up of new sections and the development of its suburban life, bring with them a constantly increasing multiplicity of needs.²⁶

It is clear that the organizers of the G&CH Improvement Association saw their ward as a suburban neighborhood that was somewhat different from the rest of the incorporated city. For by now rural Mount Airy, just south of Chestnut Hill, was also undergoing rapid development as an attractive suburb in the city. Except for the unofficial and somewhat arbitrary division separating it from the Hill, it was difficult to discern much visual difference between the two. This was particularly true of Mount Airy’s West Side, which shared the banks of the Wissahickon gorge with Chestnut Hill, along with the lush Wissahickon style of landscaping and gardening. Although Chestnut Hill had more socially prominent residents, Mount Airy (like Germantown below it) was an attractive and prestigious place to live at the turn of the century. Besides recognizing their common demographic characteristics, the organizers of the new G&CH Improvement Association were inspired by their connections with the old German Township, whose boundaries had been nearly coterminal with the 22nd Ward since the city/county consolidation of 1854. “We are proud of our ward,” they wrote. “It has an honorable past. Part of the richest history, not only of the city, but of the whole country finds its home in Germantown.”²⁷

Finally, the organizers committed themselves to a nonpartisan stance in politics, promising that it would have “nothing to do with any political party.” One motive was to attract all interested residents, regardless of their political affiliations. But their nonpartisan position also reflected the 22nd Ward’s growing tradition of political independence and opposition to the city’s corrupt machine. As an extension of this nonpartisanship, membership was open to anyone, whether an official resident of the ward or not, who was interested in the welfare of the region—Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill. Dues were set at a modest one dollar per year. General membership meetings were held semiannually, in May and Novem-
ber. There was also an executive board of nine (and later fifteen) directors.\textsuperscript{28}

By the spring of 1907, the new association listed 370 members, roughly 20 percent of whom were from Chestnut Hill. Because the Hill, with approximately 6,000 people, then represented less than one-tenth of the total ward population, its participation was twice what might have been expected by numbers alone, a testament to the progressive-mindedness of many Chestnut Hillers and their determination to preserve their community as a comfortable and attractive suburb in the city. Among the Hill’s charter members of the G&CH Improvement Association were several prominent men, some of whose descendants were still active or well-known in the community at the time of this writing. These included Henry H. Bonnell (a nephew-in-law of Henry Howard Houston); Walter A. Dwyer (whose family has owned a coal and then a fuel-oil company for over a century); Edgar Dudley Faries (a lawyer, as well as a trustee and manager of the Henry Howard Houston estate); the Reverend J. Andrews Harris (who had been active in the old Chestnut Hill Improvement Association and was thus a personal link between the two groups); Samuel F. Houston (son of Henry Howard Houston); Walter E. Rex (a lawyer and descendant of one of the Hill’s earliest land-owning families); and, of course, Dr. George Woodward.\textsuperscript{29} As clergymen, lawyers, businessmen, and physicians, these were the sort of men who created and sustained the Progressive movement throughout the United States.

Unlike the earlier Chestnut Hill Village Improvement Association, the successor group did not seek to raise its own funds for large projects. Instead, it concentrated on gathering information about physical conditions in the ward, serving as a clearing house for complaints, and putting all the pressure it could on Philadelphia authorities to make improvements, deliver services, and remedy a variety of problems and nuisances. This decision to act as a lobbying group before city government showed that most thoughts of leaving the city had been discarded and that members of the association probably accepted the prevailing idea of an organic city, with its separate yet mutually dependent parts.
An outing of the all-male Germantown and Chestnut Hill Improvement Association. The group’s president, William H. Emhardt, Jr., is seated in the center of the front row, wearing a white suit. GHS.

The guiding personality behind the G&CH Improvement Association was William H. Emhardt, Jr. (1876–1951), a native Germantowner and head of the Germantown Mutual Fire Insurance Company, who left an estate of over $250,000 (then a respectable sum) at the time of his death. Emhardt was the association’s first secretary, and in 1914 he was elected president, a position that he held without interruption for the next three decades. Such dedication was an important factor in the group’s long success, in contrast to many other improvement associations that originated in other Philadelphia neighborhoods during this period and that failed or became inactive within several years. Unlike these, the Germantown and Chestnut Hill organization would remain effective into the early 1930s and would manage to survive into the post–World War II period.

Yet another reason for the association’s success was the decision to open a permanent headquarters with a paid executive director. This office initially was on the second floor of the Vernon Building
at Germantown and Chelton avenues, and later at 5555 Germantown Avenue, both locations in Germantown rather than Chestnut Hill. The first executive director, whose official title was actually special representative, was Jacob C. Bockius (1848–1940), who was hired in 1909 and remained in that position until resigning in 1932. Bockius was a native Germantowner who, with his father, had operated a flourishing clothing store, the Bockius Bazaar.31 Bockius’s main job was to receive complaints from ward residents, forward them to the proper authorities downtown for solution, and monitor responses from city hall. From all accounts, he was very resourceful: in 1922, when about 400 complaints were registered with his office, the summary list of acceptable adjustments filled fifty typed pages.32

Serving as Bockius’s eyes and ears was another important institution known as the Auxiliary Committee of the G&CH Improvement Association. It was made up of one or more appointed representatives from each of the voting districts in the 22nd Ward, the number varying from forty-nine in the early period to eighty by the 1930s. Among the district representatives from Chestnut Hill were John B. Lear, a property manager and the father of John B. Lear, Jr., and Polly (Mrs. Samuel J.) Randall, both of whom lived in Chestnut Hill in 1990. Another was Howard S. Kneedler, grandson of early Chestnut Hill suburbanite Jesse Kneedler and himself a prosperous textile company executive. These and the other representatives collected comments and concerns at the grass-roots level and forwarded them to Special Representative Bockius.33 Ironically, the Auxiliary Committee somewhat resembled the hated Republican machine at city hall, which was well organized at the neighborhood level with ward bosses and precinct captains. It was impossible to tell whether there was any conscious imitation of the system by the Improvement Association.

In any case, the Auxiliary Committee met once a month to set priorities for their requests to city hall and to plan overall strategy. Men from the auxiliary group (there were no female members) also joined individuals from the general membership to serve on a number of functional committees. During the first years of the organization these committees were: highways, lighting, and street cleaning; street
and steam railways; health, charities, sewage, and water (with Dr. Woodward as chairman); police and fire; public education and libraries; parks, playgrounds, public bathhouses, and amusements; and publicity (whose chairman was Henry H. Bonnell). Additional committees came later, such as one for public adornment and another for shade trees.34

Given the 70,000 to 90,000 people (depending on the precise time) who lived in the 22nd Ward, it is understandable that only a portion of the improvements secured by the association benefited Chestnut Hill directly. Even so, a list of accomplishments on behalf of Hill residents would fill several pages. Among the more impressive were the removal of ugly and dangerous grade crossings on both the Pennsylvania and Reading lines (completed in the early 1930s); the opening of emergency hospitals during the 1918 influenza epidemic; the building of a district high school in Germantown (which remains the public high school for Chestnut Hill); the building of a new public elementary school in Chestnut Hill (the present Jenks facility); the construction of the Water Tower Recreation Center (with generous financial assistance from Dr. and Mrs. Woodward); the purchase of up-to-date fire-fighting equipment for the Chestnut Hill station; the repaving of many local streets, along with the installation of curbings and storm sewers; better trash removal; the augmentation of city water supplies on the Hill; and the institution of an annual property inspection and spring cleanup.35

With such accomplishments, the G&CH Improvement Association was more effective than any other local civic group in the early twentieth century. Although not as impressive, the Chestnut Hill Businessmen's Association supported many of the same causes. Its precise origins are unclear, but this group seems to have been founded very early in the century as part of a nationwide movement of businessmen's associations. After becoming inactive for several years, it was reorganized in Chestnut Hill during the spring of 1913. Its early presidents were two local building contractors, James McCrea (1878–1973) and Pringle Borthwick (1861–1948). Borthwick also served for several years as a city councilman from Chestnut Hill. Howard S. Kneedler, who was active in the Improvement Associa-
tion, was another of the early leaders of the businessmen's group. In addition to enrolling local merchants in Chestnut Hill, the Businessmen's Association included doctors, lawyers, dentists, realtors, contractors, and anyone else who might do business on the Hill. Although the organization included some socially prominent members, one has the impression that its membership was largely middle-middle to upper-middle class in background. This was in contrast to the G&CH Improvement Association, which appeared to draw members more from the upper-middle and upper classes.

During a half dozen years or so after its reorganization, the businessmen campaigned for many of the same projects as the G&CH Improvement Association, including the elimination of grade crossings on the two commuter railroads serving Chestnut Hill and the erection of a new public elementary school on the Hill. They similarly petitioned the city to resurface local streets and to provide additional water supplies as the population grew. In early 1915 the businessmen endorsed an ultimately unsuccessful plan put forward by Dr. Woodward to have a new firehouse and post office erected at Germantown Avenue and Mermaid Lane opposite the gateway to Cresheim Valley Drive (yet another example of Woodward's debt to the City Beautiful movement). A year earlier the Businessmen's Association had also rallied local residents to save the old stone water tower at Ardleigh Street and Southampton Avenue, then in a state of decay and threatened with demolition.

During this period the Businessmen's Association began sponsoring a day-long rail excursion to Atlantic City each July, an event that was aimed at giving less prosperous residents an affordable day at the shore. Beginning in the summer of 1913 and continuing until World War II, the group reserved cars on the Pennsylvania Railroad for the trip. In 1925, when the two-way fare was $2.30 for adults and $1.25 for children, nearly 1,000 inhabitants took advantage of this outing. Virtually all businesses on the Hill shut down for the day. It was also in 1913 that the businessmen began sponsoring a Fourth of July celebration in Chestnut Hill, at first on the Chestnut Hill Academy grounds and later at the Water Tower Recreation Center. The celebration featured speeches, a military band concert, athletic
contests, and the singing of patriotic songs. As with the shore excursion, this event seemed to attract less prominent residents of the Hill, as upper-class inhabitants enjoyed their own celebration at the Cricket Club. Even the observation of the nation’s birth was not enough to bridge social cleavages for a few hours on Independence Day.

The Businessmen’s Association also mobilized itself during World War I. As early as May 1917, one month after the American declaration of war against Germany, some thirty-five members of the association met in the barn of president Pringle Borthwick to cut seed potatoes for planting in victory gardens. They cooperated with several local organizations in establishing victory gardens throughout the Hill, with many of the plots donated by Dr. Woodward on land that he owned. The businessmen also organized a series of “send-off” parties for departing local soldiers.

After World War I the association seemed to falter. This may have had something to do with the spirit of complacency that overtook the entire country in the 1920s, but it is more likely that the Businessmen’s Association suffered from a lack of energetic leadership and effective organization. Unlike the G&CH Improvement Association, it did not have a paid director or a mechanism such as the Auxiliary Committee to gather ideas and plot strategy. Although it would continue to exist into the post–World War II period, the Businessmen’s Association would follow an uneven course of activity and eventually become a moribund group that confined itself largely to organizing the annual Fourth of July celebration and excursions to Atlantic City.

Chestnut Hill wives and daughters also became active in civic affairs during the early decades of the twentieth century. This was part of a national trend that saw upper-middle- and upper-class women campaigning for a host of Progressive reforms, including women’s suffrage. This was nowhere more evident than in their creation of the Chestnut Hill Community Center just after World War I.

The Community Center, which continues to function seven decades later, had its immediate origins in war work. At the instigation of Mrs. George Woodward and Mrs. Walter E. Clark, wife of a wealthy investment banker, a group of socially prominent women
founded a Chestnut Hill branch of the National League for Women’s Service during a meeting at the Cricket Club in July 1917. For headquarters they rented a large three-story stone house at 8419 Germantown Avenue, parts of which may date to the early nineteenth century. There the women sewed bandages, knitted socks for the troops, made clothing, raised money for war refugees, canned and sold vegetables and preserves, made soup for settlement houses, allotted war gardens, baked cakes for military hospitals, staffed canteens, gave luncheons for departing troops, and supplied automobiles for nurses. During the influenza epidemic, they also “visited, nursed, fed, and if necessary, buried the unfortunate [victims].”

It was as if the League for Women’s Service had touched off an explosion of pent-up energy in these local matrons, many of whom leapt at the chance to use their talents outside the home for the first time. In this sense, Chestnut Hill women appeared to lag behind
women in other parts of the country, who had become very involved in social service activities a decade or two before. It is impossible to say why this was the case, though it may have stemmed from lingering romantic notions about women’s place in the home as guardians of morality, combined with a concerted effort to maintain proper domestic models in Philadelphia’s most prominent suburb.

Whatever the reasons, Chestnut Hill’s unit of the League for Women’s Service demonstrated an energy and persistence that had already marked local civic organizations dominated by men. Not content with war work alone, the women began to assist settlement houses in Philadelphia and to care for the poor in general.\textsuperscript{45} After the war ended, they kept working at these projects, and by 1919 they were involved in about twenty separate programs. These included a Visiting Nurse Society, classes in cooking and dietetics, and a housing committee that was dedicated to improving housing conditions throughout the city. Under the circumstances, it seemed logical to form themselves into a permanent organization. As Mrs. Woodward explained it, “The time has now come when this house should be
taken over by the Community, to be the center of all those better-ments of living and opportunities for . . . service that Chestnut Hill stands for." In Gertrude Houston Woodward's mind, at least, Chestnut Hill represented progress in modern living and civic altruism. For her there was no obvious conflict between the dual identity with suburb and city.

Agreeing with Mrs. Woodward's advice, the women formed themselves into the Chestnut Hill Community Center, with a charter from the state of Pennsylvania, and bought the building at 8419 Germantown Avenue for $13,000. Most of the purchase price came from Mrs. Woodward. Among those signing the charter, in addition to Mrs. Woodward, were Ellis Ames Ballard, a socially prominent Philadelphia lawyer who lived in Chestnut Hill, and Albert Atlee Jackson, president of the Girard Trust. Although they were dedicated and energetic, the women apparently thought that they needed the moral support of leading men in the community.
Besides continuing with their various urban projects into the 1920s, the women of the Community Center organized classes in current events, psychology, and French, along with programs to heighten the interest of newly enfranchised women in politics and voting. Through the Visiting Nurse Society, the center established a clinic for preschool children. The center also provided funds for dental care and milk for poorer children on the Hill.

As members of wealthy families, who had both time and money to expend, the women from the Community Center saw their role in the organic city as enlightened dispensers of private charity. With their belief in study and organization, they also showed themselves to be faithful to the Progressive spirit well into the 1920s and 1930s. Yet it is obvious that the women's activities could be viewed as nurturing efforts and thus as extensions of motherhood, endeavors that were acceptable among their age and class. In contrast, none of the members of the Improvement Association or the Businessmen's Association appear to have been women. This was typical of women's relative lack of involvement with Progressivism in Chestnut Hill.48

In addition to their social work through the Community Center, many well-to-do women in Chestnut Hill volunteered their time and energy to a variety of charitable groups organized by the churches in Chestnut Hill. Such was the case with the women at St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Organizing themselves into the Women's Auxiliary, the women collected money and clothing in the 1890s for settlement houses, Indian missions, and a variety of other charitable causes. In 1916 Gertrude Woodward, who was active in the Women's Auxiliary at St. Martin's, began holding an annual "Fête and Garden Party" at Krisheim in order to raise money for church work in Germantown. During World War I and World War II the auxiliary rolled bandages and cooperated with other women's groups in the church to give and attend courses on home gardening and the preservation of foods. During the Great Depression the women sewed clothing for the poor and collected money for relief work in Germantown.49

In addition to these charitable activities, there were organized efforts during the first few decades of the twentieth century in Chestnut Hill that focused on health and education. These were the Chestnut Hill Hospital and the new Jenks Elementary School. Inspiration for
the Chestnut Hill Hospital came from four local physicians: Drs. Radcliffe Cheston, J. Murray Ellzey, Russell H. Johnson, and John F. McCloskey. In 1904 they leased a double house at 27 West Gravers Lane. Facilities were so primitive that the physicians had to carry nonambulatory patients to the second floor. This hospital became inadequate almost immediately, and in 1907 some $31,000 was raised in a community drive to buy the large Norris house, known as Norrington and located on the east side of Germantown Avenue, just above Chestnut Hill Avenue. In 1921 a new stone structure was built on the site and the old Norris house was converted into a maternity ward. Six years later the hospital opened a nursing program with a new nurses dormitory.

From the first, the hospital received financial support and managerial advice from Chestnut Hill's wealthy families, who were interested in providing themselves and their community with good medical care. The hospital also represented the sort of practical philanthropy that progressive-minded Chestnut Hillers admired. Among the early supporters of the hospital were Dr. and Mrs. Woodward,
Samuel F. Houston, Mrs. Charles W. Henry, Ellis Ames Ballard, C. Stuart Patterson, Judge J. Willis Martin, and the Reverend J. Andrews Harris. Over the decades its board of trustees would read like a local social register. As time passed the hospital also added to Chestnut Hill’s attractiveness as a suburb in the city. In the late twentieth century, however, the hospital’s need for additional space would clash with historic preservationists’ and neighbors’ desire to save the residential character of Norwood Avenue, which passed directly behind the hospital grounds (see chapter 9).50

In this era of improvement, civic-minded Chestnut Hillers, such as Pennsylvania’s own Gifford Pinchot and many other thoughtful Americans during the Progressive Era, became interested in conservation. Receiving the bulk of local attention was, understandably, the Wissahickon Creek and its wooded gorge. Efforts to protect this all-important western boundary to Chestnut Hill would also lay the foundation for conservation efforts later in the century. Such preservation efforts, like the improvement organizations, were additional examples of how prosperous and capable members of the community cooperated to maintain an important ingredient of their suburban lives. In this case they strove to preserve the natural or seminatural surroundings that remained essential to the suburban ideal.

Since 1868, and largely through the efforts of Fairmount Park Commissioner Eli Kirk Price (whose family owned a summer house on Bethlehem Pike and some of whose descendants continue to live in Chestnut Hill), the city had acquired the entire Wissahickon Creek within the municipal limits. The Park Commission subsequently demolished all the mills and most of the other structures along the creek, leaving only the dams and ruined foundations as a clue to future generations that the valley had once been a thriving center of industry. With the goal of returning the land to its pristine state, the commission doubtless gave little thought to the possibility that industrial historians and the general public alike might some day profit from seeing a restored mill or two along the creek banks.51

It was in this same spirit of harkening back to a romantic past that Chestnut Hillers became interested in restoring and improving the Wissahickon during the first years of the twentieth century. In
The marble Indian chief placed on Indian Rock high above the Wissahickon Creek by Charles Wolcott and Sallie Houston Henry in 1902. GHS.

fact, a sort of inauguration for such efforts took place in June 1902 when Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Henry presented a large marble statue of the area's half-legendary Indian chief, Tedyescung. It stands atop Indian Rock, where Joseph Middleton had placed a wooden Indian back in 1854. Poised in a half-crouch, the marble chief, in full headdress, still surveys the valley that had once been home to his tribe.  

This heightened interest in the Wissahickon included architectural restoration, or what was understood as restoration at the time. The first building to be renovated was the Valley Green Inn, undertaken by yet another group of prominent women who belonged to the Society of Colonial Dames. In 1901 they obtained permission from the Fairmount Park Commission to repair the old inn and to
open it as a "first-class refreshment cafe." Heading their committee was Miss Lydia T. Morris, who, with her brother John T. Morris, had already begun to create their arboretum in Chestnut Hill. Joining her in the group were the equally prominent Mrs. Alexander Van Rensselaer, Mrs. Samuel Chew, Mrs. Mitchell Harrison, Mrs. Francis H. Bohlen, Mrs. Alfred C. Harrison, Miss Margaret L. Corlies and Mrs. John B. Morgan (both sisters of Mrs. Samuel F. Houston), Mrs. Alexander Biddle, and Mrs. Randal Morgan (who lived with her husband on the large estate known as Wyndmoor at Mermaid Lane and Stenton Avenue in Chestnut Hill).53

Given the interests of the Colonial Dames, a patriotic lineage society that had been founded in 1890 in order to honor the pre-Revolutionary ancestors of fellow members, it is not surprising that they were attracted by a series of myths about the Valley Green Inn. Although the structure then standing dated from about 1850, an apparently false local legend held that a pre-Revolutionary inn had stood on the site and that George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette had dined there during their retreat from Barren Hill to Valley Forge.54

The Dames proposed to remodel the inn “along original lines,” but photographs of the 1850 structure show that they had no intention of doing an exact restoration of the midcentury building.55 Instead, the women and their architects decided to use their imaginations and to create what they thought a colonial inn should be. Like much so-called colonial restoration of the day, the resultant Valley Green Inn was largely fantasy. Among its more charming but unauthentic features were leaded glass windows on the upper story, stylized picket gates, and built-in porch benches with large scrolled shoulder rests. Inside the inn there was a newly built “colonial-style” fireplace. Whatever liberties were taken with the architectural past, the Dames created a picturesque facility that now stands as a good example of the early Colonial Revival style. The “restored” Valley Green Inn, now a full-fledged restaurant, continues to be a favorite with visitors to the Wissahickon. For nine decades it has provided a focal point for other preservation projects along the Wissahickon.

Another conjectural restoration was done on Glen Fern, the old
Thomas Livezey house at the foot of West Allen's Lane and the Wissahickon Creek, which had once stood beside the pre-Revolutionary Livezey grist mill. It was purchased, along with seventy-five acres, by the Fairmount Park Commission in 1908. A year later the house was rented by the newly formed Valley Green Canoe Club. They used the pond behind the Livezey mill dam for canoeing and the house for social events. By 1912 they had added a second-story “colonial” balcony, a supposed restoration of the one that had been there originally.  

While such renovations were being carried out at Glen Fern and the Valley Green Inn, the Fairmount Park Commission continued to acquire land in Chestnut Hill along both the Wissahickon Creek and its tributary, Cresheim Creek. Through systematic purchases and gifts, for example, Dr. and Mrs. Woodward (and Mrs. Woodward’s
sister, Mrs. Charles W. Henry) enabled the commission to extend the park along Cresheim Creek almost as far as Chestnut Hill’s eastern boundary on Stenton Avenue. In 1909 Mrs. Henry and the Woodwards also donated a monumental stone gate in the City Beautiful style for the entrance to Cresheim Valley Drive at Germantown Avenue, complete with a watering trough for horses and an overhanging trellis for wisteria vines. Even so, it looks somewhat out of place at the entrance to a wooded extension of Fairmount Park. Twenty years later, in 1929, Dr. and Mrs. Woodward spent $500,000 to purchase a 100-acre estate on the northwest corner of Allen’s Lane and McCallum Street known as Medlock Wold. They then donated it to Fairmount Park and it is now the site of the Allen’s Lane Art Center. In the meantime (1920) the Park Commission purchased the first of its properties along the Wissahickon in adjoining Montgomery County as an initial step toward protecting the creek outside city limits. In 1928 it also bought several houses on the south side of North-
western Avenue at the end of the park and then demolished them, a last step in taking the park to the very edge of the city.57

As these boundaries were being rounded out, the first debate over automobiles in the Wissahickon portion of the park emerged. The G&CH Improvement Association took the lead in late 1910 when it successfully protested against a proposal before the Fairmount Park Commission to allow motor vehicles on the upper Wissahickon Drive (the present Forbidden Drive that passes in front of the Valley Green Inn). Sharing opposition to automobile traffic along the creek were the Pennsylvania Forestry Association, the Pennsylvania Botanical Society, the Civic Club, and the Automobile Club of Philadelphia. Five years later the idea of opening the drive to cars was renewed. This time the Park Commission was deluged with a pile of protest letters some two feet high. Meanwhile, petitions opposing automobiles on the drive were placed in every drug store in the 22nd Ward.58 A letter to the Park Commission from William H. Emhardt, Jr., on behalf of the G&CH Improvement Association stated its objections to automobiles in the upper park:

[It] will necessitate the widening of the drive, taking out trees and cutting and filling. This will create scars in the present wooded scenery for many years to come. . . . Foot travel on Sundays and holidays in this part of the Wissahickon is large, and [there] would be a considerable source of danger from automobiles.

We therefore cannot express our feelings too strongly for the retention of the upper Wissahickon in its present condition. It is a wonderful natural piece of scenery, with the quiet that is so fitting for a proper appreciation, and we desire that it remain so.59

The opponents again won a stay of execution, only to have the park commissioners reconsider automobile traffic again in the early 1920s. This time local residents formed two permanent organizations to combat the recurrent threat. The first of these was the Philadelphia Riders and Drivers, founded in 1920 and reorganized in 1952 as the Riders of the Wissahickon, Inc. In order to draw attention to their cause, the group held an equestrian demonstration in late October of 1920. About 200 riders and drivers turned out, assembling at the Valley Green Inn and parading down to Lincoln Drive and back. In May
of the following year they held the first annual Wissahickon Day Parade, an event which has been held each spring ever since, except for a hiatus during and just after World War II. Over 600 riders and 12,000 spectators turned out for the first spring event in order to show their support for keeping motor cars off the drive. In future years celebrities appeared in the parade, including silent screen star Tom Mix and his horse, Tony, who came for the 1924 event. Early presidents of the Riders and Drivers were Judge J. Willis Martin and Frederic H. Strawbridge, both of whom were frequently seen driving their four-in-hand coaches through the valley. In 1934 the equestrian organization was joined by a second preservation society called the Friends of the Wissahickon, a group that continues to exist nearly sixty years later.\textsuperscript{60}

This local victory over automobiles along the upper Wissahickon would prove very important to Chestnut Hill, for it helped to protect the semirural atmosphere that was so essential to the suburban ideal. Another contemporary movement that contributed to the suburban atmosphere of the community was the establishment of the Chestnut Hill Horticultural Society in 1898. Among its early presidents was
John and Lydia Morris, the brother and sister who created Chestnut Hill's Morris Arboretum. Local.

John T. Morris, co-creator of the Morris Arboretum at the northeast corner of Germantown and Hillcrest avenues. The group awarded prizes each year for outstanding gardens, flowers, and plants, and also heard lectures on subjects of mutual interest. In January 1909, for example, they listened to a paper on “How to Beautify the Garden Cottage.” Later garden clubs would continue programs of this nature.

Supporting such activities were the Andorra Nurseries, so named for an earlier estate on the site and established in 1897 on a 120-acre tract of land at the intersection of Forbidden Drive and Northwestern Avenue that was originally rented from the Houston estate. Eventually the nurseries acquired about 1,000 acres of land, much of it in
An example of the Wissahickon style of landscape gardening. Included are the three main elements of that style: water, local stone, and native vegetation. 

Local.

adjoining Montgomery County. The company specialized in the sorts of native trees and shrubs that Chestnut Hillers continued to plant as part of the Wissahickon style of landscape gardening.62

Some local improvers became actively involved in city politics, if only to pressure officials to provide better services for the community. Others joined the fight for political reform in the early twentieth century. In this respect, too, many Chestnut Hillers shared the broader goals of the Progressive Era.

So far as partisan politics were concerned, the majority of local residents were confirmed Republicans. This was partly because the Democratic party was virtually nonexistent in Philadelphia, where a Republican machine enjoyed a monopoly that would not be broken until the post–World War II period. As an example, voter registration in 1919 for the 22nd Ward, to which Chestnut Hill belonged, was 7,892 for the Republicans and a mere 571 for the Democrats.63 Thus even domestic servants and other workers on the Hill, who
might have voted Democratic in cities such as New York or Boston, could be counted on to support the GOP. For prosperous Chestnut Hillers, the Republican party (at least on the national level) represented progress, respectability, and support for business interests. Accordingly, the Republicans dominated election after election in Chestnut Hill.

Yet many well-to-do Chestnut Hillers were disgusted by the waste and dishonesty of Philadelphia’s Republican bosses and joined with their counterparts throughout the 22nd Ward in battling the machine and in supporting reform candidates for municipal and state elections. As early as January 1898, for example, the *Germantown Guide* published a long, unsigned letter condemning the city hall machine:

The people of the Twenty-second Ward have made up their minds that they will stand by their rights and will allow “no boss rule in this town.” Doorbells are being rung constantly by the heelers as they go the rounds, with their same old threadbare rags and promises in search of pledges. Why cannot men be men always, and vote for the welfare of the city and State without throwing away a vote simply because some heeler, who is paid for his trouble in dollars and cents argues that the boss delegate of his division is a perfect gentleman and only interested in the purification of his division politics, notwithstanding the fact that this styled gentleman carries a bottle of whiskey in his pocket to get followers by buying up rumsoaks when he thinks he is going to be defeated...64

Just one year later, in 1899, reform-minded Republicans of the 22nd Ward unanimously nominated and elected Dr. George Woodward to the Philadelphia Common Council, to fill the unexpired term of Samuel Goodman.65 In 1897, as a member of the Philadelphia Board of Public Health, Woodward had taken on the machine over the subject of filtering the municipal water supply. For years city hall had denied that devastating typhoid epidemics were caused by dumping raw sewage into the Schuylkill River and then pumping untreated river water into city mains. Woodward had responded by testing the water in the Schuylkill all the way to Reading and publishing in a pamphlet his incriminating results, which proved beyond doubt that polluted river water was the primary cause of recurrent typhoid fever
in Philadelphia. The mayor and both councils had no choice but to begin filtering the water.\textsuperscript{66}

To punish Woodward for his independence, the mayor had the Board of Public Health abolished, thus depriving the outspoken Woodward of a job. Yet Woodward refused to give up. Following his brief term in Common Council, he helped to form the City party, which won a stunning but temporary victory over the machine in 1905.\textsuperscript{67} Then in 1919, he was elected to the first of his seven consecutive terms as a Pennsylvania state senator. During his first term he was helpful in steering the 1919 home-rule charter for Philadelphia through the legislature, a measure that was designed by Woodward and others to cripple boss rule. It failed to do so, but Woodward went on fighting for good government from his seat in Harrisburg.\textsuperscript{68}

Woodward and other reformers enjoyed solid support in Chestnut Hill and the rest of the 22nd Ward. Besides electing him again and again to public office, voters and political activists in the ward formed local units of various reform parties that emerged in Philadelphia during the Progressive Era. In 1905, well-to-do women such as Gertrude Woodward organized a women's ward committee of the City party. Three years later, Chestnut Hillers responded enthusiastically to the candidacy of Bayard Henry (a trustee of the Houston estate), who was elected to the Common Council on the City ticket.\textsuperscript{69} Later residents of the 22nd Ward became active in the reformist Washington party and in the equally reformist Independent Republican movement. In 1919, for instance, Independent candidates in the ward won every race in the Republican primary.\textsuperscript{70} When the new city charter was being discussed that same year, the G&CH Improvement Association supported the proposal and invited Dr. Woodward to speak on the question at a special meeting. Independent Republicans backed the charter reform strongly, but in future years were not always as well organized as the machine Republicans and frequently argued over candidates and strategy, as in 1921, when several independent candidates put themselves forward for a seat in a state constitutional convention.\textsuperscript{71}

Given the strength of the Independent movement in the 22nd Ward, it is not surprising that the Republican machine sought to di-
lute its strength by dividing the ward into two or three smaller segments. Because the 22nd was the largest ward in the city, with an estimated population of just over 70,000 in 1910, this proposal did not sound unreasonable on its face, but because it was the machine bosses who proposed division time and time again, the reform element was dubious.\textsuperscript{72}

The question of ward division was first proposed in 1906, but was beaten down by the reformers, only to be brought up and defeated again in 1914.\textsuperscript{73} The next battle over division took place in 1921. Among the division’s strongest proponents was attorney Owen B. Jenkins, the regular Republican candidate for state senate who had been defeated by George Woodward in 1919. This time the Chestnut Hill Businessmen’s Association denounced the scheme. According to its president, James McCrea, the machine had again petitioned for division because “the gang wants more jobs. But wait until the election. We will show them we have no use for them in the Twenty-second Ward. The only persons who want the ward divided are the division leaders and the ward boss.”\textsuperscript{74} The G&CH Improvement Association agreed, and in a formal resolution added an appeal to historical and civic pride:

\begin{quote}
Whereas the Township of Germantown, comprising the Twenty-second Ward has been a physical unit dating back to the original grant by William Penn in 1683 to Francis Daniel Pastorius and has been maintained to this day. Any change would tend to break its traditions and civic spirit and destroy the unanimity of the various agencies seeking the development of the Ward. . . .\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

Such comments showed that there remained a large reservoir of community feeling for the former German Township, as well as a continuing sense of autonomy within the city of Philadelphia nearly seventy years after political consolidation. These sentiments, combined with a determination to defeat machine attempts to dilute the reform movement within the ward, were sufficient to combat renewed attempts at division in 1926 and 1937. Not until 1958, after the political and demographic landscape had changed drastically, would ward division succeed.\textsuperscript{76} Although such opposition to ward division reflected a strong sense of local identity, it also showed that leaders
in Germantown and Chestnut Hill believed that they had a duty to fight for better government for the whole city if they were going to do well themselves. In this respect, the dual identity of suburbanites in the 22nd Ward functioned to some degree for the betterment of both suburb and city.

Although the independent Republicans in the 22nd Ward, with support from the Improvement Association and the Businessmen's Association, were able to defeat ward division, both organizations began to decline in the early 1930s. Part of the decline may have stemmed from the aging leadership. Although they remained in charge of the organization, these leaders failed to recruit new and more energetic members. Nevertheless, they joined with several other local institutions in relief efforts during the depression and in war work thereafter.

Without any governmental agencies to help in the early years of the depression, churches, charities, and private individuals in the area did whatever they could. Late in 1930, several of the churches in Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill opened an employment department. Their idea was to match up the unemployed with available positions, most of them odd jobs of a temporary nature, such as fixing a roof or cleaning out someone's cellar. By the end of the month, they were swamped with more than 700 calls from men desperate for work. Local businessmen, feeling the pinch of reduced purchases, launched an advertising campaign that urged residents to "Buy on the Hill." At the same time, prominent Chestnut Hillers were active in a private relief campaign for the entire city, launched in November of 1930 by Horatio Gates Lloyd, a resident of Haverford. Chief among these was George Woodward, who contributed $50,000 toward the first goal of $5 million.

In Chestnut Hill itself, Woodward and others whose wealth was not threatened by the economic catastrophe did much for relief. Woodward spent $5,000 to hire unemployed men to cut down dead trees along the Wissahickon Creek. When some of Woodward's tenants found themselves in financial trouble, he deferred and in some cases forgave their rents altogether. He also donated materials for some sixty-eight garden plots that were laid out beside the play-
ground at the Water Tower Recreation Center, a relief scheme that was doubtless inspired by memories of victory gardens during World War I. Another private make-work project in Chestnut Hill was undertaken by the independently wealthy artist Carroll Tyson, who commissioned a huge stone wall around his home at 8811 Towanda Street. He hired the Marcolina Brothers to undertake the work, with the stipulation that they should hire a new crew every three months in order to spread the jobs around as much as possible. The project took about two years, and helped to relieve some of the Hill’s unemployed stonemasons.

Continuing the work they began during World War I, the women of the Chestnut Hill Community Center redoubled their efforts to help needy families during the depression. They made hundreds of layettes for babies, collected and distributed used clothing, and sold various foods and crafts from their shop at 8419 Germantown Avenue, the profits going to several charities. They also raised money to buy coal for the unemployed, paid for medical care for the poor families on the Hill, and distributed large amounts of food. During the early years of the depression, for instance, they sent thousands of bags of flour each week to relief agencies in Philadelphia. It was the Community Center that supervised the food gardens program in Chestnut Hill, dispensing advice on gardening along with Dr. Woodward’s fertilizer and seeds.

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, Chestnut Hillers almost immediately began to gather clothes and sew surgical dressings for the beleaguered British. Some residents opened their homes to British children whose parents sent them abroad to escape the expected bombings and a possible German invasion. Residents also held various benefits to raise money for British war relief. Once the United States entered the war in late 1941, Chestnut Hillers continued to work on relief projects, bought war bonds, gave blood to the Red Cross, planted hundreds of new victory gardens, and cooperated with the city’s civil defense system.

Such activities during the depression and World War II fit well with Chestnut Hillers’ image of themselves as a progressive people who could marshal their reason, organizational abilities, and private
wealth to solve problems. But this approach to problems was not in sympathy with Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, which called for massive public assistance and unprecedented regulation of the American economy.

At first frightened, local businessmen showed enthusiasm for the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and its symbol, the Blue Eagle. The Chestnut Hill Title and Trust Company proudly displayed the Blue Eagle at the top of a large advertisement in the Germantown Telegraph.⁸⁵ Even some of the Hill’s frightened social and economic elite, realizing that Herbert Hoover had failed to cope effectively with
the depression, wished Roosevelt the best during his first months in office.

Despite these initial good wishes for Roosevelt, most of Chestnut Hill’s upper classes soon rallied to the standard of the Republican party and began denouncing Roosevelt’s programs to regulate the economy as outright socialism. Then, as Roosevelt won one election after another, local Republicans grew more enraged. One of these was Dr. Woodward’s son, George Woodward, Jr., who became furious at the mere mention of Roosevelt’s name, so much so that family members studiously avoided all talk of politics at the dinner table. A large number of local Republicans, including the younger Woodward, believed that Roosevelt, who had come from one of the most privileged families in America, was simply a traitor to his class.

Like many former Progressives, most upper-class Chestnut Hillers found that their notions of civic improvement and political reform did not go very far beyond private charity, or allow much room for even mild government regulation. For this reason, as well as others, the more limited approach of Progressive reformers would continue to appeal to suburbanites in Chestnut Hill as they sought to preserve their privileged way of life in both city and suburb. Nevertheless, this circumscribed view of government and community would later prove a handicap in local attempts to deal with serious urban problems as they began to afflict their suburb in the city and surrounding communities several decades later.