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“Let Us Be Large in Thought, in Word, in Deed”

Women's Identities in Making and Maintaining Community in Levittown, Pennsylvania, 1952-1959¹

Abigail Caldwell
The University of Texas at Austin

According to postwar advertisements from popular American corporations and companies, women in the 1950s were always smiling and apron-adorned in their pastel-colored kitchens. Their hair was perfect, their nails were manicured, and the drudgery of housework was a breeze with all the latest kitchen appliances and goods.² This homemaker depiction has since become emblematic of the domestic stereotype, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) set it in stone. She wrote, “as [each suburban wife] made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts

¹Yearbook of the Federated Women's Club of Levittown 1955-56, MSC 803 Levittown Collection Publications: Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3, Folder 2 of 6, Bucks County Historical Society, Levittown Community Collection, 1945-1965, Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle, Pennsylvania.

² Katherine J. Parkin, *Food Is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fj682.4>.

and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—'Is this all?'"³

Women in Levittown, Pennsylvania in the postwar era found that this—being a doting mother, attentive wife, and diligent homemaker—was not all, because they saw themselves as necessary and meaningful contributors to something new. When the freshly-built suburb opened in 1952, for example, women who were strangers to each other came together to establish a local branch of the nationally-recognized, long-established Federated Women's Club. This organization immediately gained influence across Levittown, as demonstrated when the Federated Women's Club of Levittown (FWCL) created and sold a Levittown Cookbook to benefit the library in 1956. The book was a "community bestseller," as members gathered and selected 250 individual recipes from local housewives, sent off the compilation and design to be professionally made, and then sold the cookbooks for \$1.50 each via phone or in-person order.⁴ While a seemingly domestic project, the FWCL cookbook shows that women in Levittown were apt businesswomen. They set their eyes on a goal and decided how to meet it: by identifying a market, creating, advertising, and selling a product, and then donating the profit.

However, many of the FWCL goals had nothing to do with homemaking. For instance, in 1957-1958, the FWCL sponsored the Women's Medical College. That same year, their yearbook bragged that all of its members could enjoy "a diversified program of community service, adult education, and friendships."⁵ By supporting women's higher education in medicine and in general, the FWCL explicitly encouraged non-domestic activities and identities for women. As these

³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 15.

⁴ Joan Nevins, "Society: News for Women, Clubs, Fashion," *Levittown Times*, August 14, 1956.

⁵ Yearbook of the Federated Women's Club of Levittown 1957-58, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3, Folder 2 of 6, Levittown Community Collection, 1945-1965.

examples hint at and this article endeavors to demonstrate, suburban women prioritized identities other than wives and mothers despite the stereotype's predominance in the popular imagination. White, middle-income suburban women in the 1950s led the creation of a new kind of community, and, by doing so, they forged white, middle-class, suburban, and American identities. As a result, Levittown women illustrate how people do not unthinkingly adopt social labels, but rather construct and define them for themselves.

Adding this nuance to life in the suburbs for 1950s women clarifies our understanding of the period, which includes the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement, and constructs a more accurate postwar history. Moreover, moving from the suburb's early construction to the problems of a firmly established suburb reveals how women's nondomestic identities evolved over time and in response to change. The most remarkable part of it all is how, in Levittown, strangers came together in a brand-new place and forged lasting shared identities in less than a decade. This rapid development reminds us that individuals fashion, not just assume, identities like suburban, middle-class, white, and American, and it demonstrates how individuals can and have modified such labels to become more inclusive over time. Ultimately, Levittown women's community involvement uncovers dynamic, nuanced identities for 1950s women that the stereotype fails to capture, and not paying attention to such identities risks overlooking how women truly defined themselves in the postwar era and beyond.

For more than two decades, historians of women in this era have attacked the stereotype of the domestic housewife by shining light on women outside the home, including civil rights activists, union women, and immigrants.⁶ This practice was especially popular in the 1990s, when historians like Susan Lynn and Naomi Abrahams argued that the 1950s was an

⁶ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960," *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 1-18.

important stepping stone for women's wider activism and political involvement in the 1960s.⁷ While this article agrees with these scholars in capturing women's nondomestic activities and identities, it does not use a scope directed toward the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, this article is unique in its study of community involvement in the 1950s. More recently in the historiography, scholars have turned back toward the home by studying how white suburban women used motherhood to promote postwar conservatism and segregation on a local level, mostly in Orange County, CA.⁸ This article employs a local lens, too, but adopts Levittown, Pennsylvania as a case study to challenge the stereotype of those who were most emblematic of it (white, financially stable suburban women, representative of the middle class). It concludes that even for them, the homemaker image falls short of reality. As the history of the first eight years in Levittown, PA, shows, women built communities and led service, social, and self-improvement initiatives that shaped multi-faceted identities for women as a whole.

As a historical case study, a large part of Levittown's allure is its reputation as the "exhibit A" of suburbia and Americanism, which the builders and first residents constructed during the Cold War.⁹ William Levitt's advertising was the first to position Levittown as a symbol of American tradition, and the perception persisted throughout the Cold

⁷ Susan Lynn, "Gender and Post World War II Progressive Politics: A Bridge to Social Activism in the 1960s U.S.A.," *Gender & History* 4, no. 2 (June 1992): 215–239; Naomi Abrahams, "Negotiating Power, Identity, Family, and Community: Women's Community Participation," *Gender and Society* 10, no. 6 (December 1996), 781, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/190199>.

⁸ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors the Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Elizabeth McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Michelle Nickerson, *Women of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁹ Joshua Ruff, "For Sale: The American Dream," *American History* 43, no. 3 (December 2007): 43.

War when Americans wanted their prosperous, freedom-loving country to stand in stark contrast to the Soviet state. Big businessmen, politicians, and regular American citizens alike felt they had a vested interest in presenting the United States as affluent and stable, and thus nurtured an ideal called the American Dream that was rooted in socio-economic mobility and success. This Dream pertained mostly to white, middle-income nuclear families, who were exactly Levitt's audience. As a result, he gave them the space to cultivate these identities and offered the epitome of the American Dream in home ownership.

This article is divided into three sections, which are further divided into subsections. Section one covers 1952-1954 and offers the background of Levittown, PA and its first residents. It ends by discussing the first clubs that women established, joined, and participated in. Section two explores the next two years, 1954-1956, to uncover the activities and roles of women within these clubs and how their initiatives cultivated non-wife and non-mother identities. Finally, Section three reveals that Levittown and its clubs were not immune to serious conflict from 1956-1959, as told by the upheaval that followed the arrival of the first Black family. Section three will end by circling back to Levittown's organizations, which proved resilient and adaptable with women's leadership and cross-club teamwork. As a whole, this article will show how (mostly) white suburban women built their community from scratch in ways and with skills that the domestic stereotype fails to consider.

Using club newsletters, group pamphlets, newspaper articles, and written and oral testimonies, we can gain an accurate, previously unstudied look at women and their community involvement in Levittown in the 1950s. Uncovering who they were, what they did, and why they did it dispels the domestic stereotype that keeps women in their kitchens as only wives and mothers. Moreover, their agency outside of the home enabled suburban women to construct the postwar world on a local level. By building a community from scratch and then maintaining and leading it, Levittown women

forged malleable identities like “suburbanite” that have persisted through time and shaped definitions of modern womanhood and Americanism ever since.

“I felt like a Pioneer!”: Moving to Levittown and Forming Community, 1952-1954¹⁰

Levitt & Sons: Laying the Groundwork for Community

While William Levitt gained fame for his efficient building techniques, he never wanted Levittown to be just houses. From the start, the construction company Levitt & Sons envisioned a space where a community would thrive and stand as a pillar of American tradition. According to Levitt, this tradition promoted people with similar values coming together, supporting each other, and having fun all while striving and succeeding as individuals. The nation, like Levitt, was keen to paint this rosy picture in the face of the Cold War, and Levittown’s designs did so. The suburb incorporated essential features of communities, like schools, and other characteristics that Levitt thought would facilitate friendship among neighbors, like recreation centers. Levitt claimed, “we bought 5,000 acres and planned every foot of it,” and the community was at the center of these plans.¹¹ This subsection will discuss how Levitt, with a specific street layout and the inclusion of amenities, laid the foundation for successful clubs and groups before the first family even set foot on the property.

The first part of Levitt’s planned community was a system of grouping the houses. The largest unit of division was the master blocks, which were areas about a mile square with 300-500 houses in each. Levitt designed every master block to have its own recreation park and a school so that “no child will have to walk more than one half mile to school or cross any major

¹⁰ Don Staedtler, “I remember...” Houses, MSC 803 Box 1 of 12 Audio Visual and Oral histories, Levittown Community Collection.

¹¹ “Planning, Building, and Selling Levittown,” Levittown, Pa. | Building the Suburban Dream, The State Museum of Pennsylvania, 2003, <http://statemuseumpa.org/levittown/one/c.html>.

road.”¹² The master blocks were further divided into three to five neighborhoods, also called sections. As Levitt claimed, “each neighborhood is small enough to create local self-pride, group activities, and competition in the

best American tradition.”¹³ Finally, within the neighborhoods, builders made all of the streets curved. Avoiding straight lines not only

prevented the homogenous look of rows of houses, but also inhibited speeding where both children and adults were at play. Levitt carried out this system from blueprint to completion, with a total of 17,311 homes divided into 4 master blocks by the close of 1957.¹⁴ Figure 1 is an aerial view of the suburb, where all of these features are visible.

Amenities were part of Levittown’s plan too, since Levitt recognized the importance of communal places to meet, play, and pray. Places of worship were integral elements of Levitt’s conception of the American tradition (and integral elements of anti-communism), so in addition to donating land to schools,



Figure 1: “Aerial View of Levittown,” Photograph by George D. McDowell, 1952, George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photographs, Digital Collections SCRC 170. (Courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA.)

¹² “Planning, Building, and Selling Levittown,” The State Museum of Pennsylvania.

¹³ William Levitt, “An Open letter to Our Neighbors in Lower Bucks County,” *Bristol Daily Courier*, May 28, 1953.

¹⁴ Suzanne Lasher Dayanim, “Levittowns (Pennsylvania and New Jersey),” *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, February 25, 2022, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/levittowns>.

Levitt provided property for churches. Many of the sites for the churches were centrally located and along Levittown Parkway, which were deliberate placements by Levitt that closely mirrored the idea of faith at the center of a good American life. He explained that the churches would be “in the body of the residential sections where they will contribute so greatly to the spiritual and social life of the community.”¹⁵ Thus, with the church sites in particular, Levitt felt he was providing his future residents a crucial aspect of a healthy American community: the space for individual and shared faith.

Levitt & Sons constructed plenty of secular places for Levittowners to gather as well. Bill Levitt was an avid baseball fan and insisted that Levittown boast multiple Little League baseball fields, along with one regulation major league field. In addition, for residents to cool off in the summer, Levitt planned for his suburb to have Olympic-size swimming pools, five of which were open by 1959.¹⁶ Builders also accounted for residents' needs for shopping and created a 60-store shopping center on Levittown Parkway. As with the churches, Levitt wanted the commercial hub to be centralized and accessible, and he felt that one large Shop-A-Rama would prevent smaller commercial strips from splitting up the suburb.¹⁷ And to top off his commitment to community, Levitt built the Community Center equipped with meeting rooms, two auditoriums, an outdoor amphitheater, and air conditioning.¹⁸

As told by his inclusion of numerous amenities, the founder wanted Levittowners to adopt a shared identity cultivated by community involvement. He encouraged residents to engage

¹⁵ Levitt, “An Open letter to Our Neighbors,” May 28, 1953.

¹⁶ “Levittown Trivia: 12 Things You Might Not Know,” *PhillyBurbs, Bucks County Courier Times*, June 24, 2012, <https://www.phillyburbs.com/story/opinion/columns/2012/06/24/levittown-trivia>.

¹⁷ Minor, Curtis. “Picture Window Paradise - Welcome to Levittown,” *Pennsylvania Heritage Magazine*, March 30, 2020, <http://paheritage.wpengine.com/article/picture-window-paradise-welcome-levittown/>.

¹⁸ Levitt, “An Open letter to Our Neighbors,” May 28, 1953.

with their community in hopes that they would enjoy their suburb as much as they enjoyed their new homes. To ensure this outcome, Levitt used his notion of traditional Americanism to inform his planned community at every level. These plans succeeded in laying the foundation for a wealth of clubs and organizations in which Levittown women thrived.

The Move: Who, From Where, and Why?

The prevailing image of Levittown, PA is one of homogeneity. However, the suburb's first residents had a wide array of geographic, occupational, and religious backgrounds. In an interview for a 1953 article titled "The Big Move," a new Levittown resident, Fran, exclaimed, "the nicest thing about Levittown is that the people come from all parts of the country and are in all lines of work."¹⁹ All parts of the country is an exaggeration, but Levittown's opening had some regional variety. Home down payment records indicate that there were buyers from 12 states, mostly from the mid-Atlantic region. Pennsylvania and New Jersey supplied the bulk of Levittown's first residents, with 40 percent of buyers from Philadelphia, 27 percent from other Pennsylvanian towns like the coal regions in the northeast or small steel communities in the west, and 28 percent from New Jersey.²⁰ Such numbers convey that Levittown was not a national attraction like Fran might have us think, but her comment captures the sentiment that everyone *seemed* different, even if they were from the same areas.

However, Fran's remark about Levittown occupations was more accurate. William Levitt asserted that "those buying Levittown homes come from all walks of life, ranging from skilled and semi-skilled mechanics to professional men and white-collar workers."²¹ While Levitt had an incentive to

¹⁹ "The Big Move" by Betty Hannah Hoffman, March 1953, Development of Levittown Box 3 Folder 20, Levittown Community Collection.

²⁰ "3,500 Buyers from 12 States Buy Homes," *Bristol Daily Courier*, February 27, 1952.

²¹ "3,500 Buyers from 12 States Buy Homes," February 27, 1952.

inflate the inclusivity of his community, his varied building plans intended to capture both working- and middle-class families. The cheapest model, the Rancher, was \$8,990, while the most expensive model, the Country Clubber, was double that.²² This range bolsters popular claims like Fran's and others that "young doctors and young accountants bought homes on the same block as young steelworkers and young milkmen."²³

Levittowners practiced different religions too, albeit most of them adhered to some version of Christianity. A 1954 directory listing churches and religious groups identified twelve distinct denominations: Catholic, First Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Jehovah's Witness, Judaism, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Faith Reformed, Church of Christ, and Pilgrim Chapel.²⁴ This data is from two years after Levittown, PA opened its doors, but people likely held these belief systems prior to and at the time of their moves. Even within some of these categories there were variations, as the larger sects had multiple churches that Levittowners could choose to attend.

An additional view of the families in Levittown comes from a section of the *Bristol Daily Courier* titled "News From Levittown." In October of 1952, *The Courier* conducted interviews of neighbors and compiled rough estimates for statistics describing the individuals and families of Levittown.²⁵ For Levittown men, 85 percent were WWII veterans, 70 percent had married after the war, and 60 percent married women they had met after the war. The average number of children in Levittown families was 1.9, and 90 percent of families had automobiles and 80 percent of the households had

²² *Levittown, PA: Building the Suburban Dream*, The State Museum of Pennsylvania, accessed April 30, 2022, <http://statemuseumpa.org/levittown/one/a.html>.

²³ *Inquire Mag: The Levittown Generation turns 30*, Levittown Celebrations, Anniversaries, and Special Events Box 3 Folder 3, 1982, Levittown Community Collection.

²⁴ Levittown directory of clubs and organizations provided by Levittown Civic Association, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 folder 13, March 1954, Levittown Community Collection.

²⁵ "News From Levittown," *Bristol Daily Courier*, October 24, 1952.

television sets.²⁶ Such numbers fit perfectly within the postwar narrative of the baby boom and economic prosperity, and the data confirms that Levitt succeeded in reaching his target audience of young families headed by veterans. However, the above information fails to mention a defining feature of Levittown residents: they were all white.

Criticisms of racial homogeneity in Levittown hit the mark. A random sample of 50 last names of residents from 1952-1954 reveals all Western European backgrounds, namely German, Scottish, and Anglo-Saxon.²⁷ Jewish names were prevalent too, often Americanized versions of German. These details suggest that those moving to Levittown were not recent immigrants, nor were they, perhaps minus the Jewish Levittowners, members of ethnic communities in the cities many of them came from. Presumably, they all simply identified as Americans and, over time, suburbanites. However, one group of Americans could not live in Levittown. A newspaper article in 1952 published that, when asked about African Americans' acceptance in Levittown, "Levitt said he wasn't going to make any 'noble experiments' but added that, if necessary, he would build a separate community for Negroes."²⁸

Though against federal law, Levitt wanted his planned community to be whites-only and thus directly aided in the creation of an exclusionary white suburban identity. The suburb's original leases included the racial covenant that the premises could not be occupied "BY ANY MEMBERS OTHER THAN THE CAUCASIAN RACE," and Levitt continued to enforce this rule even after removing the exclusionary verbiage.²⁹ A number of residents shared the

²⁶ "News From Levittown, October 24, 1952.

²⁷ *Levittown Community Collection*; "Discover the Meaning and History Behind Your Last Name," Ancestry, <https://www.ancestry.com/learn/facts>.

²⁸ Charles R. Allen, "Levittown in Bucks County," Folder 20: Development of Levittown, May 31, 1952.

²⁹ David Kushner, *Levittown: Two Families, One Tycoon, and the Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb* (New York: Walker & Company, 2009), 43.

desire for racial homogeneity, with some expressing that the whites-only policy was a factor in choosing Levittown.³⁰ The suburb stayed this way until 1957, making “whiteness” part of the Levittowner identity. Regardless of each resident's stance on the rampant racial discrimination and injustice in postwar America, their investment in a whites-only neighborhood represented an investment in white supremacy and white identity. In short, prejudice underlaid the community that Levittown women built, served, and loved.³¹

This data gives us a sense of Levittowners' identities before moving into their new homes. Similarities and differences aside, buying a house and moving to a new place was a momentous decision for all the young men and women signing the Levitt & Sons contracts. If leaving loved ones was not daunting enough, warnings from friends and family that the Levittown homes would blow down in the first storm or not last more than ten years made the choice all the more intimidating.³² Despite the concerns, the couples jointly chose to adopt the new identity of suburbanites, which they would forge and cultivate alongside their neighbors from the first moments they moved in. What drove their agency? As many of the first residents reflected, they called it the American Dream.

The biggest part of this dream was homeownership, made possible through the GI Bill. With federal assistance, new veterans and aspiring Levittowners were overjoyed to take advantage of the opportunity. When Fran finally moved into a home of her own, she beamed, “life seems beginning for us at

³⁰ Dan A. Dodson, “Crisis in Levittown PA (1957): Segregation and Racial Conflict in Suburbicon,” Dynamite Films Inc., 20:48.

³¹ George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006) explains the repercussions of this housing prejudice and white identity-making. While not thoroughly covered in this article, his arguments are pertinent and important to consider.

³² Robert F. Bresch interviewed by Nick S, 5th Grader from Walter Miller Elem interview reports “Where were you in ‘52?,” MSC 803 Audio Visual and Oral Histories, Box 1 of 12, 2001, Levittown Community Collection.

last.”³³ Another couple, Bill and Pat, recalled the thrilling process of buying a house: “we were so excited. We had only been married a short time and we were already buying our first home. We went on the appointed evening and waited all night for our name to be called so that we could pick out a house on the map.”³⁴ Numerous families made similar exclamations, all of which affirmed that owning a private home was a true accomplishment and a step in the direction of a fulfilled life. Furthermore, accounting for Levittown’s large proportion of former city-dwellers, part of the pride that young families had in their homes was the transition away from an apartment or condominium.

Another significant cause for excitement, especially following the chaos of war, was the prospect of a safe and pleasant neighborhood to raise children in. A commemorative article on Levittown’s 30-year anniversary proclaimed, “living in Levittown meant having better schools, parks, no pollution, safer streets, and privacy.”³⁵ With all of the incoming residents being young parents or newlyweds, each Levittown home buyer wanted space for the family, excellent education for the children, and a like-minded, genial community to make friends in. Husbands and wives and moms and dads had visions for the lives they wanted, and through Levittown, they acted on them. Fred Bernstein, who moved into Peachtree Lane in November 1952, captured the vision in one sentence: “this was the American Dream come true!”³⁶

³³ Betty Hannah Hoffman, “The Big Move,” Folder 20: Development of Levittown, March 1953, Levittown Community Collection.

³⁴ Pat and Bill Amon, “I remember...” Houses, MSC 803 Audio Visual and Oral Histories, Box 1 of 12: Levittown Community Collection.

³⁵ David J Yeager, “Working Class: Looking for Elan in Levittown” in *Landscape Architecture*, Folder 20: Development of Levittown, January 1982, Levittown Community Collection.

³⁶ Fred Bernstein, “I remember...” Houses, MSC 803 Box 1 of 12 Audio Visual and Oral histories, Levittown Community Collection.

*From Strangers to Neighbors to Friends:
Forming Community*

Once couples and families made the momentous decision to move, it was time to form their new lives. Levittown was different from a normal move, though, because it was an entirely new place. While established communities have stable social structures that incoming families can step right into, Levittowners would have to build their society from the ground up. In one of the thirtieth-anniversary projects on Levittown, a journalist observed, “the newness was the most pervasive aspect of early life in Levittown” because “all the institutions one usually associates with a community had to be created anew.”³⁷

Without knowing anyone, where would Levittowners start? The task of meeting people, making friends, and coordinating groups was daunting, but Levittowners proved up for the task. As another thirtieth-anniversary project described, “people went door to door, introducing themselves, announcing the ages of their children, and organizing everything from bird-watching societies to basketball leagues.”³⁸ A report on Levittown made five years after its opening confirmed this trend, affirming that “every time Levittowners met one another on the street, an organization was formed.”³⁹ After purchasing the keys to their new home, then, the next decision for Levittown families was to walk next door.

With these convivial attitudes, Levittowners started organizations. One of the firsts was the Levittown Civic Association, a non-partisan and non-profit organization to provide Levittown with relevant community and political information. One example of its services included sending a

³⁷ David Diamond, “The Children of Levitt,” *Levittown Celebrations, Anniversaries, and Special Events* Box 3 Folder 3, December 12, 1982, Levittown Community Collection.

³⁸ *Inquire Mag: The Levittown Generation turns 30*, 1982, Levittown Community Collection.

³⁹ “5 Years Later Report on Levittown,” in *Bucks County Traveler*, Folder 20: Development of Levittown, 1957, Levittown Community Collection.

printed directory of all the clubs serving Levittown to each home. In its introduction, it expressed that “we have in Levittown an opportunity to really face our community problems with optimism and resourcefulness.”⁴⁰ This idea of Levittown as a unique place especially apt for being a community started with Levitt & Son’s advertising, and groups and organizations happily co-opted it as a selling point for community engagement. The other attractive aspect of joining an organization was the prospect of making a difference. Levittown families had moved their entire lives to the suburbs, so becoming a part of something that sought to maintain and improve their new lives ensured that their decision was worthwhile.

The directory further encouraged residents to “make use of [this pamphlet] by joining at least one of any of the fine groups we have listed.”⁴¹ Made just two years after Levittown opened its doors, the list recorded over 70 organizations for its residents. With remarkable speed, they had established clubs ranging from sports to music to gardening to politics, and anyone with a vision for a new group could start one. Women were central to these developments, making Levittown a prime case study for historian Joanne Meyerowitz’s claim that “white, middle-class, married, suburban women were neither wholly domestic nor quiescent.”⁴²

In line with Meyerowitz’s observation, Levittown women challenged the stereotype of the 1950s homemaker by taking initiative in their new environment and creating, maintaining, and leading community organizations.⁴³ While their efforts

⁴⁰ Levittown directory of clubs and organizations provided by Levittown Civic Association, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, March 1954, Levittown Community Collection.

⁴¹ Levittown directory of clubs and organizations, Levittown Community Collection.

⁴² Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*, 2.

⁴³ While some scholars may classify women’s community work as a type of extended kinship labor, even this categorization expands the sphere typically afforded to 1950s suburban women, the home. I would argue, though, that the identities Levittown women assumed in community work directly pushed against the ideal because they exhibit

were unpaid, this article will prove that such work brought forth change and fostered nondomestic identities which connected women to their community and to larger folds of society. Levittown's plethora of clubs and organizations were a primary channel through which women exercised their ambitions and forged new selfhoods, and the next subsection will focus on them.

Community for Women: Making Levittown Their Own

Levittown clubs and organizations formed as quickly as families moved in, and often women were at the center of it all. The first groups women met with (and later joined) were established to welcome new families to Levittown. Women in the Welcome Wagon, the Welcoming Committee of the Levittown Civic Association, and the Goodwill Hospitality Service offered friendly smiles, advice, resource lists, and gift baskets to incoming families to help them adjust to suburban life.⁴⁴ Around this same time, the *Levittown Times* asked new residents what organizations they would like to see. Women responded with a myriad of requests, and a few examples were a Young Republican Club, a club that sponsors picnics and dances, a knitting club, and groups for young married couples and cooking skills.⁴⁵ As told by these answers, Levittown women were keen on community involvement.

Historians Naomi Abrahams, Elizabeth McCrae, and Michelle Nickerson have argued that motherhood strongly influenced postwar women's activities, and in Levittown a number of the organizations women chose focused on their children.⁴⁶ Women advocated for Levittown schools and education and formed the parent-teacher associations and

strength, initiative, and leadership instead of submissiveness and deference.

⁴⁴ Chad M. Kimmel, "Levittown, Pennsylvania: A Sociological History," (PhD diss., Western Michigan University, 2004), 122.

⁴⁵ Kimmel, "A Sociological History," 139.

⁴⁶ Abrahams, "Negotiating Power, Identity, Family, and Community," 781; McCrae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance*; Nickerson, *Women of Conservatism*.

groups like the Mothers of Birch Valley and the Magnolia Hills Schools Site Committee.⁴⁷ Organizations like these helped plan the building of schools and gain educational resources for the students. Women often led their children's clubs, too, as conveyed by one mother, Helen S. Scott. She recalled, "the Girl Scouts' first organization meeting was held in my home. I held my infant daughter in my arms while I conducted the meeting."⁴⁸ Motherhood also led Levittown women to create coffee klatches where moms would drink coffee, talk about their children, and share parenting techniques and childcare advice.⁴⁹ For suburban women whose primary duty was child care, it makes sense that they would take up activities that they felt would make them better mothers or make their children's lives better. Even when Levittown women got involved for their kids, domesticity colored rather than confined their actions.

Women also chose to enter organizations that related to their husbands, making Ladies Auxiliaries popular in Levittown, too. The kinds of ladies or women's auxiliaries varied too much to give an accurate historical overview, but the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines them as organizations of women that are subsidiary usually to a men's fraternal or social organizations.⁵⁰ As a postwar suburb, many of Levittown's auxiliaries were veteran-related. There were also the Lower Bucks County Hospital Women's Auxiliary, church auxiliaries, and even the Bristol Yacht Club auxiliary.⁵¹ The activities of such groups depended on the type of auxiliary, but almost all of them held service and social events for Levittown women to take part in. Whether women chose these groups for proximity to spouses, friendship with women in similar

⁴⁷ Kimmel, "A Sociological History," 147.

⁴⁸ Helen Scott, "I remember..." Houses, MSC 803 Box 1 of 12 Audio Visual and Oral histories, Levittown Community Collection.

⁴⁹ Kimmel, "A Sociological History," 168.

⁵⁰ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "Ladies Auxiliary," accessed April 4, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Ladies%20Auxiliary>.

⁵¹ "Mrs. Hannah E. Wilson," *Levittown Times*, September 24, 1954.

positions, or genuine interest in the causes, auxiliaries attracted a good number of Levittown residents.

Women's faiths brought them into the community as well. As mentioned earlier, the first Levittowners brought a variety of religions with them, and with each came activities and groups for women. For instance, St. Michael's was the first Catholic Church in Levittown (founded in January 1953), and women were essential to sustaining the congregation. They held devotionals, organized and ran holiday drives, and planned cake stands for the Annual Fair. In addition, women created the Stork Club, a committee for Christian home and family, and the Block Rosary Society that performed a rosary and prayer for happiness and world peace each week.⁵²

For women of any faith, joining a religious club ensured that their fellow club members held similar values and led similar lifestyles. The groups worked toward something each woman genuinely believed in, which gave such organizations a powerful allure. Furthermore, assuming that women were members of the churches or synagogues that sponsored their group, group women gave back to an organization that directly served them and their families. Practically speaking, then, women often chose to spend time where it was most relevant to their lives.

Women's clubs were another opportunity to meet and befriend neighbors. In the United States, women first formed these clubs in the Progressive Era to discuss literature and self-improvement.⁵³ The clubs soon became social spaces where women could express their ideas as equals and transform those ideas into action through political activism. Clubs became less popular in the twentieth century as women gained other venues for their organizational skills, but many still existed to meet community needs. They did charity work during the Great

⁵² "The Suburban Way," *Levittown, PA: Building the Suburban Dream*, The State Museum of Pennsylvania, accessed April 30, 2022, <http://statemuseumpa.org/levittown/one/a.html>.

⁵³ "Introduction to Clubwomen," *Reforming Their World: Women in the Progressive Era*, WebArchive.org, accessed April 16, 2021, www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/progressiveera/introclubwomen.html.

Depression, war relief during the World Wars, and suburban community building during the 1950s.⁵⁴ The last was the case for Levittown, where women organized the women's clubs based on neighborhoods and could meet and share ideas with neighbors on how to improve their suburb. By 1954, there were 15 such groups, all with set monthly meetings.⁵⁵

Many women chose to join groups for the sake of leisure and enjoyment, and hobby clubs were perfect for having fun with others with shared interests. In an oral interview, Jacqueline Martino and her husband Matt recalled participating in the square dancing club in Levittown.⁵⁶ Another woman wrote that she was in the garden club and recalled the Levittown camera club, too.⁵⁷ Other examples of hobbies that connected women in clubs were the Women's Auxiliary of the Levittown String Band, the Bridge Club, the Windsor Kennel Club (for dog lovers), and more.⁵⁸ With these organizations in particular, women had the chance to cultivate their unique talents, explore their interests, and simply leave the duties of home and family behind for a bit.

One of the most popular groups for women in Levittown was the Federated Women's Club of Levittown (FWCL), a local branch of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. This national organization has its origins 1868, when an all-male press club denied journalist Jane Croly entry into a dinner discussion, which prompted her to found her own club, called Sorosis. In 1889, Croly brought together women's clubs from around the country to create a federation, which was

⁵⁴ "Women's Clubs: Women and Volunteer Power, 1868-1926 and Beyond," National Women's History Museum, March 17, 2014, <https://www.womenshistory.org/articles/womens-clubs>.

⁵⁵ Directory of Clubs and Organizations provided by Levittown Civic Association, March 1954, Levittown Community Collection.

⁵⁶ Jacqueline and Matt Martino, MSC 803 Box 1 of 12 Audio Visual and Oral histories, Levittown Community Collection.

⁵⁷ "I remember..." Houses, MSC 803 Box 1 of 12 Audio Visual and Oral histories, Levittown Community Collection.

⁵⁸ Directory by Levittown Civic Association, March 1954, Levittown Community Collection.

accomplished in 1890.⁵⁹ Thus, the General Federation began as a space for women to do what men believed they should not do, like congregating to discuss important matters of culture, politics, and the like. Despite these origins in patriarchal resistance, clubs in the Progressive Era often labeled their efforts as extensions of domesticity, and historians often carry this classification over to postwar clubs. For example, scholar Paige Meltzer links the General Federation's postwar activities to members' maternalism, which both obligated and equipped women to nurture American values in the citizenry.⁶⁰ However, the General Federation pulling on maternalism to justify its entry into the public and political realm does not mean that what women *did* in those realms was a larger-scale version of homemaking. Like any politician might strive to do, clubwomen influenced voting, policy, and education and directly shaped the American perception of the postwar world.

In the case of Levittown, FWCL members sought to build a community for people to thrive in. As this article's introduction conveyed, women began establishing the organization right as they moved into their new homes. By April 1953, members applied to be incorporated into the Pennsylvania Federation of Women's Clubs, which approved them at the start of 1954 and created the Federated Women's Club of Levittown.⁶¹ The stated purpose of the club, which its leadership published every year in the yearbook, was "to develop the intellectual, civic, and social interests of its members; and to advance the welfare of the community."⁶²

⁵⁹ "Impact and Accomplishments: Our Story," General Federation of Women's Clubs, accessed April 21, 2024, <https://www.gfwc.org/what-we-do/impact-accomplishments/>.

⁶⁰ Paige Meltzer, "'The Pulse and Conscience of America': The General Federation and Women's Citizenship, 1945-1960," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 30, no. 3 (2009): 52-54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40388747>.

⁶¹ Correspondences from April 9, 1953 and February 23, 1954, Clubs and Organizations 1, Folder 3 of 6, Levittown Community Collection.

⁶² Yearbook of the Federated Women's Club of Levittown, Pennsylvania 1954-55, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

This two-fold mission statement captures the club's appeal, which would allow women to serve their community, improve themselves, meet new people, and spend time with friends all in one place. At least 74 women participated by 1955, and as trailblazers of Levittown and American suburbia, FWCL members had a unique opportunity to mold both and define what it meant to be a Levittowner and American suburbanite.⁶³

Overall, then, the first women in Levittown worked hard to create a wide array of groups that would cater to a variety of interests and passions and, in turn, form women's identities. Not all of them have been listed or explored, but a common thread connects each club: women taking the initiative to participate in their new communities. That Levittown was new to everyone made for an acute desire to connect with one another, and its newness required special work to get the ball rolling. Without hesitation, Levittowners created structures that would not only sustain the community but also facilitate a sense of togetherness.

As the title of this section ("I felt like a pioneer!") suggests, Levittowners associated themselves with the frontiersman of Manifest Destiny and romanticized the exodus to the suburbs as a fresh start filled with new opportunity, prosperity, and happiness.⁶⁴ In short, this move was the American Dream. Whether or not this vision came true, the novelty of Levittown and the enthusiasm of the families moving there inspired women to take part in shaping what it meant to be an American suburbanite and what it meant to be a woman. As made clear by now, that did not just mean cleaning floors and cooking

⁶³Yearbook of the Federated Women's Club of Levittown, Pennsylvania 1954-55, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

⁶⁴ While white suburbanites were not displacing indigenous groups, their language invokes settler colonialism and places them alongside the European colonizers and American settlers who moved onto lands occupied by peoples they deemed less evolved or uncivilized. This tie is not the angle of my article, but the association with the white supremacist project is important to note. Refer to Cheryl I. Harris's "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1983) for further reading.

dinner; for Levittown women, womanhood also included leadership, service, and friendship. It meant building community.

“Put into Action Our Better Impulses”: Women’s Roles in Organizations, 1954-1956⁶⁵

Levittown’s winding streets were teeming with anticipation and preparation in 1954. The suburb had been bustling all summer long, but there was a big hoorah planned for the end of the season. Some of the most influential clubs and organizations were coming together to put on a weekend-long, suburb-wide event called the Levittown-A-Ree. A spokesperson for the gathering explained how the Levittown-A-Ree sought to “show new residents as well as the old the current Levittown life.”⁶⁶ From Friday to Sunday, Levittown organizations put on different activities for the community to enjoy: art and photography exhibits, musical performances, a flower show, a play performance, a pet parade, and more. With participation from groups like the Levittown Art Association, Color Camera Club, String Band, and Garden Club, the Levittown-A-Ree was a true cross-sectional event to showcase, unify, and bring family fun to the suburb just at the time the Levittown Civic Association asserted that “there are probably more organizations active in Levittown than in any other community of similar size in the country.”⁶⁷

The commotion surrounding the Levittown-A-Ree is just one example of what Levittown clubs and groups got up to. Women’s organizations and the events they put on in service, social life, and self-improvement will direct this section and ultimately show that Levittown women exercised skills and cultivated selves that challenge the stereotype of a 1950s

⁶⁵ Yearbook of the Federated Women’s Club of Levittown, Pennsylvania 1954-55, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

⁶⁶ “Festive Country Fair to Open 5th Annual Levittown-A-Ree,” *Levittown Times*, August 21, 1954.

⁶⁷ Directory of organizations by Levittown Civic Association, Box 3 Folder 2 of 6, 1955-1956, Levittown Community Collection.

homemaker. This section expands on the work of Susan Ware, who describes women's self-fulfillment through organization involvement via the League of Women Voters.⁶⁸ Like the women Ware studies, Levittown women were dedicated members of their organizations and worked hard to keep their groups running smoothly, and they participated so readily and consistently because the organizations carried out what women considered to be important functions in Levittown and in the Cold War era United States at large. But what did women do as members, and what were these functions? The following subsections will explore the different activities of these women's groups and explain the various hats women wore to make their clubs and their projects successful.

Service: Levittown Women Giving Back

Service was a major feature of many Levittown groups that women chose to participate in, and it often gave women direct influence over their community. For Levittown's religious groups, community service was the cornerstone of women's activities. Seemingly every denomination in Levittown sought out women to participate in church affairs, and the women readily stepped up. At the Emilie Methodist Church of Levittown, for example, women could volunteer for the Women's Society of Christian Service and fundraise for women, children, and families in need.⁶⁹ Levittown's Catholic women performed similar activities, as told by one advertisement for a St. Ignatius Sodality Bake Sale to benefit the school building fund.⁷⁰ Numerous newspaper clippings prove that fundraising was indeed a popular way for church women to serve, but still others describe different forms of

⁶⁸ Susan Ware, "American Women in the 1950s: Nonpartisan Politics and Women's Politicization," *Women, Politics and Change*, eds. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 290, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610445344.19>.

⁶⁹ Emilie Methodist Church of Levittown Consecration Pamphlet 1955, Churches Box 3 Folder 5, Levittown Community Collection.

⁷⁰ "St. Ignatius Sodality Bake Sale Set Saturday," *Bristol Daily Courier*, October 17, 1956.

volunteer service, too. Women of St. Michael's Church organized and carried out Holiday Drives every year, and a 1956 article in the *Levittown Times* reported that 22 members of the Sewing Circle of the Women's Society of Christian Service sewed girls' pajamas, slips, nightgowns, and lap robes for the Methodist Deaconess Home in Philadelphia.⁷¹

While the activities of baking and sewing match those of the archetypal housewife, working on church projects required a host of nondomestic skills and gave women significant say in the community. For starters, successful fundraising requires large-scale financial budgeting and number crunching. Women performed cost-benefit analyses before, during, and after their projects, along with strategizing marketing techniques, allocating supplies, and delegating tasks. Women were not restricted to the tasks of volunteer work either and could take paid positions on the church staff or become stewards, which were positions elected by the congregation. Women thus worked alongside leading church men and undertook the politics of running organized religion. In these ways, women's religious identities were not only means of being good mothers, as often thought. Instead, leadership in churches allowed women to have a direct hand in how the community practiced its ideologies.

Volunteer work of women's auxiliaries also required competence in matters of money and event coordination, and these women's service to veterans tied them closely to how the community showed its Americanism. For example, members of the Ladies Auxiliary of Jesse W. Soby Post 148, American Legion, hosted frequent penny sales (a form of fundraising) to benefit hospitalized veterans at Christmastime.⁷² In addition, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Levittown Memorial Post 960 sponsored bake sales where proceeds went toward the Christmas fund for gifts for needy families of Levittown, and the Ladies Auxiliary of the Falls Township American Legion

⁷¹ St. Michael's Church 1953-1963, Churches Box 3 Folder 5; "Circle Sews Nightwear for Home," *Levittown Times*, August 14 1956.

⁷² "Women Discuss Dinners," *Bristol Daily Courier*, October 17, 1956.

Unit No. 83 sent donations to veterans hospitals and their “adopted war orphan.”⁷³ Like in church groups, auxiliary women did a great deal of planning, financing, and collaborating to execute these service projects. For these women, though, their initiatives represented a deep appreciation for America’s liberties and ways of life. They therefore contributed to a growing American identity as the world’s model for freedom, democracy, and prosperity, which was vital to the Cold War space.

Levittown’s women’s clubs performed similar activities but opted to stay within their immediate community, where they cultivated a local identity by directly interacting with those they helped. They held bake sales and other fundraisers, like pay-for-play game nights and white elephant sales, to support the Levittown resources that they valued most. In August 1954, the Thornridgers Women’s Club donated \$225 to the Levittown Fire Company to cover the cost of new equipment. A newspaper article read, “the Thornridgers have adopted the fire company as their project for the year and have held various affairs to raise funds.”⁷⁴ Similarly, in April 1956, the president of Fairless Hills Women’s Club presented a \$300 check to the supervisor of obstetrics at Lower Bucks County Hospital to purchase an incubator.⁷⁵ As told by these women’s clubs, women’s philanthropic efforts through organizations were oftentimes not raising money for far-off humanitarian groups. Instead, Levittown women were giving back to Levittowners and knew exactly who and what their endeavors were going toward. As a result, women were informed on what services the community needed and how the community received them, and thus became esteemed powers in Levittown. Moreover, their explicit ties to Levittown gave them a distinct opportunity to define what it meant to be a Levittowner.

⁷³ “Several Children Still Available; Funds Needed,” *Bristol Daily Courier*, November 17, 1956; “Auxiliary Meets in Yardley,” *Bristol Daily Courier*, December 6, 1954.

⁷⁴ “Firemen Buy New Equipment,” *Levittown Times*, August 26 1954.

⁷⁵ “Fairless Hills Women Aid Hospital,” *Levittown Times*, April 20, 1956.

The Federated Women's Club of Levittown appealed to women who wanted to join a more expansive, nationally-recognized group that hosted multiple levels and scales of service activities, and by 1956, at least 93 women were members.⁷⁶ Since Levittown was new, virtually all participants of Levittown groups were founders, but the FWCL especially capitalized on its unique position in a new community. The 1954-1955 president expressed, "we all know Levittown is a new and growing community and for this reason we are able to play an increasingly important part. There is much that we can accomplish."⁷⁷ As such, clubwomen hosted several projects every year. From 1953 to 1954, women worked together to raise money for the Bucks County Hospital Completion Fund.⁷⁸ The next year, members kept this goal and added the task of establishing chapels in hospitals. In 1955, they took up the cause of the library, too. In addition, departments had their own projects. For example, the Public Affairs Department chose the Kiddie-Park-It project in 1954, civil defense in 1955, and a donation drive for the Valley Forge Veterans Hospital in 1956.⁷⁹ Between club-wide events and department-level duties, there was always a service project requiring members' thought, time, and effort.

Service was thus a pillar of many of the Levittown groups that women joined, and in a brand-new community, it required acute discernment, critical thinking, and action. Indeed, men were hired and paid to perform these functions through their occupations while women served their communities for free.

⁷⁶Yearbook of the Federated Women's Club of Levittown, Pennsylvania 1955-56, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

⁷⁷Yearbook of the Federated Women's Club of Levittown, Pennsylvania 1954-55, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

⁷⁸First book of the woman's club (1953-1954), Folder 3 of 6, Levittown Community Collection.

⁷⁹Federated Woman's Club Public Affairs for the year 1954-55, September; Federated Women's Club Public Affairs Department Report of 1955-56, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

However, women embraced the opportunities presented by their clubs to actively uplift the community and to ensure and enhance the well-being of their neighbors near and far. In a similar vein to Alison Clarke's analysis that selling Tupperware afforded women new space for autonomy and accomplishment, Levittown's service activities demonstrate greater action by 1950s women than popular imagination likes to allow.⁸⁰ They applied and cultivated a number of nondomestic skills through their service, such as financial literacy, teamwork, goal-setting, thorough planning, and resilience, and with them adopted and shaped the identities of Levittowner, suburbanite, and American.

Social: Fun in Levittown's Organizations

Women also prioritized social gatherings that fostered fun and a sense of community, even if it was at the expense of others. Rita C. Sappenfield moved to Levittown in 1954 and described how "all the Levittown sections had social events in which everyone participated."⁸¹ These gatherings allowed neighbors to become close friends, and the events promoted a sense of community that Levittowners grew protective over. Rita recalled an occurrence at a picnic one year where a drunken husband bragged about stealing wooden slats from each house to build a bigger patio. She continued, "everyone was furious that a 'crook' lived among us. That family was shunned; within the year they sold their home and moved on."⁸² This story highlights the power of social events to unify strangers and make their community *feel* like a community, but it also exposes how identity-building is often based on exclusion. For the young families who behaved in Levittown's socially-acceptable way, they could enjoy group amusement in

⁸⁰ Alison Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastics in 1950s America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

⁸¹ October 5th 2002 letter from Rita Cummins Sappenfield, MSC 803 Box 1 of 12 Audio Visual and Oral histories, Levittown Community Collection.

⁸² Letter from Rita Cummins Sappenfield, MSC 803 Box 1 of 12, Levittown Community Collection.

informal gatherings like Rita described. The next section describes the virulence of Levittown's racial exclusion, but this subsection will focus on what social events looked like in official clubs.

Even women's auxiliaries, whose primary purpose was to serve alongside men's groups, organized social festivities that brought women away from homemaking and toward American fun. The Auxiliary of Levittown Fire Co. No. 1 sponsored Card-Party Game Nights, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary organized Valentine's parties.⁸³ Moreover, the Bristol Auxiliary hosted an annual dance called the Spring Frolic, the Newport Firemen's Auxiliary staged swimming parties and outdoor barbecues, and the Soby Auxiliary sponsored Christmas bazaar luncheons where women enjoyed lunch and perused various bazaar tables together.⁸⁴ From these examples, it is clear that auxiliary women sought fun and planned social activities when they were not serving their surrounding community. They did both successfully through time management, teamwork, and budgeting, and thus, like with service events, social events brought women outside of their homes and promoted skills that went beyond those of a "typical housewife." Furthermore, socializing under the banners of auxiliaries to American servicemen denoted a celebration of American values that served as encouragement away from communism and toward the fun-loving American way of life.

Women's clubs, based on Levittown neighborhoods, used physical proximity to their advantage and planned social events that bonded local women. Some of the activities sponsored by clubs included masquerade Halloween parties, game nights, theater parties, and dances. More unique events took place too,

⁸³ "Auxiliary to Hold Party," *Levittown Times*, March 16th, 1955; "VFW Auxiliary Meets Tonight," *Bristol Daily Courier*, February 10 1955.

⁸⁴ "Spring Frolic in Bristol," *Bristol Daily Courier*, April 10, 1956; "Newport Firemen's Auxiliary Stages Swimming Party; Outdoor Barbecue," *Levittown Times*, August 14 1956; "Women Discuss Dinners," *Bristol Daily Courier* October 17 1956.

as the Appletree Women's Club hosted a "Mad Hatter Social" where members modeled different hats and could receive prizes for "funniest," "most original," or "prettiest" hats.⁸⁵ Not all of these affairs were exclusive to each neighborhood, either, as women were often encouraged to invite other friends. For instance, the Magnolia Hills Women's Club had a meeting with an ice cream demonstration and film presentation, and the executive board urged members to attend and bring a friend.⁸⁶ Because of their smaller reach and size, women's clubs were perhaps the most intimate and accessible option for Levittown women seeking to engage with other women. For many of them, becoming friends with their next-door neighbors was an essential step for Levittown to feel like home. Women's clubs' social activities helped to add the comfort and fellow feeling that was so important to their identities in the brand-new suburb.

Those who wanted to socialize with people with similar interests could develop their passions through co-ed hobby clubs. One of the many options was the Levittown Cinema Club, where women helped choose films for viewing and attended sessions to watch them. At the first meeting, for instance, members put on *The Blue Angel*.⁸⁷ For the more adventurous, Levittown had a ski club that of course discussed skiing but also planned parties for members to attend.⁸⁸ The Levittown Players was a group for men and women interested in acting, and it held productions of plays such as "Separate

⁸⁵ "Clubwomen Enjoy Mad Hatter Social," *Levittown Times*, June 9, 1956.

⁸⁶ "Magnolia Hills Club To Meet," *Bristol Daily Courier*, February 10 1955.

⁸⁷ "Levittown Club Slates Meeting," *Levittown Times*, September 16, 1954. Jennifer Williams's "Gazes in Conflict: Lola, Spectatorship, and Cabaret in *The Blue Angel*," *Women in German Yearbook* 26 no. 1 (2010) analyzes the overt sexual nature of this film and its cultural implications on sexuality, making the movie an interesting choice for Levittown's film club. Members may have chosen it for its potential for lively discussion.

⁸⁸ "Ski Club to Meet on Party Plans," *Levittown Times*, September 11, 1956.

Rooms” and “The Hitchhiker.”⁸⁹ The list of hobby clubs goes on, but the trend is clear: women in such clubs enjoyed exploring their passions with other Levittowners and thus contributed their time, effort, and organizational skills to promote, participate in, and run the groups. In the hobby clubs in particular women got the chance to prioritize their more unique identities, such as movie connoisseur, skier, or actress.

Lastly, the Federated Women's Club of Levittown encouraged social amusements for members as avenues for women's fun and friendship. For the FWCL, many of the service events doubled as social events. The Annual Balls, for example, were always much-anticipated “festive” affairs that had food, drink, dancing, and prizes (the Second Annual Ball awarded a muskrat fur cape and the Fourth Annual Ball gave out an all-inclusive weekend getaway to a mountain resort).⁹⁰ In April 1956, women of the fine arts and community affairs departments of the FWCL hosted a Luncheon Fashion Show where Levittown women could eat, chit-chat, and observe the latest fashions on a local runway.⁹¹ For each of these events, and many more headed by the FWCL, the goal was to put the duties of home on the backburner and enjoy time with fellow members and other adults in the community.

In all, the prevalence of social events that women participated in reflects the premium women placed on a sense of community. While giving back to the community could be meaningful and fulfilling, having fun in it was just as important an endeavor for Levittown women. Spending leisure time with fellow club members allowed women to embrace their new suburban lives, meet their social needs as individuals, and make the community personal to them. Levittown women's friendships, illustrated here through club social events, confirm

⁸⁹ “L'town Players to Give Scripts,” *Levittown Times*, April 16, 1956; “Suspense Drama Set by Players,” *Levittown Times*, August 27, 1954.

⁹⁰ “Holiday Ball Announced by Federated Club of Levittown,” *Bristol Daily Courier*, November 13, 1954; “Holiday Ball to Take Place Dec. 8th,” *Levittown Times* November 28, 1956.

⁹¹ “Style Show Slated Saturday,” *Bristol Daily Courier*, April 4, 1956.

that suburban women in the 1950s were not only homemakers or service-minded wives and mothers. They valued fun and friends, and they incorporated these values into their identities as white, American, Levittown residents.

*Self-Improvement:
Levittown Women Learning and Leading*

Inherent to all of these activities was women's desire to improve themselves and their lives. Serving and socializing brought several benefits to Levittown women, namely skills like planning, delegating, and financing and the chance to have fun and cultivate identities other than homemaker. All clubs, then, could have been a means of self-improvement. However, this subsection will deal with the ways in which groups had explicit aims at personal empowerment or development. Additionally, it will cover Levittown women's leadership more thoroughly, as director, officer, or chairman positions became valued identities in women's nondomestic lives and gave women stronger footholds from which to mold collective identities like suburbanite.

Through Bible studies or classes in Levittown churches, women could nurture their individual faiths. Hope Lutheran Church offered a mid-week prayer and Bible study on Wednesdays at 8 PM, the Faith Reformed Church held adult discussion groups, and the Church of Christ offered Bible classes for all ages on Sunday mornings and Tuesday evenings.⁹² Some faithful Levittowners also formed Levittown's Christian Science Society that, like a church, offered men and women "lesson-sermons" on topics like reliance on God for safety and abundance. To enable women to participate, the society provided a nursery.⁹³ All of these opportunities encouraged women to have active personal devotions that, according to their ideologies, would improve their lives and spiritual well-being. While church on Sundays

⁹² "Hope Lutheran Church," *Levittown Times*, December 1, 1956; "Lower Bucks Church Directory," *Levittown Times*, February 26, 1955.

⁹³ "Science Service Lesson Sermon," *Levittown Times*, June 9, 1956.

was the norm for most Levittown families, joining a Bible study or attending a Bible class was an individual choice for women. In these groups, women created and secured a space for independent growth and spiritual fulfillment.

Alternatively, ladies' auxiliaries hosted educational events that allowed for intellectual fulfillment and American identity-building. With the Cold War in full swing and WWII only a decade behind them, women's discussions often involved American patriotism. The President of the Ladies Auxiliary of Morell Smith Post 440 American Legion, Ella McIntyre, gave a lecture on Americanism during a meeting in 1956. She "spoke on legislation which should be followed up regarding our American way of life, our freedom and liberties which should be guarded and appreciated and respected, and the significance of 'Veterans Day' to our veterans."⁹⁴ Women of the Soby Post Auxiliary made an effort to learn about countries other than the United States, and in 1956 their country of study was Honduras.⁹⁵ Auxiliaries encouraged more interactive learning, too, as the Ladies Auxiliary of Cornwells Fire Company No. 1 sponsored a bus trip to Lancaster, where women visited the Pennsylvania Farm Museum, the Lititz Pretzel Factory, and the countryside to see the Amish.⁹⁶ Whether through educational talks or field trips, women sought deeper understandings of their state, nation, and world. Levittown auxiliaries thus helped women explore and come to know their place in a much wider, uncertainty-ridden world, even if it was through an America-centric lens.

Hobby clubs were another space for women to learn about anything that interested them. Mrs. Goldberg, for example, participated alongside her husband in the Great Books Club. Together with other members, the couple discussed topics like

⁹⁴ "Americanism Topic at Auxiliary Meeting," *Bristol Daily Courier*, November 13, 1954.

⁹⁵ "Women Discuss Dinners," *Bristol Daily Courier*, October 17, 1956.

⁹⁶ "Cornwells Fire Co. Auxiliary Takes Bus Trip to Lancaster," *Bristol Daily Courier*, October 12, 1956.

the philosophy of John Locke.⁹⁷ In the French Club, women and men met twice monthly to speak French, watch French films, exchange French periodicals and literature, and “maintain and cultivate an interest in the French Language and cultures.”⁹⁸ Through both groups, we see women seeking mental stimulation. They actively read literature, viewed films, and took part in discussions, which are activities that mirror classes in higher education. This participation demonstrates that even as fewer women enrolled in college in this decade, women’s interest in philosophy, government, foreign languages, and other academic topics did not wane.⁹⁹ Levittown women found ways to pursue these subjects and others through clubs, and they therefore nurtured learned identities despite a lack of higher education. Moreover, for Levittown women imagining Soviet women toiling away in collective factories, having this leisure and freedom to pursue individual happiness was part of the superior American way of life.¹⁰⁰

While all clubs required leadership to function, none had as extensive leadership opportunities for women as the Federated Women’s Club. The FWCL maintained an extensive officer board and committee system where women could take up various roles. One club booklet listed departments like community affairs, education, fine arts, home, public affairs, hospitality, finance, publicity, and social. It affirmed, “each member can find a place to channel her interests.”¹⁰¹ In addition to the traditional roles of president, secretary, and treasurer, women could become committee chairs and run the

⁹⁷ “French Club Will Meet,” *Levittown Times*, March 16, 1955.

⁹⁸ “French Club Will Meet, March 16, 1955.

⁹⁹ Marion Nowak, “‘How to be a Woman’: Theories of Female Education in the 1950’s,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 77-83.

¹⁰⁰ Robert L. Griswold, “‘Russian Blonde in Space’: Soviet Women in the American Imagination, 1950-1965,” *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 4 (2012), 881-907, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41678943>.

¹⁰¹ Yearbook of the Federated Women’s Club of Levittown, Pennsylvania 1954-55, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

functions of their departments. Even on the smaller scale of committees, women in leadership had to delegate tasks, manage funds, time, and supplies, and report back to the executive board. Whether club president, department chairwoman, or publicity chair for a particular event, women's leadership positions provided constant learning opportunities where women could grow as members and individuals. Moreover, even though leadership in different clubs meant different things, being a leader was empowering for women in any group and gave them the platform to forge the suburb into what they wanted it to mean and to be.

All in all, self-improvement's role in Levittown groups is unquestionable. Certain clubs and activities allowed women to focus on individual growth, but all the groups that women joined helped them learn about themselves and grow confident in their new communities. The skills they refined, the friends they made, and the knowledge they gained meant that women could strive to be better, happier individuals through organizations.

From church groups and women's auxiliaries to hobby clubs and the Federated Woman's Club, women in Levittown cultivated their identities by engaging their intellects, creativity, and aspirations outside of the home. Their community involvement ensured their place as community builders and leaders, from which they could exercise significant sway in the suburb's functioning and representation. More generally, each group offered women different opportunities to shape identities for themselves, their community, and the American suburbs in the 1950s.

“A Constructive and Organized Effort for Good”: Improving Community, 1956-1959¹⁰²

By the close of 1956, it seemed that Levittown, PA had proven itself a complete and utter success. Women had

¹⁰² Yearbook of the Federated Women's Club of Levittown, Pennsylvania 1957-58, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

numerous spaces to practice their faiths, to volunteer, and to socialize, and the second half of the decade would be no different. However, as the suburb grew to its maximum size and its residents became increasingly diverse, conflict bubbled beneath the surface and soon met the open air. Women and their organizations had opinions and took action, and their commitment to solving the problems illustrates that women held priorities not confined to motherhood or homemaking. In other words, the considerable influence that Levittown women yielded within and via their clubs during trying times further disproves that the 1950s suburban woman's dominant identity was homemaker. Previous scholars have proven that postwar women were forces to be reckoned with in shaping American politics and culture, and Levittown women did the same for their local scene.

The first subsection will cover Levittowners' reaction to the arrival of the first Black family. The second subsection will explore how all of the organizations discussed in Sections one and two interacted with each other, problem-solved, and set their goals for the upcoming decade and the future of Levittown. While the previous sections captured women's initiatives in times of optimism, the stories below exemplify how Levittown women shaped and were shaped by the uncertainty and strife that marked the American 1950s.

*The Myers Family Moves In:
Levittown Clubs in Response to Integration*

Daisy Myers, her husband William (Bill), and their three kids moved to 43 Deepgreen Lane in Dogwood Hollow in August 1957. With three bedrooms and a garage, the Levittown Rancher was perfect for them. Moreover, the family was familiar with the neighborhood already. Daisy had canvassed Levittown houses to fundraise for the Red Cross and Levittown Library, and she participated in the Levittown League of Women Voters.¹⁰³ Despite these ties, the Myerses did not receive a warm welcome to their new community. They

¹⁰³ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 79.

were Black, and their arrival sparked protests, hate groups, and chaos in America's best-planned suburb. Crowds jeered, motorcades honked, Confederate flags waved, and protesters sang "Old Black Joe."¹⁰⁴ Bricks shattered Daisy's new home windows, and crosses burned in her supporters' yards. Other Levittowners greeted the Myerses with open arms, and whether in opposition or in support, residents did what they had done since Levittown opened: they formed groups.

From the Levittown Betterment Committee to the Human Relations Council, Levittowners took their stances on the issue of race against the backdrop of the nation-wide civil rights movement. The Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) that racially restrictive housing covenants could not be legally enforced, but builders and landlords, including Levitt, ignored the decision.¹⁰⁵ Another Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), proclaimed that segregation in schools was unconstitutional because separation was inherently unequal.¹⁰⁶ States resisted this decision too, as the Little Rock Nine incident in September 1957 confirms. Nine African American students faced severe opposition when trying to attend Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas at the same moment that the Myerses met with large protests after moving to Levittown.¹⁰⁷ In short, as the Myerses took the first step toward integrating Levittown, the question of integration in both education and housing was sweeping the entire nation.

Thus, while much of this article has presented Levittown as unique, the simultaneous hate and encouragement the Myerses received in 1957 portrays the suburb as a microcosm of a

¹⁰⁴ *Levittown Times*, December 10, 1957.

¹⁰⁵ "Shelley V. Kraemer (1948)," Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School (April 2021), [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/shelley_v_kraemer_\(1948\)](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/shelley_v_kraemer_(1948)).

¹⁰⁶ "Brown V. Board of Education (1954)," Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School (July 2022), [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/brown_v_board_of_education_\(1954\)](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/brown_v_board_of_education_(1954))

¹⁰⁷ Lonnie Bunch, "The Little Rock Nine," National Museum of African American Culture and History, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/little-rock-nine>.

country striving for progress while riddled with uncertainty, upheaval, and intolerance. The Myerses succeeded in Levittown despite antagonistic groups and with the help of compassionate ones, with women joining both camps. Ultimately, the story of the first Black family in Levittown, PA, portrays how women took action outside of the home in organized community involvement, and it serves as a harsh reminder that while some women crafted accepting and supportive identities, other women in the suburbs molded identities that were racist and exclusionary. On both sides, women's actions had explicit aims of defining and maintaining suburban, white, and American identities.

The Myerses' Levittown story starts with two co-ed clubs called the Human Relations Council and the Friends Service Association. Civil rights activists in Bucks County formed the Relations Council in 1952, and they joined forces with the Friends Service Association, a Quaker group, to make integrating Levittown a priority.¹⁰⁸ Together, they held meetings and workshops to discuss Levittown's racist policy, and in 1955 the Council supported the NAACP's court case against federal mortgage agencies financing Levittown. The judge ruled against the NAACP, but the Relations Council maintained its commitment to integrating the suburb.¹⁰⁹ After much discussion and brainstorming in Council meetings, Jewish members Bea and Lew Weschler decided to help their neighbor sell his Levittown home to a Black family, the Myerses.¹¹⁰

When the Myerses arrived on August 13, news quickly spread, and the terrorization began. A few onlookers became a crowd, and the crowd became a mob composed of men, women (including pregnant women), and children.¹¹¹ There,

¹⁰⁸ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 67.

¹⁰⁹ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 70.

¹¹⁰ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 83.

¹¹¹ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 100.

on Deepgreen Lane, “women stood cursing and spitting,” and one woman, Agnes Bentcliffe, screamed, “let’s everybody get arrested! Let’s

make a big thing out of this!”¹¹² The Myerses returned to their old neighborhood for the night, but the crisis re-emerged the next day. Soon, the angry

mob had an official name and leader: The Levittown Betterment Committee, headed by James Newell.

As told by this response, members of the Levittown Betterment Committee had forged white identities based on the exclusion of Black neighbors. The Committee sought to maintain this constructed identity by driving the Myerses from their home, and women eagerly participated. According to Newell, the committee sought “to protect the betterment of our homes, community, family, and investment and to organize interested active citizens in a legal and peaceful manner.”¹¹³ Peaceful was hardly the word for the Committee’s actions, though. For example, the second day of protest garnered a crowd of 600 people, some of whom demonstrated their hatred late into the night (Figure 2). Men and women, some



Figure 2: James Newell stands above a mob of protestors at a “meeting” of the Levittown Betterment Committee in August of 1957. Photograph by George D. McDowell, 1957, George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection, University Digital Collections SCRC 170, Levittown (PA)-Demonstrations. (Courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA.)

¹¹² Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America’s Legendary Suburb*, 94.

¹¹³ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America’s Legendary Suburb*, 105.

with babies in strollers, marched in pairs and clapped in rhythm circling around the Myerses' and Weschlers's block.¹¹⁴

Protests continued. On August 15, at yet another protest with over 600 people, the Committee passed around a petition to "protest the mixing of Negroes in our previously all-white community" because "the Negroes have an equal opportunity to build their own community."¹¹⁵ These efforts seemed to be working, too, as the *Levittown Times* reported on August 17 that 700-plus people belonged to the Betterment Committee and that an executive board had formed to organize the meetings of the group. It further detailed that a team of Committee members made call after call to inform Levittowners of their meeting and that "Mrs. Jean Frankenstein, secretary of the group, said she made at least 150 calls notifying others to pass word on about the location of the meeting place."¹¹⁶

After trying (and failing) to find a regular meeting place and trying (and failing) to force the Myerses out through protest, the Levittown Betterment Committee took more desperate measures. At one meeting with Newell and twelve key men and women, the committee voted on Ku Klux Klan involvement. Eight members voted in favor, and five voted against (including Newell).¹¹⁷ However, at the next meeting, they decided Klan support was too extreme and revoked the decision. Instead, one woman secured the Committee's new meeting place: the rental house diagonally behind 43 Deepgreen Lane.

Here, 25 members spent the day drinking coffee, selling Confederate flags, and playing the racist song "Ol' Man River."¹¹⁸ Flood lights shined on the Myers house all night,

¹¹⁴ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 107.

¹¹⁵ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 112.

¹¹⁶ "Both Factions Urge Peace in Solution," *Levittown Times*, August 17, 1957.

¹¹⁷ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 138.

¹¹⁸ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 157.

and church pews lined the inside of the house for meetings. Called the Dogwood Hollow Social Club, members took pride in the commotion threatening the Myerses day in and day out. It wasn't until October, after more than two months of persecuting the family, that the law finally caught up with Committee leaders. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania charged the seven leading Committee members, two women and five men, with violating the Constitution of the United States and the Federal Civil Rights Act. In trials held in December and January, a court found each of them guilty.¹¹⁹

Women behind the Betterment Committee explained their stances in an interview for a 1957 documentary, and they pointed to the future well-being of the suburb as justification. One complained that, "property values will go down" and "this integration business...will end up with mixing socially...[and] becoming equal with the whites."¹²⁰ Another woman, in front of two others, told of an instance where African American boys beat up her son, and she asserted, "I don't want [my daughter] associating with colored people. Period."¹²¹ For such women, worry over the future of their families and specifically their children justified their hostility to another family seeking a peaceful life. Elizabeth McRae's claim that "white women helped to sustain segregation at a local level" holds truth in Levittown, where some of the suburban women used their motherhood role as an authority to maintain the white supremacist status quo.¹²²

This hate made moving to Levittown an excruciating experience for the Myerses, but there were supportive men and women, too. The people who started the whole process, the Human Relations Council, the Friends Service Association, and the Weschlers, stuck by the Myerses' side through it all. The morning after the first protest, August 14, Bea and Lew

¹¹⁹ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 169; *Levittown Times*, December 10, 1957.

¹²⁰ Dodson, "Crisis in Levittown PA," 7:40, 9:02.

¹²¹ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 20:27.

¹²² Mcrae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance*, 17.

(with their children to play) and Friends representatives showed up on the Myerses' doorstep ready to provide moral support and guidance.¹²³ After more protests and shattered windows, Daisy and Bill returned to find their broken windows replaced, their curtains hung, and their lawn mowed.¹²⁴ Over the course of the race-riots, members of the Council and the Friends helped cook, clean, or simply check-in to offer kind words.¹²⁵ The Weschlers, also under attack for their involvement in the sale and support of the Black family, spent almost every day with the Myerses.¹²⁶ Thus, while the Myerses were the only Black family in Levittown, they were rarely alone.

Levittown's racist events prompted other support groups to emerge, like the Citizens Committee for Levittown that formed to counteract the Betterment Committee. Its chairman, Reverend Ray Linford Harwick, became the spokesperson for the Myerses and said the group was created so that "all decent and law-abiding citizens and groups may make themselves heard in their community."¹²⁷ The Citizens Committee put ads in the newspapers promoting integration and held meetings to allow those who were in favor of or neutral to the situation to speak out.¹²⁸ Because of his role in the Citizens Committee, Harwick ultimately took the stand against the Levittown Betterment Committee and confirmed under oath that the accused were guilty of violating the Myerses' rights.¹²⁹

¹²³ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 99.

¹²⁴ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 125.

¹²⁵ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 131.

¹²⁶ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 131.

¹²⁷ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 117, 132,

¹²⁸ "Both Factions Urge Peace in Solution," *Levittown Times*, August 17, 1957.

¹²⁹ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 116.

Other support came from the combined efforts of groups, including from Levittown clubs discussed in Sections one and two. On August 16, the Human Relations Council held an emergency meeting where 45 people from town organizations like synagogues, the women's league, and the Levittown Civic Association drew up a statement that expressed, "the maintenance of human decency, law and order, and religious morality are of primary importance" and that "demonstrations of racial and religious bigotry have no place in our community."¹³⁰ While the Betterment Committee got most of the media attention, many pre-existing Levittown groups condemned the violence occurring in their suburb and were willing to embrace the Myerses into the community that they, as organizations, had worked so hard to create.

The same documentary that captured some Levittown women's hatred recorded other women's encouragement. One woman interviewed made the astute observation that the crisis was "a white problem, not a Negro problem," and she articulated that she "would like to see an integrated group here...[because] I want my child to live in a group that is representative of the world."¹³¹ Again, motherhood was a commonly-cited reason for women's stance on the local civil rights event. Whether in defense of ill-founded prejudice or in support of equality and American rights, women used their identities as moms to color new, additional identities as segregationists, integrationists, or simply activists. While today the persistent ideology from *The Feminine Mystique* might have made us guess that women watched these events through their kitchen windows, Levittown women were on the ground and making a difference from the start—even if they were often in opposition to one another.

Women's Organizations Working Together

The riots following the Myerses' move to Levittown confirmed for many residents that even their model suburb

¹³⁰ Kushner, *The Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, 104.

¹³¹ Dodson, "Crisis in Levittown PA," 12:50, 13:41.

was susceptible to crises and unrest. Levittown did not exist in a bubble, and neither did the organizations that filled its streets. This subsection will reveal that for Levittown organizations, interaction with each other and the outside world became an indelible aspect of functioning in the suburb. Through community-wide initiatives, women in organizations overcame obstacles, kept up their momentum as the decade came to a close, and relied on each other to accomplish goals after Levittown “maxed out” in 1957.¹³² In the end, by exemplifying teamwork on a multi-club level, Levittown women solidified their importance in roles other than wives and mothers. They were indispensable community leaders who constructed multifaceted identities for themselves and postwar women as a whole.

Widespread recognition that Levittown was far from perfect led to many collaborative improvement initiatives. The Levittown Library is one example. In 1956, the Upper Orchard Women's Club and the Violetwood Women's Club donated money for chairs and presented the accompanying tables to complete the children's section of Levittown Library.¹³³ In 1958, the *Levittown Times* reported on “Operation Big Switch,” which required the moving of some 10,000 books from the old to the new library. The paper documented how “men and women from the Exchange Club, Levittown Junior Chamber of Commerce, Levittown Civic Association, Federated Women's Club, and other organizations helped in the moving operation.”¹³⁴ This cross-club teamwork for the library demonstrates that Levittown groups were happy to work side-by-side and that, when they did, large projects for the entire community could be accomplished efficiently and effectively. Such efforts and their successes reinforced a shared suburban identity as a result.

¹³² Curtis Miner, “Picture Window Paradise - Welcome to Levittown” *Pennsylvania Heritage Magazine*, March 30, 2020, <http://paheritage.wpengine.com/article/picture-window-paradise-welcome-levittown/>.

¹³³ *Levittown Times*, November 26, 1956.

¹³⁴ *Levittown Times*, October 4, 1958.

Another facet of inter-club teamwork and local identity forming was the Levittown Public Recreation Association (LPRA). The LPRA was a non-profit corporation that supervised all recreational facilities in Levittown, and it sponsored the Levittown-A-Ree every year after 1954.¹³⁵ A snapshot of the event in 1958 emphasizes the degree of group collaboration. The *Levittown Times* told of 14 different organizations with booths and activities, “from hot dogs to voting information, from fortune telling to pizza pie, and even... coffee and donuts before the sets for a coming stage production.”¹³⁶ Besides promoting fun, the LPRA solicited groups’ input on important matters. For a meeting about the cost of association subscriptions, the LPRA reported that at least 35 local organizations RSVP’d favorably, and that “women’s clubs have been included in the invitations to represent themselves.”¹³⁷ Through associations like the LPRA, Levittown women used their club affiliations to have a voice in community matters that usually fell outside of their scope. Moreover, organizations could band together to conduct policies that better supported Levittown, further solidifying the common identity as suburbanites.

Other projects were more like partnerships between two organizations to reach shared ambitions. For example, in 1957 the FWCL and Red Cross came together to combat increased injuries to players of winter sports. Together, they created a resolution to make sports safer and inform people of the dangers of hazardous winter conditions.¹³⁸ While the FWCL was one of the largest groups in Levittown (with at least 155 members by 1958), certain community goals required expertise

¹³⁵ “Another Pool for Levittown,” *Levittown Times*, February 19, 1955,

¹³⁶ “Festive Country Fair to Open 5th Annual Levittown-A-Ree,” *Levittown Times*, August 21, 1958.

¹³⁷ “LPRA,” *Levittown Times*, March 25, 1957.

¹³⁸ Personal Letter, March 28, 1957, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

from outside organizations with similar interests.¹³⁹ In another example, two clubs joined hands to promote the arts. In 1958, the Red Rose Gate Women's club of Levittown sponsored a production directed by a woman and performed by a new thespian group called the Footlighters.¹⁴⁰ In this collaboration, the women's club allowed for a budding organization to succeed in Levittown, and the Footlighters brought entertainment to the community in return. These partnerships and the other community-wide initiatives demonstrate that Levittown women organized, served, and led in an increasingly interconnected network.

Overall, women's organizations in Levittown were not self-contained bodies that pursued their goals and interests in a bubble. As the suburb expanded and hit its limit, women in different clubs embraced the various functions that other groups served to the community and their members. Levittown women sought out collaboration and new perspectives to make the greatest difference and to face the toughest challenges, as exemplified by the organizations that took action against racial segregation until tolerance and inclusivity won out. This perseverance and welcoming of cross-group cooperation allowed women in Levittown to weather the storms of an enormous suburb during the civil rights movement and Cold War. After women in organizations worked through the first trials and tribulations of Levittown's existence, they entered the 1960s as proven movers and shakers.

In 1982, on the thirtieth anniversary of Levittown, PA, David Diamond wrote in the article "The Children of Levitt," "What difference did it make to grow up in the Ultimate Suburb? The men and women who did say they learned to deal with new situations...and to tolerate their fellow man—up to

¹³⁹ Yearbook of the Federated Women's Club of Levittown, Pennsylvania 1957-58, Clubs and Organizations 1, Box 3 Folder 13, Levittown Community Collection.

¹⁴⁰ "'Bus Stop' Tickles Funny Bone," *Levittown Times*, September 27, 1958.

a point.”¹⁴¹ In other words, despite residing in the “ultimate suburb,” Levittowners did not always live in perfect harmony with one another. In the second half of the 1950s, it became clear that the novelty of Levittown would not keep out nationwide problems. From 1956 onward, diversity crept into Levittown and clubs increasingly worked together. None of this progress, including the Myerses’ ability to remain in Levittown, would have been possible without Levittown women, who never fully conformed to the homemaker stereotype that so often follows them today. Like Susan Douglas argues for women in the 1960s, women in Levittown in the 1950s had multifaceted identities that made them powerful members of society.¹⁴²

Conclusion

Through a case study on the first eight years of Levittown, this article has endeavored to add women’s nondomestic contributions to the story of the US in the 1950s so that a more complete history of postwar America exists. With this nuance and a better understanding of women’s identities, the stereotype that plagues women loses some of its grip. We see how women in Levittown were leaders, founders, and visionaries, and that their accomplishments and mistakes have had lasting effects on the American Dream, the American suburbs, and America itself.

Levittown women exemplify how dedicated, concerted, and community-oriented action was essential to women’s lives in the 1950s, and scholars must include it in the narrative of postwar women for its role in shaping women’s identities as individuals and members of American society. Geographic location, race, financial standing, and nationality all played into who these women were, but Levittowners shaped each of these

¹⁴¹ David Diamond, “The Wonder Years,” May 1991, MSC 803 Levittown Collection Publications: Business, Box 3 Folder 2, Levittown Community Collection.

¹⁴² Susan J Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media* (Times Books, 1994).

identities over time through their actions and interactions in the community. As a result, they represent how postwar women possessed dynamic, responsive, and multi-dimensional identities that modern American women's history would be amiss without.

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Protecting a “Bit of Country in the City” The Georgetown Citizens Association and the Preservationist Politics of Exclusivity, 1950-1970

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“GEORGETOWN IS UNDER SIEGE,” read the warning emblazoned across the top of the July 1967 newsletter—besieged this time not by civil warfare or foreign combatants, but rather by local teenagers coming to drink, disturb the neighborhood’s peace, vandalize its property, and even violate its parking regulations.¹ In an urgent missive to its 2,000 members, the Citizens Association of Georgetown (CAG) implored its neighbors to attend upcoming hearings of the Alcoholic Beverage Control board to demand the denial and revocation of liquor licenses. Its public pressure tactics sought enforcement of a law requiring licenses be granted only to establishments with the consent of the surrounding community.² Even after the cases to deny liquor licenses to three taverns on M Street were won, its campaign was far from over, as the group continued to sue and shut down potential

¹ The Citizens Association of Georgetown News Letter, July 27, 1967, Citizens Association of Georgetown Collection, Peabody Room at the Georgetown Public Library, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as the CAG Collection).

² CAG News, July 27, 1967, the CAG Collection.

new taverns.³ Much more than temperance crusades, however, such tavern fights exemplified the ambitious tenets and tactics of the CAG and its predecessor organization, the Georgetown Citizens Association (GCA): these groups ultimately sought to establish Georgetown as an elite white enclave with low population density, tightly prescribed aesthetic beauty standards, and little space for outsiders, all under the auspices of creating a “bit of country in the city.”⁴

The local concerns of an insular neighborhood organization may not appear to be of the utmost importance. But the existing research on its activities has already revealed the GCA’s immense sway over housing and redevelopment in the neighborhood from the 1920s to the 1950s. Ida Elizabeth Jones argues that the GCA ushered in a new Georgetown where property values and aesthetics defined civic relationships, not the longevity of residents.⁵ However, Jones’s excellent work on the GCA ends in 1955, missing a key period in the history of the GCA and the CAG, which is the gap this article intends to fill.

Jones is not alone in centering the GCA in the history of Georgetown, as other scholars have discussed the group’s important role. In *Black Georgetown Remembered*, Kathleen Lesko, Valerie Babb, and Carroll R. Gibbs acknowledge the group for its efforts in passing the Old Georgetown Act, which resulted in the major displacement of Black people from the neighborhood.⁶ They additionally find that while the GCA did not explicitly discuss race, it was certainly on its mind as preservationist goals consistently stood in opposition to Black

³ CAG News, July 27, 1967, the CAG Collection.

⁴ CAG News March 1965, the CAG Collection.

⁵ Ida Elizabeth Jones, “Creative Destruction: Identity and the Effect of Urban Renewal on Georgetown Methodists in Washington, D.C., 1945–1954” (PhD diss., Howard University, 2001), 104.

⁶ Kathleen Menzie Lesko, Valerie Babb, and Carroll R. Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered: A History of Its Black Community from the Founding of “The Town of George” in 1751 to the Present Day* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 99.

residents of Georgetown.⁷ Meanwhile, Dennis Gale's work discusses Georgetown preservationism as having its roots in the homeowners committee of the GCA.⁸ While Gale looks at how the GCA and the CAG worked in terms of preservation work, he does not engage with its myriad other initiatives which would color the character of Georgetown.

Academic discussion of the CAG and the GCA is typically only contextualized within Georgetown despite their influence throughout Washington, DC. Chris Asch, George Musgrove, and Howard Gillette largely leave out the CAG when writing on the freeway protests of the late 1960s despite the Three Sisters Bridge protests which took place in and around Georgetown.⁹ Instead, other groups, such as the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC), are the focus of these pieces. The ECTC certainly played a larger role in protesting the development of freeways through largely Black and poor neighborhoods, but the GCA and the CAG represent freeway resistance from outside of a multiracial coalition and show a far more elite side of these protests.

I aim to re-center the GCA and the CAG in Georgetown's history from 1950 to 1970. I have chosen these dates with careful consideration: 1950 marks the passage of the Old Georgetown Act, which redefined the neighborhood; 1970 is the final year before the Three Sisters Bridge was defeated, and the Georgetown Waterfront Redevelopment project went into full swing, both of which denoted a new era for the neighborhood. I will argue these groups reorganized Georgetown along preservationist and aesthetic lines, prioritizing control of the neighborhood's historic character in

⁷ Lesko, Babb, and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 99.

⁸ Dennis E. Gale, "Restoration in Georgetown, Washington, D.C., 1915-1965" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 1982), 74.

⁹ Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 360 ; Howard Gillette Jr., *Between Justice and Beauty : Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D. C.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 166.

order to maintain property values. They accomplished this by enforcing strict adherence to zoning laws, frequently engaging with Congress and regulatory boards, lobbying for increased police presence, and finding ways to ensure Georgetown was “preserved” just for Georgetowners.

My research relies largely on the minutes and newsletters of the GCA and the CAG. Minutes were not available for the CAG, but nearly all copies of their newsletter were. These records provide the most comprehensive archive of these organizations and provide enough detail to track their monthly business and concerns. Additionally, archived issues of the *Washington Evening Star*, correspondence from the ECTC, personal files of lawyer Peter Craig, and records on the Three Sisters Bridge controversy were analyzed. This article will first discuss the GCA until 1963, focusing on its zoning initiatives and its attitudes toward race and policing. Briefly, the restoration of the Capitol Hill neighborhood will be discussed as a successor to the preservation work in Georgetown. Then I will turn to the period from 1963 to the 1970s as the GCA desegregated and merged with the Progressive Georgetown Citizens Association (PGCA), creating the CAG, which focused on zoning initiatives, support of police, planned development of the Georgetown Waterfront, its fight against taverns, and its role in the citywide protests against the construction of the Three Sisters Bridge.

Georgetown was not always synonymous with wealth and luxury in Washington, DC. Industry dominated the neighborhood for much of its early history as the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was established in 1828.¹⁰ The neighborhood would continue to expand through the 1800s and into the early 1900s, at which point residents began to organize to conserve the historic character of Georgetown.¹¹ In 1923 the neighborhood was rezoned to single family housing to prevent the destruction of historic buildings.¹² This brief history is courtesy of the CAG itself, as every year it would include a

¹⁰ CAG News February 1965.

¹¹ CAG News February 1965.

¹² CAG News February 1965.

short history pamphlet in the newsletter to remind residents of its version of Georgetown history and where the organization hoped to go. But there is more to Georgetown prior to the 1950s than what the CAG explains, including a large contingent of Black residents.

Georgetown from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries had a vibrant Black population. In 1776 a third of Georgetown's population was Black, although this number largely represents enslaved people.¹³ Following emancipation there was burgeoning political momentum in the Black community of Georgetown, massively influencing Georgetown and Washington, DC politics and resulting in the election of (some) Black politicians.¹⁴ All throughout Georgetown there were Black-owned businesses and churches catering to the community.¹⁵ Come the 1940s and 1950s, however, this population began to shrink due to the rising prevalence of white preservationists buying up and raising the price of housing.¹⁶ Preservationism in the neighborhood was bolstered and codified by a specific law, one of the crowning achievements of the GCA: The Old Georgetown Act.

The Old Georgetown Act was the first major rallying point and accomplishment for the GCA from the late 1940s through the early 1950s. Passed in September 1950, it provided protection to historic buildings in the Georgetown neighborhood. The law created a strict process in which the US Commission of Fine Arts had a say in the demolition, construction, or renovation of buildings in Georgetown.¹⁷ Even the smallest details faced the scrutiny of the Commission of Fine Arts. For instance, one Georgetown resident, Katharine Gibbs, had to fight the commission to allow the installation of horizontally-opening windows instead of

¹³ Lesko, Babb, and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 4.

¹⁴ Lesko, Babb, and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 25.

¹⁵ Lesko, Babb, and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 50.

¹⁶ Lesko et al., *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 95-96.

¹⁷ Old Georgetown Act, Pub. L. No. 81-808, 64 Stat. 903 (1950).

vertically-opening ones.¹⁸ For the GCA the passage of this act marked a major victory for its efforts to protect its neighborhood, commemorated on its “Why We Have a Georgetown” pamphlet as a pivotal moment in the neighborhood’s history.¹⁹ The act was a culmination of decades of historic preservation work, which was now codified into law. The GCA’s success in the passage of the Old Georgetown Act not only provided protection for the neighborhood but also reaffirmed for the GCA that flexing its muscles could create massive change in the neighborhood, a strategy it would continue to pursue.

The passage of the Old Georgetown Act gave way for the GCA to pursue even more aesthetically-inclined goals. Beyond zoning laws, it found other regulations and rules which could be attacked or created in order to change the character of the neighborhood. Buses were investigated by the group for taking up too much space along M Street, and for being too long, negatively impacting the neighborhood aesthetics.²⁰ The GCA also undertook an initiative to place new street signs to commemorate the original names of streets in Georgetown.²¹ Funded directly by members of the organization, this initiative was started to help preserve the historic character of the neighborhood and was spurred by the Old Georgetown Act. The act also encouraged the GCA to argue for reserved parking for Georgetown residents.²² GCA members argued that the Old Georgetown Act already gave residents a distinguished position and that protecting the Colonial charm of the neighborhood meant disallowing nonresidents to park in the

¹⁸ "Woman Architect Wins Point, Gets Windows Easy to Clean," *Washington Post*, July 6, 1951.

¹⁹ CAG News, March 1967, the CAG Collection.

²⁰ Georgetown Citizens Association Minutes January 1952, Georgetown Citizens Association Collection, Peabody Room at the Georgetown Library (hereafter cited as GCA Collection).

²¹ GCA minutes, September 1951, the GCA Collection.

²² "West Denies Georgetown Parking Ban," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, December 2, 1955.

area and clutter the streets.²³ Though this was shot down, parking would become a chief concern for the next decade for the GCA.

In the early 1950s, ensuring that there was enough parking for Georgetown residents, and keeping nonresidents off of neighborhood streets, were contentious issues. Proposals to create more parking for residents were wide-ranging, such as condemning one to two buildings every block along M street to create more parking spaces.²⁴ Later ideas included special parking stickers for all members of the GCA to reserve parking, and imploring the city government not to remove any further parking.²⁵ These disputes demonstrate how insular the GCA wanted Georgetown to be, and how frustrated its members were with outsiders coming into their neighborhood.

Keeping Georgetown exclusively for Georgetown residents was seen as a key component of maintaining high property values, which carried a great deal of weight for the GCA. Preserving property values was key for the group, as was seen in a proposal to limit the construction of apartment buildings. In January 1951 a proposal was put forward to rezone Georgetown to ensure all future residential properties would only be for single-family residences and that currently existing housing could not be converted into multifamily housing. The argument put forth by the GCA was that construction and renovation of single-family homes from 1924-1950 led to a major increase in property values, making Georgetown a highly desirable place to own property and one of the most valuable areas in Washington, DC.²⁶ While subsequent meeting minutes have little reference to this proposal, it appears to have been successful, as the zoning of the residential neighborhoods of Georgetown changed from "BR" restricted zoning in 1923, to R-3 in 1958. Whereas "BR" zoning allowed for conversion to multifamily housing, R-3 was

²³ "West Denies Georgetown," *Washington Post and Times Herald*.

²⁴ GCA Minutes, March 1951, the GCA Collection.

²⁵ GCA Minutes September 1960, the GCA Collection; GCA Minutes January 1961, the GCA Collection.

²⁶ GCA Minutes, January 1951, the GCA Collection.

explicitly for the construction of single-family housing.²⁷ The GCA demonstrated here its incredible ability and devotion to undertaking actions to increase property value. By restricting increased housing density, the GCA was essentially walling itself off from lower-income residents.

The GCA's zoning goals changed the demographic makeup of Georgetown, but the GCA practically refused to discuss race.²⁸ The organization was explicitly white-only and would not desegregate until 1963. The GCA did acknowledge at least once that Black residents were leaving the neighborhood in 1951. Members complained how the exodus of Black residents from the neighborhood had a negative impact on businesses' revenues along M street.²⁹ Despite this acknowledgment, the group did not discuss any potential plans to bring back Black or low-income residents in order to boost revenues. For a group whose constitution was supposedly in favor of business interests in Georgetown, this policy shows a desire to secure Georgetown as a wealthy white enclave. While the GCA would not explicitly state that it was trying to remove Black residents from the neighborhood, its policies did lead to the vast majority of them moving out. As Lesko, Babb, and Gibbs argue, the passage of the Old Georgetown Act along with the restoration movement worked to price nearly all Black residents out of the neighborhood.³⁰

Instead of explicitly using racial terms, the GCA tended to utilize dog whistle language in the form of reports on police, crime, and neighborhood cleanliness. For the GCA, reducing the number of police reports was in fact a matter of public health. Listed out next to reports on unkempt yards and overflowing trash were statistics on other minor crimes and violations.³¹ The group would consistently try to bring more police into the neighborhood, even to shut down legal activities

²⁷ DC Office of Zoning, "Summary of Zone Districts - ZR58," <https://dcoz.dc.gov/page/summary-zone-districts-zr58>.

²⁸ GCA Minutes, April 1951, the GCA Collection.

²⁹ GCA Minutes, March 1951, the GCA Collection.

³⁰ Lesko et al., *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 99.

³¹ GCA Minutes, November 1951, the GCA Collection.

like sunbathing, which it had a distaste for.³² It even briefly flirted with creating a civilian police corps.³³ Keeping the neighborhood clean clearly had racialized and class-based prejudices at play. The group at one point unsuccessfully proposed that in order to receive welfare, recipients needed to work as janitorial staff for the neighborhood.³⁴ While these plans and reports did not explicitly use any terms about race, it should be assumed that discussions on welfare and policing from the 1950s and early 1960s were tinged by race and class, especially considering how the GCA's policies led to massive Black displacement. Georgetown was the first neighborhood in Washington to experience gentrification, but not the last.

Georgetown's preservation movement was unprecedented in Washington, DC but quickly became a blueprint for other neighborhoods. The neighborhood which most closely followed in the footsteps of Georgetown was Capitol Hill. Located immediately east of the Capitol Building, in the 1940s and 1950s it was majority Black.³⁵ Today filled with colorful row houses and immaculately kept front gardens, the neighborhood was in a degree of disrepair in the early 1950s, while on the other side of the city Georgetown's residents poured money into the restoration and preservation of their houses. This began to shift, however, as young white professionals began to move back into the city, wishing to escape the suburbs.³⁶ Capitol Hill was seen as the neighborhood for pioneer restorationists that did not quite have the Georgetown money.³⁷ Soon a number of white families started fixing up homes and would go on to form the

³² GCA Minutes, May 1961, the GCA Collection.

³³ GCA Minutes, March 1962, the GCA Collection.

³⁴ GCA Minutes, January 1961, the GCA Collection.

³⁵ Cameron Logan, *Historic Capital: Preservation, Race, and Real Estate in Washington, D.C.*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2017), 99.

³⁶ Logan, *Historic Capital*, 108.

³⁷ James Welsh, "Distinctions sharpen in the District," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), October 21, 1969.

Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS) in 1955.³⁸ The CHRS filled a similar role to that of the CAG, advocating for the importance of preservation and restoration and fear-mongering about high crime rates.³⁹ Restoration work picked up rapidly, as did housing costs. During this process, the CHRS would explicitly compare it to the work done in Georgetown in prior decades.⁴⁰ In 1975, just a year before Capitol Hill would receive its historic designation, housing prices there were rivaling those in Georgetown.⁴¹ While Capitol Hill followed in the footsteps of Georgetown, the CHRS faced a unique challenge: organized resistance.

The Black residents of Capitol Hill worked to organize against the increasing housing costs and displacement of Black people, although their efforts were unsuccessful. The main organization in Capitol Hill was the Capitol East Community Organization (CECO), led by a prominent Black organizer in Washington, DC, Charles Cassel. At its founding the group set out to help preserve the “racial balance” of the Capitol East Community. Many initiatives focused on providing a social safety net to the largely Black, low-income residents of the neighborhood. In its efforts to maintain the “racial balance” of the neighborhood, the CECO explicitly took aim at the restorationists, placing signs in the windows of businesses proclaiming that Black people used to live in Georgetown, and that what happened there is now happening here. More expensive restored houses meant more Black people pushed out of the neighborhood.⁴² Other flyers produced by anti-

³⁸ Robert J. Lewis, “III: Capitol Hill,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), November 19, 1960.

³⁹ Boris Weintraub, “Mr. Smith comes to Washington - via the Capitol East Gazette,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), July 13, 1969.

⁴⁰ Logan, *Historic Capital*, 8.

⁴¹ Lance Gay, “Home prices on the hill are soaring out of sight,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), December 22, 1975.

⁴² Mike Wallace, “Preserving the Past: A History of Historic Preservation in the United States,” in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*, ed. Mike Wallace (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 195.

restoration groups depicted the “White Octopus” which aimed to keep Black people out of central areas in the city.⁴³ Despite efforts by the CECO, Capitol Hill followed the same trend as Georgetown, becoming overwhelmingly white by the end of the 1970s.⁴⁴ The process of gentrification and displacement had taken hold thanks to similar strategies used by the GCA. Not facing this same resistance, the GCA would continue to espouse racist views in Georgetown.

The racism of the GCA came into full view as schools began to desegregate across Washington, DC. The first murmurs of desegregation appeared in the GCA minutes as early as 1952, when its education board urged that funds not be diverted from Division I (white) schools to Division II (Black) schools.⁴⁵ And in preparation for potential desegregation, it passed a resolution stating there should be no lowering of educational standards at Division I schools in the name of integration.⁴⁶ While this resolution was largely toothless, the GCA would engage in actual opposition to desegregation, as it stood by and supported the Federation of Citizens Associations in filing an injunction against the desegregation of schools.⁴⁷ Notably, there was little discussion of segregation within schools in the Georgetown area. During the period of the early to mid-1950s, the GCA’s main concern for Georgetown schools was separating children who were deemed to be intellectually disabled.⁴⁸ Future reappraisals of the history of Georgetown would argue the neighborhood never harbored a white racist attitude.⁴⁹ This is patently false, however, and the Association in this era was built on racial prejudice. While the GCA spilled a great deal of ink on

⁴³ Logan, *Historic Capital*, 99.

⁴⁴ Logan, *Historic Capital*, 106.

⁴⁵ GCA Minutes, April 1952, the GCA Collection.

⁴⁶ GCA Minutes, April 1952, the GCA Collection.

⁴⁷ GCA Minutes, September 1954, the GCA Collection.

⁴⁸ GCA Minutes, January 1956, the GCA Collection.

⁴⁹ Betty Beale, “Purposeful Georgetown Fun,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), April 10, 1968.

education issues, its bread and butter was preservation, and a major opportunity presented itself with the historic waterfront.

While most of the GCA's history since 1950 had been about preventing building, it did endeavor to embark on one development project: the Georgetown Waterfront. For years it had been considered an eyesore, as the waterfront was largely an industrial port area. But in 1956, the GCA's sister organization, the Progressive Georgetown Citizens Association (PGCA), began to pressure the district to rezone the waterfront away from industrial use and toward residential use.⁵⁰ The PGCA spurred this project initially, but the GCA would become involved in 1960, as it aimed to ensure Georgetown was purely residential.⁵¹ In March 1961, it first began reaching out to Washington, DC commissioners about potentially redeveloping the area.⁵² Redeveloping the waterfront was sought both to remove the unattractive industrial landscape and simultaneously create more single-family residential structures.⁵³ Despite this initiative seeking to increase the amount of housing, the group was purposefully very careful to not advocate for policies that could increase density. They always stood by the importance of upgrading zoning to residential usage, but only to single-family use.⁵⁴

The GCA's partner in waterfront development, the PGCA, was a key player in the 1950s in Georgetown. In fact, Eva Hinton, president of the PGCA, was one of the primary forces behind the passage of the Old Georgetown Act. The act was primarily the work of the PGCA, since even though the GCA vehemently supported the bill, the PGCA wrote and petitioned for the legislation.⁵⁵ The PGCA also began the practice of giving out awards for good architecture under the Old

⁵⁰ "Citizens Urge Adoption of Zoning Proposals," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), September 11, 1956.

⁵¹ George Wilson, "Georgetowners Plan Residential Waterfront," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), November 23, 1960.

⁵² GCA Minutes, March 1961, the GCA Collection.

⁵³ GCA Minutes, April 1961, the GCA Collection.

⁵⁴ GCA Minutes April 1961, the GCA Collection.

⁵⁵ Gale, "Restoration in Georgetown," 228.

Georgetown Act.⁵⁶ These awards recognized the best new construction and renovation of the year, meant to encourage and reward individuals and businesses that supported the act. Awarding construction created an incentive system to continue to stay well within the limits of the Old Georgetown Act. Other activities from this period included courting members of Congress at Georgetown area gardens and cosponsoring the January 1951 zoning proposal to restrict the conversion of single family housing to multifamily.⁵⁷

The two groups were remarkably similar organizations, with only minor differences between them. The PGCA was initially founded to allow women the opportunity to be involved with citizens associations in the Georgetown area, though the GCA would soon allow women within their ranks.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the GCA billed itself more as an association for business owners, while the PGCA was more concerned with issues of zoning.⁵⁹ Despite the two groups representing the same area and largely having similar interests, there were points of departure between them. A key point was when a potential freeway through Glover Park was proposed. The GCA saw this as a boon for business, while the PGCA wished to resist any potential new freeway development.⁶⁰ However, these were minor disputes between groups with a great deal in common, so much so that they would soon merge.

In 1963 the PGCA and GCA merged, beginning a new era for both groups. This merger had long been in the works; as early as 1951 the two groups had been strongly considering a merger to increase their influence.⁶¹ Reception to the idea was positive on the GCA side, but the potential merger would linger for over a decade before actually happening in 1963. The new organization would be named the Citizens Association of

⁵⁶ "Georgetown Diary," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), May 18, 1952.

⁵⁷ GCA Minutes, October 1951, the GCA Collection.

⁵⁸ Gale, "Restoration in Georgetown," 78.

⁵⁹ Gale, "Restoration in Georgetown," 228.

⁶⁰ Gale, "Restoration in Georgetown," 258.

⁶¹ GCA Minutes, June 1951, the GCA Collection.

Georgetown (CAG). With the formation of this new group, the two main citizens associations of Georgetown would unify, and in coming years post impressive membership numbers. By October 1967, the CAG was able to attract over 2,000 members out of 11,000 residents in Georgetown, representing almost 20 percent of the population.⁶² Its membership was largely former military and government officials, who had extensive political connections that they were not afraid to utilize. Many residents were current members of the federal government, including 15 members of Congress in the final years of the GCA in 1960. John and Jackie Kennedy were even members prior to his election to the presidency.⁶³ The CAG's new combined membership and swelling numbers would go on to define the coming period for Georgetown. Immediately following this merger, the group would exert its newfound strength, and Washington, DC would be forced to take note.

The CAG clearly had notable sway within local politics, as its meetings were the frequent topic of newspaper articles in the Washington *Evening Star*, the city's paper of record at the time. From 1963 through 1970, nearly monthly articles were published about when meetings were and provided updates on various initiatives the group was undertaking. For instance, the September 15, 1965 edition of the *Star* included a staff writeup on all the topics of discussion at the most recent meeting, as well as current goals of the CAG.⁶⁴ Devoting coverage and a reporter to the CAG indicates some recognition of its influence on the neighborhood and within Washington, DC as a whole, which would be further proven over the rest of the 1960s.

Part of the foundation of the new organization was reaffirming the importance of aesthetic preservation. A notable feature in the CAG newsletters were excerpts of statements from President Lyndon B. Johnson to Congress describing the importance of maintaining aesthetic beauty across the country. At least two of these were published by the CAG: his 1965

⁶² CAG News, October 1967, the CAG Collection.

⁶³ Gale, "Restoration in Georgetown," 258.

⁶⁴ "Georgetown Unit Told of Measures in Crime Fight," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), September 15, 1965.

statement which argued for greater preservation, and his 1966 statement proclaiming the need for protecting America's natural heritage.⁶⁵ While these messages were not Washington, DC specific, the CAG published these Congressional messages and understood them as a call to action for the group to re-up its initiatives and continue its diligent work in the preservation of Georgetown. Thus, in the eyes of the CAG, its work was not just important for keeping Georgetown beautiful, but for ensuring Washington, DC was a beautiful place befitting the capital of the United States. As its preservationist impulses were reaffirmed by the federal government, the group attained yet another key victory in the preservation of Georgetown when the entire area was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1964.⁶⁶ Legally speaking, very little changed for the neighborhood, but for a group that had sought historic preservation and beautification, this designation both reflected the CAG's work and added yet another layer of legal protection for the neighborhood and its aesthetics.

As the importance of the historicity of Georgetown continued to be reaffirmed, zoning issues still were a key concern for the CAG. The CAG's zoning board, led by Eva Hinton, the former president of the PGCA, kept the same ferocious spirit both the GCA and PGCA had had around zoning. Georgetown's growing lack of parking and rising property values led some to wish to raze structures in order to create space for parking lots. The CAG would oppose this effort on the grounds that it did not uphold the spirit of the Old Georgetown Act as it could encourage the destruction of historic structures.⁶⁷ Importantly, on one occasion the group insisted there was no requirement to compensate someone for the denial of a demolition permit, which was not required by the Old Georgetown Act. While tracking the outcome of the subsequent challenge to the CAG was difficult, the building in

⁶⁵ CAG News, February 1965, the CAG Collection; CAG News, February 1966, the CAG Collection.

⁶⁶ CAG News, October 1964, the CAG Collection.

⁶⁷ Robert J. Lewis, "Georgetown Citizens Attack Razings, Fear 'Destruction,'" *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), October 11, 1965.

question was still standing months after the challenge was filed and available for rent.⁶⁸ Outside of issues pertaining to Old Georgetown, the group was still firmly trying to keep density as low as possible.⁶⁹ This included passing new resolutions to prevent the breakup of single-family housing into apartments.⁷⁰ Beyond the breakup of homes into apartments, it also stood firmly against converting detached housing into rowhouses, which would again threaten to increase density and create difficulties for residents already in Georgetown.⁷¹ In addition to zoning, the CAG would become even more interventionist in other areas of Georgetown life in the mid to late 1960s.

One of the CAG's main focuses in the community was attempting to increase the police presence and engaging in pro-police rhetoric. The CAG's greater use of police rhetoric was tied to the perception of rising crime rates in Washington, DC. While crime rates were up all across the city, Georgetown was still by far the safest place within it.⁷² Alarmism on Georgetown crime was apparent, as a 1964 article in the *Evening Star* headlined "Serenity and Peril: Canal Walk Evokes Fear" described in great detail the horrors of murder along the Georgetown towpath.⁷³ This article included calls from Association president Peter Belin for increased police presence as a response. The CAG went beyond simply encouraging greater police presence, as it became interventionist itself, advocating for residents to call both police and the CAG hotline to report vandalism or parking violations.⁷⁴ Similarly, the group circulated a questionnaire to ask residents what

⁶⁸ "Commercial Property," *Evening Star*, (Washington, DC), January 14, 1966.

⁶⁹ CAG News, October 1965, the CAG Collection.

⁷⁰ CAG News, March 1968, the CAG Collection.

⁷¹ CAG News, June 1965, the CAG Collection.

⁷² CAG News, December 1967, the CAG Collection.

⁷³ Lance Morrow, "Serenity and Peril: Canal Walk Evokes Fear," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), October 14, 1964.

⁷⁴ CAG News, March 1967, the CAG Collection.

crimes they witnessed most frequently.⁷⁵ What the CAG did with said reports is unclear, but its hotline and questionnaire demonstrate the importance placed on property crimes in the neighborhood and an attitude that the organization needed to become involved with policing.

While the CAG ramped up efforts to increase police presence, it found a new enemy in the proliferation of taverns. Through the early to mid-1960s, a wave of new taverns and drinking establishments began to open up shop in Georgetown. The location was especially appealing thanks to Washington, DC's lower age limit for drinking, 18, compared to 21 in the surrounding states of Virginia and Maryland.⁷⁶ This resulted in even more demands for police. As evidenced by an alarmist newsletter, "Georgetown Under Siege," the CAG viewed the tavern issue as incredibly urgent for the neighborhood.⁷⁷ Reducing the number of liquor licenses, changing the Washington, DC drinking age, and other measures to reduce patronage of taverns were considered.⁷⁸ The group believed there was an explicit link between crime and the amount of liquor licenses in the neighborhood, and it turned to a tried and true method to deal with the tavern issue: litigation.⁷⁹

In response to an apparent overabundance of liquor licenses, the CAG took to filing numerous complaints and lawsuits to shut down taverns. In the October 1967 issue of its newsletter, the CAG had a brief section entitled "How we win," which detailed both a victory and loss for the CAG in Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) board hearings. The board's decisions in both cases hinged on the amount of traffic and delinquency in the area, deciding once against a liquor license due to potential increased traffic, and once for a license arguing that it would not significantly increase traffic.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁵ CAG News, November 1969, the CAG Collection.

⁷⁶ CAG News June 1965, the CAG Collection.

⁷⁷ CAG News July 1967, the CAG Collection.

⁷⁸ CAG News July 1967, the CAG Collection.

⁷⁹ CAG News November 1968, the CAG Collection.

⁸⁰ CAG News October 1967, the CAG Collection.

ABC was clearly receptive to the basic claims of the CAG based on these arguments. In this same newsletter, a list of potential changes for the ABC is given by the CAG, including expanding the ABC board's subpoena powers, creating more public hearings, and restricting the ability to transfer licenses.⁸¹ This list of changes was sent to Congress, but it appears they were not taken into consideration. These changes, however, demonstrate how the CAG believed strongly enough in its ability to influence the board that it wanted to increase that body's powers. Potentially, the Citizens Association believed it had significant influence thanks to the presence of an Association member on the board, J. Bernard Wyckoff, who stated he would rescind himself from CAG activities, but it is unclear if he truly left his past association at the door.⁸²

Along with recommendations to the ABC powers, the group engaged in extensive litigation to lobby the board and increase its own power.⁸³ In both its own newsletter and the *Evening Star*, there are numerous articles about different challenges being made to liquor licenses, some of which made their way up to the US Supreme Court.⁸⁴ These court hearings all typically fell along the lines of the CAG arguing against the granting of liquor licenses. Another case heard by the Supreme Court in 1969 gave the CAG standing to represent its own members in court.⁸⁵ Litigation not only created results but actually increased the power of the organization. Again, however, the CAG was primarily interested in zoning disputes, and the key question of redeveloping the Georgetown Waterfront was becoming a pressing issue.

Under the CAG, the redevelopment of the waterfront truly began, with many specific demands from the organization to aid in continuing the preservation of Georgetown. There had

⁸¹ CAG News October 1967, the CAG Collection.

⁸² "ABC Aide Drops Citizen Activities," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), August 26, 1965.

⁸³ "Georgetown Cafes Win Liquor Stay," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), January 29, 1966.

⁸⁴ CAG News, February 1967, the CAG Collection.

⁸⁵ CAG News, December 1970, the CAG Collection.

been murmurs of waterfront development during the late 1950s and early 1960s, but March 1965 marked one of the first concrete steps toward major development in the area.⁸⁶ President Johnson directed Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall to draft plans for the historic preservation of the waterfront.⁸⁷ In October 1965 real estate firm Floyd E. Davis and Co. began to plan for apartment buildings in the area, which the CAG would soon oppose.⁸⁸ Simultaneously the CAG drafted a series of four recommendations: urging that Udall reaffirm the Old Georgetown Act in any new development; that scenic easement be granted, limiting building height to 40 feet; that zoning south of M street be updated to permit only single-family housing and small shops to maintain the historic character of Georgetown; and that steps be taken to plan a tunnel under the Potomac River for a potential freeway.⁸⁹ Over the next five years the CAG would continue to publish recommendations and proposals as it awaited the completion of the Georgetown Waterfront Feasibility study, which was released in January 1971.⁹⁰ The results of this study and its future actions fall outside the scope of this article, however, its efforts to zone and redevelop the waterfront encapsulated the core ideals of the CAG. There was a tandem issue with the waterfront, however: the threat of the Three Sisters Bridge.

As the redevelopment of the Georgetown waterfront began, the group became increasingly interested and concerned with the potential construction of the bridge. Proposed formally in 1953, it would have added a new span just north of the already existing Key Bridge which connected Georgetown to Arlington, Virginia.⁹¹ Opposition to the Three Sisters Bridge

⁸⁶ GCA Minutes, March 1961, the GCA Collection.

⁸⁷ CAG News, March 1965, the CAG Collection.

⁸⁸ "Waterfront Apartments in Georgetown Urged," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), October 22, 1965.

⁸⁹ CAG News, November 1965, the CAG Collection.

⁹⁰ CAG News, January 1971, the CAG Collection.

⁹¹ "New Expressways and Bridges Proposed in Nearby Virginia," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), December 10, 1953.

was not immediate for the CAG but in time it became vehemently opposed. In 1961, Association President Peter Belin, member Robert Hale, and Georgetown lawyer Peter Craig voiced their doubts about the bridge.⁹² Craig was one of the more prominent individuals engaged in freeway protests across the city, and would over the next few years work closely with both the GCA and the CAG. As of the February 1964 meeting, the CAG was actively coordinating with engineering firms to better understand potential plans for the bridge crossing, and considering which option could be most beneficial to the residents.⁹³ Through hearings and talks at meetings, soon the CAG would stand in opposition to the bridge, and by September 1968, the group was submitting testimony against the construction on the grounds that it would increase traffic in Georgetown and separate the community from the waterfront, which it claimed was an outdated form of urban planning.⁹⁴ But the CAG was not the only group standing in opposition to the Three Sisters Bridge; in fact, it was only a minor player.

As the bridge proposal progressed, one of the main groups in opposition was the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC). The ECTC was the preeminent group opposing freeway development in Washington, DC, cutting its teeth on blocking the Northeast Freeway. Organizing in Brookland and much of the city against the freeways was predicated on racial justice. Driven by white lawyer Sammie Abbott and Black activist Reginald Booker, the slogan of “White man’s roads through black men’s homes” became a mantra for the movement.⁹⁵ ECTC documents point out how freeways would harm the most vulnerable members

⁹² Robert Hale to Peter Craig, November 1, 1961, Folder 10, Box 57, Series 2 Peter S. Craig Papers, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University.

⁹³ CAG News, February 1964, the CAG Collection.

⁹⁴ CAG News, September 1968, the CAG Collection.

⁹⁵ Harry Jaffe, “The Insane Highway Plan That Would Have Bulldozed DC’s Most Charming Neighborhoods,” *Washingtonian*, October 21, 2015.

of society first. Members wrote numerous letters and reports explaining how the development of the Northeast Freeway would displace Black families.⁹⁶ Groups affiliated with the ECTC engaged in organizing in the Brookland neighborhood around social issues outside of just the freeways. For example, one flyer describes the “Rape of Northeast Washington” and how insufficient public services were being developed in the neighborhood.⁹⁷ As the group moved into the late 1960s its messaging would take on a new environmental tinge.⁹⁸ The ECTC began warning of air pollution, and internal messaging indicated the importance of building an environmental coalition to force the government into studying the environmental effects of the bridge.⁹⁹ In its attempts to stop construction, the ECTC was willing to create a large tent for organizations to come together under.

As part of its organizing the ECTC would hold yearly conferences on the anti-freeway movement, which were attended by dozens of local citizens associations and other civic groups, though the CAG never appeared on any conference roster.¹⁰⁰ The CAG seemed to be uninterested in aligning itself with the ECTC, despite having overlapping values and contacts. Its disinterest in working with the ECTC is representative of its lack of involvement in issues outside of Georgetown. However, the CAG would be forced to work with the ECTC soon enough to block the Three Sisters Bridge.

Despite differing in values from the ECTC, the CAG still did enter into a lawsuit to oppose the bridge in late 1969.¹⁰¹ In its suit, the CAG joined forces with groups like the Sierra Club,

⁹⁶ Angela Rooney to Van Eckardt, November 19, 1964 Box 21, Series 2, Emergency Committee on The Transportation Crisis Records, at MLK Library, Washington, DC. (hereafter cited as ECTC Records).

⁹⁷ The Rape of Northeast DC, October 14 1965, ECTC Records.

⁹⁸ Resolution for Action, November 5, 1968, ECTC Records.

⁹⁹ Lou Robinson to Byron Kennard, Jack Winder, and Dr. Dan Fisher, August 10, 1970, ECTC Records.

¹⁰⁰ List of Participants at the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis Convention 1966, ECTC Records.

¹⁰¹ CAG News, December 1969, the CAG Collection.

the National Audubon Society, and the Metro Washington Coalition for Clean Air, which the CAG President Robert Evans acknowledged as being a bit of an odd and even uneasy alignment.¹⁰² It is unclear if the ECTC was directly involved in this suit itself, but the above environmental groups were in contact with the ECTC.¹⁰³ Bizarrely enough, this suit would receive no further coverage in CAG's newsletter through the remainder of 1970. The bridge proposal ended up dying in 1971 when the US House of Representatives voted to reassign freeway funding to the development of the Washington, DC Metro, as the District shifted its transportation priorities and funding to the Metro system.¹⁰⁴ With the failure of the proposal, CAG returned to its insular focus on Georgetown issues.

The GCA and CAG of the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated a great deal of continuity with the groups going back to the start of the preservationist period in the 1920s. Their focus on zoning and historic preservation mirrors what previous scholars have discussed in their research on those earlier periods. As Gale finds, the Old Georgetown Act gave credibility to preservationism in Georgetown and codified the importance of preservationism into law.¹⁰⁵ As this research shows, this law would subsequently be wielded aggressively by the GCA and the CAG to develop the Georgetown that members desired. Furthermore, Jones's argument that the GCA and the Old Georgetown Act worked to remove Black residents from the neighborhood is reflected in the actions of the GCA and the CAG.¹⁰⁶ From their efforts to maintain school segregation to increased policing, to reducing zoning density, the groups' interest in race never changed. Despite claims that the neighborhood did not harbor the typical white

¹⁰² CAG News, January 1970, the CAG Collection.

¹⁰³ Byron Kennard to Joe Browder, Lou Clapper, James Deane, Ted Pankowski, Lloyd Tupling, and Cynthia Wilson, 1970, ECTC Records.

¹⁰⁴ Jack Eisen, "House Releases District Subway Funds," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1971.

¹⁰⁵ Gale, "Restoration in Georgetown," 227.

¹⁰⁶ Jones, "Creative Destruction," 20.

racist attitude, their actions consistently painted a different picture.

On the other hand, the increased level of interventionism undertaken, especially by the CAG, over the decades examined in this research, marked a different path for the group in comparison to prior iterations of the association. The GCA and the PGCA saw their investment in the minutiae of neighborhood goings-on increase following the passage of the Old Georgetown Act. Thanks to the protection granted by the Old Georgetown Act the GCA and the CAG did not have to be nearly as vigilant around restoration and zoning issues. While Gale's focus on the GCA and the PGCA centers around their preservationist work, he gives little credence to their initiatives outside of zoning and redevelopment, which this article argues actually helps define the groups.¹⁰⁷ In the CAG period which Gale does not cover, this interventionist bent became more prevalent with its attempts to increase policing in the community and its fights against taverns. Understanding Georgetown between 1950 and 1970 means considering the explicit interventionist and segregationist stances the CAG took, particularly its extensive pro-police rhetoric.

The GCA and the CAG made changes in their neighborhood using methods that differed from the civil rights groups in Washington, DC fighting for racial justice. In the civil rights era in Washington, DC, a common form of making change came from mass marches and mass action. As Asch and Musgrove write, the ECTC was a protest movement and a remarkably successful one at that.¹⁰⁸ By comparison, the GCA and the CAG arguably held contempt for marches. To them, their community did not need rallies to enlighten residents on the importance of civil rights issues.¹⁰⁹ As the Poor People's Campaign was gearing up for its 1968 march on the capital, the CAG newsletter made pleas to police, asking them to act

¹⁰⁷ Gale, "Restoration in Georgetown," 251.

¹⁰⁸ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 360

¹⁰⁹ Betty Beale, "Purposeful Georgetown Fun," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), April 10, 1968.

“without unreasonable restraint” to stop potential violence.¹¹⁰ As an elite, wealthy, white group, the Georgetowners did not need to resort to disruptive mass politics like underrepresented communities. Instead, as has been shown, the GCA and the CAG could attend board meetings and utilize litigation to prompt change. Understanding the GCA and the CAG as catalysts of conservative change falls in line with the economic and racial breakdown of Washington, DC in the 1960s, exemplifying the community’s race and class-based stratification. Asch and Musgrove describe how important racial coalitions were to Washington, DC, especially during the civil rights era. Returning again to the ECTC, they argue the group was explicitly formed to be radical and multiracial.¹¹¹ Its protests against the Three Sisters Bridge cut across both class and race, as predominantly white college students took up Black Power slogans and messaging.¹¹² As Gillette argues, multiracial coalitions were essential for stopping freeway development in Black neighborhoods, since white neighborhoods often had a far easier time stopping development, thanks to their elite and wealthy residents.¹¹³ By contrast the GCA and the CAG did not need outside help and certainly did not want a multiracial coalition to aid them in their various struggles.

In contemporary Georgetown, the CAG is still a community fixture, and still espouses similar views to those held in the 1950s and 1960s. Its recent struggles continue to focus on historic preservation, liquor licenses, and public safety. September 2018’s newsletter featured updates on zoning challenges faced by Georgetown and the CAG regarding the installation of new “small cell” towers for 5G support in the neighborhood.¹¹⁴ Subsequent discussion at its town hall focused largely on the aesthetic impact of the towers

¹¹⁰ CAG News, June 1968, the CAG Collection.

¹¹¹ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 362.

¹¹² Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 365.

¹¹³ Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 165-166.

¹¹⁴ CAG newsletter, September 2018, <https://cagtown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/cag092018.pdf>.

and creating guidelines for them according to the Old Georgetown Act.¹¹⁵ The CAG is also still involved in the public safety fight, pitching members on donating money to help pay for CAG security officers.¹¹⁶ These security officers function as a glorified neighborhood watch group, and one that is eager to work with DC Metro Police. The summer 2020 CAG newsletter discussed how CAG security officers were looking to coordinate with Mayor Muriel Bowser to support police during the George Floyd protests.¹¹⁷ Over 50 years removed from the Poor People's Protests which had worried CAG members, the organization is still worried about intrusion into its village.

The actions of the GCA and the CAG demonstrate how a gentrified and historically preserved neighborhood maintained its status, adding an interesting new chapter to preservationist studies. Mike Wallace, one of the preeminent scholars on the preservation movement in the United States, predicted the segregationist outcome of continued historic preservation would be to create entire cities of "historic districts," defending themselves against the thousands of poor and nonwhite people who had been kicked out of those areas.¹¹⁸ While this was a prediction for the future in 1996, Georgetown had practically fulfilled this prophecy already by 1970. Of course, Georgetown had not constituted an independent city since 1871, but nearly a century later the residents of that neighborhood certainly viewed themselves as living in a besieged, embattled enclave. From 1950-1970, their extensive attempts at increasing policing and keeping interlopers out suggest a neighborhood that had been "preserved" to the point of needing to protect itself, demonstrating what happens to a "historic" district after gentrification has changed the historically multiracial demography.

¹¹⁵ CAG newsletter, October 2018, <https://cagtown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/cag102018.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ CAG newsletter, summer 2020, <https://cagtown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CAG-Summer2020-web.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ CAG newsletter, summer 2020.

¹¹⁸ Wallace, "Preserving the Past," 208.

The CAG is but one example of the way preservation and restoration has caused gentrification, and combating the problem requires sweeping policy changes. Wallace pointed out in 1996 that the preservationist movement would cause cities to become increasingly expensive due to the difficulty of creating new housing stock. He refers to old European cities where poorer residents are consistently pushed farther and farther outside of the city center.¹¹⁹ More recent research in the United States has supported this conclusion, as Ted Grevstad-Nordbrock and Igor Vojnovic found in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. Due to the increase in demand that historic districts create, they quickly gentrify and can even begin to lose their historic character.¹²⁰ Combatting this problem is possible however, as is seen in Paris, France, where the city government has aggressively pursued a policy of rent control to ensure low-income residents can stay in historic neighborhoods.¹²¹ This policy has extended to local businesses as well, with the government offering low rent to keep small and family-owned shops in the city. Taking drastic measures is required, as Wallace notes how preservationists cannot fundamentally grapple with displacement so long as they accept the framework of a marketplace of privately-owned property.¹²² Efforts to protect historic buildings have proven incapable of protecting the historic residents of a neighborhood, and the original residents of Georgetown are now long gone. The CAG has been nothing but successful in protecting "a bit of country in the city."¹²³

¹¹⁹ Wallace, "Preserving the Past," 208.

¹²⁰ Ted Grevstad-Nordbrock and Igor Vojnovic, "Heritage-fueled gentrification: A cautionary tale from Chicago," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 38, (July-August 2019): 261.

¹²¹ Thomas Fuller, "How Does Paris Stay Paris? By Pouring Billions Into Public Housing," *New York Times*, March 19, 2024.

¹²² Wallace, "Preserving the Past," 196.

¹²³ CAG News, October 1964, the CAG Collection.

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Buffering Battlefields

A Study of the Local Strategies Surrounding the Preservation of Space at Manassas

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Our biases are indeed a sensitive index of our affections, our tastes, our loyalties, our generosity, and our manner of wasting weekends.

– Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*¹

Since its creation in 1940, the National Battlefield Park in Manassas, Virginia has been a bridgehead amongst the competing interests of local community members, national historians, politicians, businesses, and land developers.² From staving off internal development such as the 1957 Interstate 66 highway creation, to halting the external development of two major theme parks nearby, the battlefield in Manassas has proven extraordinarily resilient to change. What is especially curious about the intense local and national resistance to modification is that the threat of development is often *external* to the park. The successful resistance to major

¹ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, First Edition (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), 77.

² “Park Anniversaries - NPS Commemorations and Celebrations US National Park Service,” National Park Service, accessed October 27, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/npscelebrates/park-anniversaries.htm>.

and minor developments adjacent to the National Battlefield Park in Manassas offers a case study of how the local community and national historians viewed a “buffer strip” as integral to the site.

The term “buffer strip” refers to the physical space that is just beyond the legal border of a historic site. The buffer strip space is impacted by and associated with the senses: sight (viewshed), air quality, light pollution, traffic, aural environment, and other aesthetic qualities. Beyond the senses, however, the buffer strip is a meeting place that concerns how Americans conceive of history, culture values, and conservation. The protection of these buffer strips and how they impact historic site visitors’ senses is deeply entwined with the holistic integrity of the battlefield. It concerns the defense of the historic experience to keep it as close as reasonably possible to how it was at the time relating to the purpose of preservation. Hence, while the buffer strip is not legally owned by the park, it is frequently the site of a new sort of battle for protection to preserve the character of the historic site. The guardians of these buffer strip areas are primarily concerned with fighting against outside developments that would, by proximity, encroach negatively but not illegally upon the historic site. Industrial mining operations on the border of Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park are an example of how buffer strip development disrupts the viewshed and increases noise levels to the detriment of the visitors’ experience.³

Manassas local Annie Snyder described one such request for land development near the battlefield as having the potential to “destroy the mood and visual aspects of the park.”⁴ Snyder created the Save the Battlefield Committee (SBC), later

³ Castiglia Onofrio, “Cedar Creek National Park Growing Slowly,” *The Winchester Star*, August 31, 2018. https://www.winchesterstar.com/winchester_star/cedar-creek-national-park-growing-slowly/article_8f62100e-572c-5f2b-9c05-7a91eafe4b5f.html.

⁴ Joan M. Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 80.

renamed the Save the Battlefield Coalition, whose tactics spread national awareness in successfully defending the Manassas Battlefield from multiple developments that would have had destructive effects on the buffer strip. Her tenacity, vision, and leadership were innervated by the Marine Corps media training she received as one of their first female officers. Thanks to her skillful outreach to national organizations (beyond merely those solely regarding history), her persistent door-to-door local campaign, and her engagement with national newspaper and television media, she and the SBC were triumphant in their defense of the Manassas buffer strip from corporate encroachment. The SBC's most effective strategy was making the protection of Manassas battlefield a national issue.

The Annie Snyder Collection, housed at the National Park Service's Museum Resource Center in Landover, Maryland provides a window into the nearly 50-year struggle to protect the buffer strip of the National Battlefield Park in Manassas.⁵ The collection provides the stated purpose for the creation of the Save the Battlefield Coalition, a cross-section of tactics used by activists, motives, key players in the movement, and other useful sources to understand these buffer strip skirmishes. By drawing on this trove of primary source materials in the form of letters, petitions, magazine articles, opinion editorials, political correspondence, political cartoons and more, this article will demonstrate the tactical and strategic maneuvers that Annie Snyder and the SBC used to successfully defend the National Battlefield Park buffer strip in Manassas during the 1960s-1990s. This collection also provides a trove of evidence showing that the primary guardian of the buffer strip was the local activist.

A critical aspect of defining the buffer strip is locating it in a philosophy of space where memory, actions, aesthetics, and culture meet. Contextualizing the spectacle of the buffer strip through the organization of the citizens concerned about preserving the Manassas battlefield Park provides a powerful

⁵ This collection was bequeathed to the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum collection by Page Snyder, Annie Snyder's daughter.

example of timely questions on preservation of local and national history. Buffer strips around historic areas across the United States are facing current or developing infringements, and therefore understanding the history of the buffer strip skirmishes at Manassas Battlefield Park is a matter of urgency. This article asks whose job it is to protect them, what role nostalgia and memory play in their preservation, what is lost if buffer strips fail to be preserved, how and why the buffer strip was maintained around the Manassas battlefield, and whether a blueprint be drawn from the success of local activists.

The two specific “battles” of preservation at Manassas Battlefield Park that relate most directly to buffer strips are “the Marriott hotel proposal and the William Center proposals.” While there are other periods of intended development in the park’s history, my aim is to focus solely on buffer strip battles.⁶ Charting where and how communities were successful in defending their buffer strip and what tactics and strategies were effective will help future historians and environmentalists understand what was at stake and how it was resolved. Finally, connecting why activists felt the need to protect these areas can answer questions about how the nation interacts with history and the pain of the legacy of the Civil War.

Historian Joan M. Zenzen’s monograph *Battle for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park* was useful for understanding the creation and preservation of the historic lands as a National Park.⁷ Likewise,

⁶ Yardley, Jonathan, “Disney War: The Mouse May Yet Bite Back,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 1994.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1994/10/03/disney-war-the-mouse-may-yet-bite-back/a7c60dda-7f79-4396-9d0d-8254855837c9/>

In the 1990s the Walt Disney Company proposed to build an amusement park in Haymarket, Virginia, five miles from the Manassas Battlefield. Though relevant to Manassas Battlefield, the local community’s organization against the Disney proposal does not constitute a ‘buffer strip’ battle because it was not proximate to the park border.

⁷ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*.

Angela Sirna's analysis explored the full scope of park preservation in her article for *The George Wright Forum* entitled "Shining light on Civil War Battlefield Preservation and Interpretation: From the 'Dark Ages' to the Present at Stones River National Battlefield," in which she discussed much of the diligent and creative work done by National Park Service (NPS) employees.⁸ Finally, *Interpreting Sacred Ground: The Rhetoric of National Civil War Parks and Battlefields* by J. Christian Spielvogel was critical to discerning the complexities of race, violence, and memory in the continuing discourse over Civil War history.⁹ However, questions that concern the areas surrounding National Battlefields have gone unasked, and here the conversation among these scholars can be deepened by defining a pattern in the history of the Manassas battlefield through examining the buffer strip battles. This article names the area on the periphery of historic sites as buffer strips and locates their guardian as the local activist. By examining the history of the efficacy of the SBC in protecting the Manassas battlefield buffer strip from two major developments, this article offers a review of the tools, techniques, and strategies for future study and application.

Buffer Strips Explained

I took inspiration for the term buffer strip from the agricultural practice of the same name. The Center for Regenerative Agriculture from the University of Missouri defines buffer strips as a "narrow planting of perennial plants [surrounding a field] that are primarily used to reduce water runoff from fields, including loss of pesticides and fertilizer. They can also help provide habitat for pollinators and other

⁸ Angela Sirna, "Shining Light on Civil War Battlefield Preservation and Interpretation: From the 'Dark Ages' to the Present at Stones River National Battlefield," *George Wright Forum* 34, no. 3 (December 2017): 261–74.

⁹ J. Christian Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground: The Rhetoric of National Civil War Parks and Battlefields* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2013).

beneficial insects as well as wildlife.”¹⁰ In addition to creating positive space (a buffered habitat) they also have a protective function. The strips provide the farmer with better water retention and efficacy of fertilizer and create a safeguard for crops from destructive forces such as nearby car traffic exhaust, unchecked wind, and even provide resistance to some blights. Further, by providing protection for wildlife, the farmer can encourage “source[s] of food, nesting cover, and shelter for many wildlife species, such as songbirds. Continuous buffers also provide connecting corridors that enable wildlife to move safely from one habitat area to another.”¹¹ Therefore, in addition to buffer strips being a more efficient farming process they can also serve as a powerful method of environmental conservation. The farmer intentionally does not cultivate a crop in the buffer strip area, rather they are left to merely grow native plants, often grasses, scrub bushes, and trees. The farmer gives up an immediate economic advantage of planting and harvesting crops for the long-term health, protection, and integrity of the land, plants, and creatures.

This article uses the concept of buffer strips to describe a protective barrier around historic sites. A term such as this has been missing from the broader discussion of preservation. Applying this model of buffer strips to the protection of battlefields involves identifying a physical space that is just beyond the legal border of the historic site, that if developed, could disrupt the holistic integrity or character of the site. It is important to note that the buffer strip areas may or may not have direct historic value, rather, their importance is derived from their proximity. Buffer strips are areas that can be employed to protect the sensory experience of a historic site. These sensory qualities include disruption of viewsheds, noise, light pollution, smells, and any other elements that might

¹⁰ “Buffer Strips,” Center for Regenerative Agriculture: University of Missouri, accessed October 28, 2023, <https://cra.missouri.edu/topics/buffer-strips/>.

¹¹ “Vegetation Buffer Strips in Agricultural Areas,” DNR Waters, Vegetation Buffer Strips in Agricultural Areas, November 2007, http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/publications/waters/buffer_strips.pdf.

negatively impinge upon the historic site. Certain types of development on the buffer strip adjacent to the historic site would disrupt its interpretive mission of conveying the original nature of the battlefield, therefore the protection of these zones is imperative. Beyond protecting the historic tradition and culture of the site, establishing buffer strips would undo the fragmentation of the lands surrounding the park allowing for continuous area of travel and nesting for animals, birds, and (in the case of Manassas Battlefield) the growth of one of Virginia's largest grasslands.¹²

Early Civil War preservation efforts considered using what was termed the Antietam Plan, which included careful consideration of the character of the lands surrounding preserved battlegrounds. In 1902 the Plan, named for having been initially implemented at the Antietam Battleground, had the goal of retaining the agricultural character of the area so that the park would be as close as possible to the original nature of the land at the time of the Civil War. George Carr Round, a local teacher and early advocate for Manassas becoming a national park, put a heavy emphasis on retaining the character, sights, smells, and sounds of the Civil War. Round was a Union veteran who, after the war, recognized the need for remembrance and healing within the divided nation and argued that Manassas ought to be made a national park. He died before seeing his dream become reality, but he did manage to successfully organize the Manassas National Peace Jubilee in 1911, which sought to heal the wounds between the Confederate and Union veterans 50 years after the first battle of Bull Run. Ralph K. T. Larson attended the Peace Jubilee as a young boy and recalled seeing Union and Confederate soldiers organize "on the battlefield [in] two lines, Gray and Blue. They marched toward each other, shook hands, and then formed mixed twosomes, threesomes, or other small groups. There would be conversation, then pointing hither and yon,

¹² "Grasslands Conservation," National Park Service Department of the Interior, National Capital Region, 2011, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-I29-PURL-gpo39273/pdf/GOVPUB-I29-PURL-gpo39273.pdf>.

laughter and smiles and backslapping.”¹³ Using the battlefield as a meeting place for the acknowledgement and diminishment of war trauma and public education has been key to the mission of the Manassas Battlefield Park since its inception. Faithful preservation of the battlefield was fundamental to these missions. Round envisioned the Manassas battlefield as being conserved “in the condition it had been in between 1861 and 1865, meaning as farmland” and that “the battlefield park focused its importance as a historic area rather than an inviting public park filled with diversions to please a range of visitors.”¹⁴ The necessity of preserving the condition of the park as closely as possible to the Civil War era, and for the express purpose of conveying history, is precisely the argument that later activists used against the danger of numerous character-threatening development projects.

Manassas National Battlefield Park Background

The Manassas National Battlefield Park is known for the two major Civil War battles that occurred there. The names of the battles are more numerous than the amount of skirmishes due to differing naming conventions between the Confederate and Union armies. The first battle occurred in 1861 and is referred to as the First Battle of Bull Run, the First Battle at Manassas Junction, or the Battle of First Manassas. The second, in 1862, is known as either the Second Battle Bull Run, the Second Battle at Manassas Junction, or the Battle of Second Manassas. Each name is used, often interchangeably, by various sources, yet they all refer to the same general territory. Confederate forces were fond of using man-made structures like cities and towns to reference battles, whereas the Federal forces tended to name their battles after rivers and other

¹³ Ralph K. T. Larson, “The New Battle of Manassas,” *Washington Post*, May 12, 1979.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1979/05/12/the-new-battle-of-manassas/2268559f-968f-4420-a2ab-2094cf83b54f/>

¹⁴ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 8.

geographic features.¹⁵ Only 30 miles from Washington, DC, the city of Manassas contained a crucial railroad junction that connected the Confederate army to its capital in Richmond, Virginia. The railroad line was vital for resupply of equipment and movement of Confederate troops.¹⁶ Manassas Junction was the strategic prize sought after by the Federal army, and Bull Run stream was the geographic obstacle to its capture. Therefore, both names are utilized in reference to the battles.

In 1861, 22,000 Confederate troops and the Bull Run stream stood between the Union troops and the important Manassas railroad junction. A London reporter covering the Civil War for the *New York Times* set the scene for his readers, describing Bull Run as “a stream, larger than a rivulet, and not sufficiently dignified in this land of big waters to be called a river, which intersects the railway from Alexandria to Manassas, and the road from Centerville south, running through a succession of gorges and hills, between steep wooded banks—a kind of Alma, which the Confederates have occupied strongly in advance of the mainline of their defense.”¹⁷

Two significant Civil War battles were fought on this land. The first Battle of Bull Run occurred on July 21, 1861, and is widely known for being the first major land battle of the Civil War. The second Battle of Bull Run followed 13 months later and ended with General Robert E. Lee driving back Union forces across the Potomac River.¹⁸ Both resulted in Confederate victories. Suzanne Chilson, executive director of

¹⁵ Barbara Maranzani, “Why Do Some Civil War Battles Have Two Names?,” *History*, August 31, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/why-do-some-civil-war-battles-have-two-names>.

¹⁶ Ted Ballard, *Battle of First Bull Run*, Staff Ride Guide (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, Army, 2007), 6.

¹⁷ William Howard Russell, “The Battle of Bull Run,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1861, <https://www.nytimes.com/1861/08/20/archives/the-battle-of-bull-run-description-of-the-engagement-by-mr-russell.html>.

¹⁸ “Second Manassas,” American Battlefield Trust, accessed October 29, 2023, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/second-manassas>.

the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation, emphasized the enduring impact: “Manassas is near and dear to Confederate hearts. The Confederate victory was a complete surprise to the Union Army and to the people living in Washington.”¹⁹ The triumphs of the Confederate troops at Manassas will figure into later discussions about memory and nostalgia.

It is also important to note the wide geographic spread of those who were present at these two battles. Service members from across the country fought, died, or were wounded here. At the first battle of Bull Run alone units from 27 states saw combat. The combined bloodletting of the two battles resulted in over 26,000 casualties. The countrywide convergence of troops upon Manassas battlefield created a lodestone of proud patriotism and deep-seated trauma on a national scale for future generations. The descendants of those who fought at the two battles grew up hearing stories and handling relics from these clashes, then passed those remembrances and stories on to their children. These memories created a national collective of memories as descendants moved and relocated across the country in the following decades. The countrywide representation in these battles made them more accessible for future generations who walked the hallowed grass plains of Manassas years later and contemplated their families’ sacrifices. These widely-scattered descendants were some of the most effective advocates who assisted the members of the SBC during the multiple buffer strip skirmishes surrounding development near Manassas battlefield.

Memory & Nostalgia

The outcomes of the two battles at Manassas were Confederate victories. The second battle, in August 1862, gave the Confederates particular cause for excitement as it enabled General Lee and his forces to cross the Potomac River into Union territory. It was the veritable apogee of the doomed Confederate campaign. By 1863, with the loss at Gettysburg,

¹⁹ Nick Miroff, “Reenactors Prepare to Mark Battle of Bull Run,” *Washington Post*, July 26, 2006.

Pennsylvania and Vicksburg, Mississippi, the Confederacy was faltering militarily. The same year, Confederate women were cultivating a new role for themselves as bearers of the torch of white southern heritage.

As historian Caroline Janney has argued, these southern women “began turning the soldiers’ burial grounds into Confederate shrines. Foreshadowing their postwar activities.”²⁰ Following Lee’s surrender at the Appomattox Courthouse, many of the wartime Confederate women’s organizations turned their efforts to burying their dead and memorialization.²¹ The majority of these organizations, or Ladies Memorial Associations (LMAs), later coalesced into the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). Janney has asserted that the members of the UDC “proposed to do on a cultural level what their fathers had failed to do: win the war for the South. These associations were dedicated to the proper burial of Confederate soldiers and ceremonies rich in respectful symbolism.”²² Central to distinguishing this white post-Confederacy cultural heritage was the myth of the Lost Cause which maintained the southern justification for the war as a “mawkish and essentially heroic and romantic melodrama, an honorable sectional duel, a time of martial glory on both sides, and triumphant nationalism.”²³ The Lost Cause myth not only sought to glorify Confederate soldiers, but also sought to recast their motivation for war by claiming it was to fend off so-called Northern aggression rather than to protect the institution of slavery.²⁴

²⁰ Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 36.

²¹ Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*, 1.

²² Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, *Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 191.

²³ Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (NY: Indiana University Press, 2000), 18-19.

²⁴ Gallagher and Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, 21-26.

The Lost Cause narrative was perpetuated by southerners in many ways, from literature to educational materials, but the key to understanding its role regarding buffer strips is the idea of tangible and symbolic commemoration. LMAs were central in the preservation of the Civil War battlefields upon which they created memorials to the Confederate dead. The constellation of sympathetic Confederate monuments, memorials, cemeteries, and other physical cues that dot Civil War battlefields are reminders of the enduring myth of the Lost Cause.

Manassas battlefield is no exception to Confederate memorialization efforts. There, the Groveton Confederate Cemetery was created by the Groveton Ladies Memorial Association and later, in 1904, a monument was installed by the UDC for the purpose of praising the approximately 266 Confederate soldiers who were laid to rest there.²⁵ The original somber purpose of the cemetery was now punctuated with saccharine language of sacrifice and courage and patriotism for the Confederacy. The words etched onto one side of the Groveton monument quote the Roman poet Horace: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, “how sweet it is to die for one’s country.”²⁶ The lauded country was the traitorous Confederate States of America.

Buffer strips are not neutral. Crucial to interrogating the preservation of the Manassas battlefield is grasping the wider discourse on Confederate efforts regarding memory, nostalgia, and the Lost Cause myth. When UDC members created sympathetic physical reminders, they did so, as historians Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh noted, “as cultural arbiters, as keepers of the public memory through their role as guardians of the

²⁵ “Groveton Confederate Cemetery,” Historic Prince William, accessed November 1, 2023, <https://historicprincewilliam.org/cemeteries/cemeteries-in-pwc/groveton-confederate.html>.

²⁶ “Auto Tour Stop #8: Groveton,” National Park Service, accessed October 31, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/places/000/auto-tour-stop-8-groveton.htm>.

white male Confederate past.”²⁷ The use of affectionate Confederate symbology without appropriate context at historic battlefields is tantamount to engaging in approval of revisionist history. At Manassas the very same groups that perpetuated the Lost Cause myth, such as the UDC and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, were central to protecting the buffer strip. These groups were concerned with carrying on the legacy of the South through shielding the battlefield from developments that could detract from the remembrance of the two Confederate victories.

The production of sympathetic reminders by UDC and other Confederate groups altered and imbued the landscape and experience of the park with a sort of geography of memory. Civil War author Stuart McConnell noted, “having absorbed the postmodern embedded without embedding it in some other story, we are too often content to line the stories up next to each other, like pieces of a dream, without considering their interrelation.”²⁸ Monuments act with a sort of gravity upon those within their proximity, even if one does not stop to fully absorb the message. The physicality of these monuments and spaces is a show of strength, a demonstration of endurance, and a perpetuation of sympathy for the Lost Cause myth. The question as to the morality of whether to excise these monuments is beyond the scope of this article, however, it is important to keep in mind the history and motives of some of the allies called upon to help protect the buffer strips and the full context and content of what the buffer strip girdles.

The Many “Battles of Manassas”

In the period between the Manassas battlefield’s establishment as a national park in 1940 and the Marriott proposal to build a theme park in 1973, several developments

²⁷ Fahs and Waugh, *Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, 190.

²⁸ Stuart McConnell, Epilogue to *Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, edited by Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill, NC, The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 226–227.

threatened the preservation of the site. Often these threats are grouped together and referred to as the “third battle for Manassas.”²⁹ However, Edwin C. Bearss, Historian Emeritus for the National Park Service, refers to each skirmish distinctly and chronologically. In the foreword of *Battling for Manassas* he wrote:

Third Manassas was fought over the location of Interstate 66. Initial plans by the Bureau of Public Roads and the Virginia Department of Highways called for locating the four-lane limited access highway through the core of the park on a route adjacent to and parallel to route 29[...]
The fourth battle was precipitated when military veterans concerned with the need to expand Arlington National Cemetery lobbied William L. Scott, then the U.S. congressman, who represented the district in which the park was located [to create] an annex for Arlington National Cemetery on lands including in and adjacent to the Manassas battlefield.³⁰

These battles for Manassas provided training for organizing and toughened tactics on resistance to development. It also provided a time of pivoting leadership. Support for the park for the third battle for Manassas was rallied predominantly by the Park’s superintendent, Francis Wilshin. He worked tirelessly to assemble Civil War history organizations, such as the Civil War Round Tables, the local UDC, and other communities to push back against interior development from the Virginia Department of Highways and the Department of Defense. In addition speaking with local organizations, he gave interviews, authored articles and editorials, and ensured the development story was covered by radio and TV segments reaching a national audience. Yet, arguably his most enduring action was creating strong ties with the local community and

²⁹ Nolan Stout, “The Third Battle of Manassas: Historic Battlefield Lands on Endangered List,” *WTOP News*, May 12, 2022, <https://wtop.com/prince-william-county/2022/05/the-third-battle-of-manassas-historic-battlefield-lands-on-endangered-list/>.

³⁰ Edwin Bearss, “Foreword” in *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), xi.

converting local Catharpin resident Annie Snyder to the cause of the park's protection.

Annie Snyder and the SBC

Elizabeth Anne “Annie” Delp Snyder was a groundbreaking woman of intensity whose ability to grassroots organize proved pivotal in the preservation of Manassas battlefield. Withdrawing from law school, she was one of the first women to join and graduate from Officer Candidate School in the Marine Corps during World War II, where she acted as a recruiter convincing other women to join the service.³¹ Following the war she and her husband relocated from Pennsylvania to a 180-acre angus farm just to the east of Manassas battlefield where the Bull Run stream trickled through their property. After her wartime service in the Marine Corps, Snyder focused on expanding justice at home by challenging the Massive Resistance policy in Virginia which prevented school integration.³²

Her interest in preservation of the Civil War buffer strip was originally kindled by Superintendent Wilshin, who gave her a private tour of Manassas battlefield.³³ She described the effects of the battlefield upon her imagination: “when we first moved here it was easy to imagine at night that you heard the creaking of leather saddles as General Longstreet's advanced guards arrived to help Stonewall Jackson as he held on to that railroad embankment over there.”³⁴ When the expansion of I-66 threatened to cleave Manassas battlefield in two she put the skills of persuasion she had cultivated while in the Marines to work in the form of an intensive letter writing campaign. The

³¹ “Elizabeth ‘Annie’ Snyder,” *Changemakers*, accessed November 26, 2023, <https://edu.lva.virginia.gov/changemakers/items/show/184>.

³² “Elizabeth ‘Annie’ Snyder,” *Changemakers*.

³³ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 59.

³⁴ Richard Pearson, “Annie Snyder Dies at 80,” *Washington Post*, July 22, 2002,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2002/07/22/annie-snyder-dies-at-80/31a81805-eb20-4c5a-92a6-a4e6f7e25ecc/>.

result was success—the federal highway engineers replanned the road development along a more southerly route.³⁵ The subsequent fourth battle concerning blocking the use of portions of the battlefield as an annex for the Arlington Cemetery was also blocked—a success for Wilshin and Snyder, however, it resulted in Wilshin’s transfer to a post in Washington, DC. Henceforth the leadership around protecting the park and its buffer strip rested with local community activists such as Snyder, Betty Rankin, Ed Lekander, and others, collectively known as the Friends of the Park.

The Friends of the Park, later called the Save the battlefield Committee, was created during the fourth battle. The creation of the SBC provided a way to organize effectively against the multiple land development projects that continued to threaten the Manassas battlefield. This group of concerned citizens created an outsized response to these threats through several techniques: local door-to-door advocacy, engagement with local and national news outlets, letter writing campaigns, involving historical societies, allyship with ahistorical associations, courting powerful allies, bringing lawsuits, and imploring Congress to do its federally mandated duty of protecting the national battlefield. The SBC created a legacy that impacted Manassas Battlefield and advocated for protecting other Civil War parks’ buffer strips, such as at Johnston’s Island Prison in Ohio, Honey Springs Battlefield in Oklahoma, and West Virginia’s Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

The Marriott Proposal

Whereas the planning of I-66 and use of Manassas battlefield land for the cemetery would have affected the *interior* character of the battlefield, the battles that occurred next concerned the border land: the buffer strip. In 1973 the hotel company Marriott “acquired a 513 acre site” in Prince William County touching the southern border of the Manassas battlefield and proposed “multiple development[s] including a

³⁵ Pearson, “Annie Snyder Dies at 80.”

Theme Park to be called Marriott's Great America."³⁶ The theme of the amusement park was to coincide with the 1976 Bicentennial. The proposal offered "to re-create six historic ideas that reflected the idea of "Great America" and to create 'a specialty shopping center,' 'hotel,' and 'industrial park.'"³⁷ Soon after, the Prince William County Board of Supervisors had approved the plans for the amusement park. The Board was enthusiastic about the project as an income generator and source of tax revenue to offset the stress of Prince William County's recent population growth on county services. However, not everyone was so pleased.

In a *Washington Post* article, Mrs. Mary Goddard Zon (former research director of the AFL-CIO) wrote scathingly about Marriott's proposal, describing it as: "the Great American Traffic Jam," "the Great American Display of Hamburger Stands and Gas Stations," "the Great American Tax Break," "the Great American Profit Motive," and added that, "if a wax museum is contemplated [at the theme park], effigies of the Prince William County Supervisors should be included, more for pity than in anger, personifying well-meaning stewards of the Great American Land Rape."³⁸ Zon had touched on elements that became frequent burrs latched onto the Marriott proposal: increased traffic, the incongruity of hamburger stands with the battlefield, and the perception of County Supervisors as profit-obsessed. Annie Snyder and the SBC meanwhile allied with the Prince William League for the Protection of Natural Resources—an approximately 100-person civic organization—to create a unified local response to the proposal.

The SBC and friends reasoned that the Manassas battlefield would incur a negative effect from Marriott's proposed theme park. The SBC argued in addition to the "added buildings, the

³⁶ "Proposed Report for Marriott Theme Park," 1973, box 4, folder 1, Annie Snyder Collection, Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection.

³⁷ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 86.

³⁸ Mary Goddard Zon, "A Vision of Marriott's Great America Amusement Park," *Washington Post*, February 27, 1973.

county would experience rising traffic, noise and air pollution, and the general degradation of the aesthetic and historic aspects of this section of the county,” and that the “visual impact of [a] projected 350- [foot] tall structure” (possibly the proposed hotel) would hurt the viewshed of the park.³⁹ These views articulated the effect development proximate to parks can have on a historic location and illustrated why buffer strips occupy a particularly complicated position. In short, the buffer strip would have been penetrated resulting in a degraded battleground experience. The integrity of the character of the battlefield would have deteriorated, first from the disruption of loud construction, then from the everyday operation of a nearby theme park.

The Annie Snyder Collection retains a copy of the 1973 “Proposed Report for Marriott Theme Park” equipped with multiple underlinings, penciled-in notes written in tight cursive, and question marks scattered amongst the margins presumably by Snyder herself. The Marriott report with the embedded responses and highlights by the SBC provides an insight into what it found to be particularly egregious about the proposed theme park and its proximity to the Manassas battlefield.

Figure 1 shows the proximity of the Great America theme park in relation to the Manassas battle park. Not only would the proposed buildings share a partial border with the park, but the park would also share road usage of US Route 29 and Virginia State Route 622. In extreme circumstances, this would have directly impacted the amount of traffic in front of and through the Manassas battlefield, which would have resulted in not only a bottleneck of visitors, but also increased noise and air pollution. The “feasible alternative” to traffic that the Marriott report suggested interchange and was met with skeptical questioning from the SBC about where the money to build such an interchange would come from.

In figure 2, Snyder keyed in on the lack of information about Marriott’s proposed I-66 interchange: “Their alternate –

³⁹ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 88.

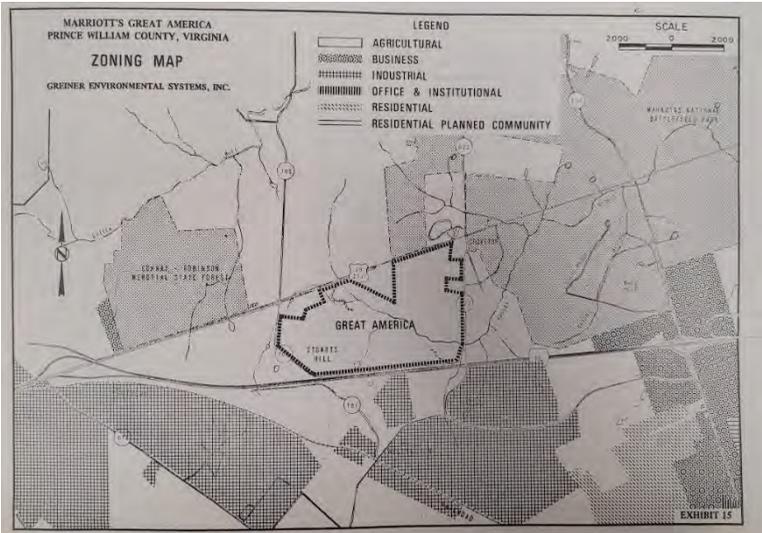


Figure 1. The Great America proposed zoning map and its proximity to the Manassas Battlefield and Stuart's Hill. Photograph by author. Greiner Environmental Systems, INC. "Marriott's Great America Zoning Map," Map, Box 4, Folder 1, 1973, Annie Snyder Collection. (Courtesy of the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection.)

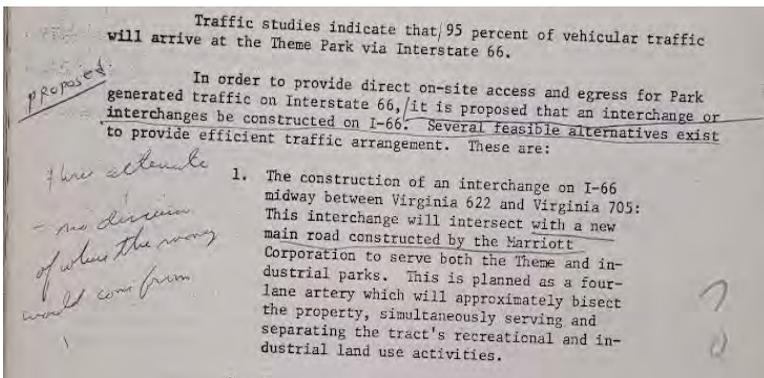


Figure 2. Annie Snyder marginalia on the Marriott report questioning the feasibility of an I-66 interchange. Photograph by author. "Proposed Report for Marriott Theme Park," Annie Snyder Collection. (Courtesy of the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection.)

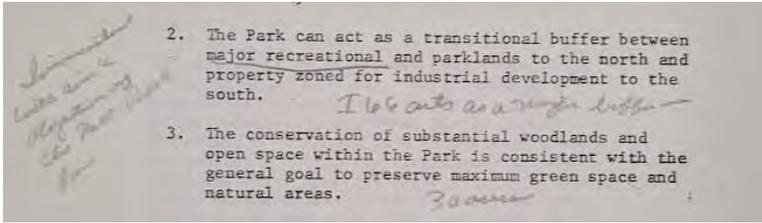


Figure 3. SBC margin notes reading, “Inconsistent with local aim + allegation of the Natl. Battle. Park” and “I-66 as a magic buffer.” Photograph by author. “Proposed Report for Marriott Theme Park,” Annie Snyder Collection. (Courtesy of the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection.)

no decision of where the money would come from.”⁴⁰ Snyder’s large, scrawled question mark in the margins emphasized her frustration at the lack of information. The Marriott report put forward other potential solutions for the community’s reluctance, such as the proposed addition of vaguely-defined green spaces. The discerning pen of Snyder continued to be unconvinced.

The underline of “major recreational” in figure 3 demonstrated the misunderstanding on behalf of the Marriott company of the function of the Manassas Battlefield Park. In referring to the battlefield merely as “recreational and parklands,” Marriott failed to recognize the battlefield’s historic significance and the NPS’s mission to interpret the Civil War for subsequent generations. Snyder’s notes confirmed as much: “Inconsistent with local aim + allegation of the Natl. Battle. Park.”⁴¹ Some locals agreed with the SBC’s fears that the theme park would “degrade the historic character of the area by attracting traffic (with its noise and pollution) and unsightly secondary business—motels, fast-food shops, gas stations.”⁴² But following the report there was a shift in local perception to the report as inadequate. Now, “opponents sought to defeat the park by attacking studies conducted for

⁴⁰ “Proposed Report for Marriott Theme Park.” Annie Snyder Collection.

⁴¹ “Proposed Report for Marriott Theme Park,” Annie Snyder Collection.

⁴² Ron Shaffer, “Pr. William Backs Park By Marriott: Pr. William Approves Great America Park,” *Washington Post*, April 6, 1973.

Marriott, calling them inaccurate and incomplete at assessing the park's impact on the roads, the economy and the environment."⁴³ Instead of having a calming effect, Marriott's incomplete and wishful report frustrated the public, locals, and park officials.

The SBC sought partnerships with regional Civil War Round Tables (CWRTs) to bolster support against the theme park. The CWRTs are independent organizations that exist across the world that promote Civil War education and preservation. Virginia, Maryland, and District of Columbia-based CWRTs eagerly joined the fight to protect Manassas Battlefield. The CWRTs were natural allies of Civil War battlefields protection groups, often sponsoring annual trips for their members to various sites and engaging frequently with ongoing historic preservation efforts of battlefields. In 1973, the members of the regional CWRTs encouraged Congress to hold hearings on the outcomes of the development near the park and to ensure the character of the park would not be damaged.⁴⁴

At the hearing, Mr. Frederick Simpich from the Alexandria and District of Columbia CWRT noted that he had requested "independent professionals to examine some of the material put forward by the Marriott Corporation in support of its assurances" and was advised, "that the Marriott studies they have examined are deceptive, incomplete, and designed to emphasize benefits without exposing countervailing detriments."⁴⁵ Again, the idea of the imperfect and incomplete Marriott report proved to be a tough thorn to remove from Marriott's character. Former Manassas National Battlefield Superintendent Wilshin testified that the Marriott proposal would "introduce such a foreign element of noise and physical

⁴³ Shaffer, "Pr. William Backs Park By Marriott: Pr. William Approves Great America Park."

⁴⁴ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 92.

⁴⁵ *Hearing before the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs*, H441-16, General and Oversight Briefing Relating to Developments Near Manassas National Battlefield, 93rd Cong., 1st sess., April 3, 1973.

change of historic terrain as to gravely damage the interpretive and environmental interests of the park.”⁴⁶ Peter R. Borreli, the Eastern Representative for the national environmental organization the Sierra Club, also provided a witness statement on behalf of the park noting the distinctiveness of what Manassas battlefield captured which, unlike Gettysburg, “is a unique combination of open space, serenity, and the history that once occurred there.”⁴⁷

This emphasis on peacefulness tied into the idea of commemoration in a statement by Raymond V. Humphreys of Manassas: “it was here that the chains of slavery were stricken from the arms of men and human dignity became a reality. A prerequisite to appreciating the vastness of this scene surely must be silence and reverence.”⁴⁸ Mr. Humphreys’s testimony at that hearing went beyond being distressed over the physical aesthetics of the increased noise, traffic, and disruption to the viewshed. Rather, he was alarmed by what he identified as an inappropriate “infringement of crass commercial enterprise” on such historically significant ground.⁴⁹ The intrusion is the final piece in the buffer strip phenomenon, and it is the most difficult to define: the cultural aspect. Portraying the physical disruption as antithetical to the cultural values of the park, Mr. Humphreys went further:

The land within this Battlefield would be holy if but one person had laid down his life in defense of the rights of his fellow man. But Bull run and Manassas were not so commonplace. Not one, not one hundred, but thousands of Americans poured out their blood for what today millions of souls enjoy and demonstrate to an eager world to be the joys of freedom and dignity.⁵⁰

Proper reverence for American historical culture demanded that proper environmental factors follow: protection from

⁴⁶ HR 441-16, *Hearing*, 84.

⁴⁷ HR 441-16, *Hearing*, 86.

⁴⁸ HR 441-16, *Hearing*, 94.

⁴⁹ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 92.

⁵⁰ H441-16, *Hearing*, 94.

noise, traffic pollution, looming structures, and commercial triviality. To the minds of the SBC and its cohort, resistance to the Marriott proposal was formed in the idea that proper respect for this culturally significant historic site required a buffer strip.

In addition to shielding the physical conditions of the park, the buffer strip would protect the park's military, environmental, and historic cultural heritage. The Historic Sites Act of 1935 and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 created the legal structure to protect and create public education programs of federally-controlled historic sites like Manassas battlefield.⁵¹ The federal protection and the identified purpose of creating the park codified these cultural goals through faithfully maintaining the battlefield, providing interpretive education to visitors, and preserving the history of America's Civil War. To those testifying on behalf of the Manassas battlefield, flooding the buffer strip with commercial development was as much a violation, if not a graver defilement, as increased noise pollution from traffic. The contrast of colorful "cartoon characters like Tweety Bird and Daffy Duck" that were planned to "guide visitors through the park" in such proximity to the solemn Stonewall Monument likely aggravated groups like the CWRT with their frivolity.⁵² As Annie Snyder and her cohort were venting their frustration, Marriott cleared its final hurdle with the county by conceding to pay for an I-66 interchange. Meanwhile, Congress directed an "environmental impact statement to be filed for the interchange similar to that required for federally aided highway projects."⁵³ The request for a detailed and time-consuming environmental impact statement proved to be the final nail in the coffin for the Marriott project in Prince William County,

⁵¹ "National Historic Preservation Act - Historic Preservation," National Park Service, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/national-historic-preservation-act.htm>.

⁵² Ken Ringle, "Va. Park Wins Tie To I-66: Major Obstacle To Marriott's Plan Removed," *Washington Post*, November 20, 1974.

⁵³ Ken Ringle, "Va. Park Wins Tie To I-66: Major Obstacle To Marriott's Plan Removed."

and in 1977 the hotel company shelved the “Great American” theme park for good.

**The William Center Fiasco—
“Booking a Roller Derby in the Sistine Chapel.”⁵⁴**

If the Marriott theme park skirmish had solidified the organization and leadership of the SBC, then the William Center fight established the SBC’s tactics. This time, the developer was local, centered in neighboring Fairfax, Virginia. The Hazel/Peterson Companies acquired the tract of land from Marriott’s contracted seller, Centennial Development Corporation, in 1985. The same year, Hazel/Peterson asked the Prince William County Board of Supervisors to consider rezoning the property for what was termed a “planned mixed-use district (PMD).”⁵⁵ PMD zoning allowed for a “mix of commercial, office and residential development” to “create an integrated space” where consumers could live, work, park, and play.⁵⁶ This type of integrated planned community was the calling card of the Hazel/Peterson Companies which, during the 1970s,

developed several master-planned communities including Burke Centre, Franklin Farm and Centre Ridge along with the Tysons-Mclean Office Park. Next came Fair Lakes, which required the construction of the first interchange of the Fairfax County Parkway and Route 66 and is widely credited for transforming Fairfax County from a bedroom

⁵⁴ “Civil War Battlefield Loses Ground to New Mall,” *National Parks*, May/June, 1988, 10.

⁵⁵ Stella Dawson, “Hazel/Peterson To Buy I-66 Tract From Centennial,” *Washington Post*, December 28, 1985, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/real-estate/1985/12/28/hazel-peterson-to-buy-i-66-tract-from-centennial/0ff5d5c0-8fc2-4be8-90dc-6c2a0255a5d8/>.

⁵⁶ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 123.

community to a serious center of business activity and commerce.⁵⁷

Milton (Milt) Peterson and John Tilghman (Til) Hazel Jr. who were the heads of the Hazel/Peterson Companies, both shared a vision of what they considered to be civic-minded real estate development working to shape and enrich the communities of Northern Virginia.

Til Hazel, “the crew-cut developer with a Harvard law degree and slow Virginia drawl,” had originally been an attorney.⁵⁸ He started his career with the US Army’s Judge Advocate General’s Corps in the 1950s, then shifted to being a land use attorney in northern Virginia before he formed a powerful partnership with Milt Peterson.⁵⁹ By the time he acquired the land in Prince William County, Hazel already had a track record of standing up against anti-growth activists in Fairfax as both an attorney for developers and as a land speculator himself. Originally, development of the land near Manassas Battlefield, which Hazel rechristened as the William Center, was pitched as “an office park of about 275 acres; a residential neighborhood consisting of 975 townhouses, garden apartments, and single-family homes; and a small shopping center.”⁶⁰ Hazel/Peterson even took the Prince William Board of Supervisors on a field trip to Fair Lakes community in nearby Fairfax County to show how a mixed-use zoning area, if thought through intentionally, could result

⁵⁷ “Milton V. Peterson,” Corporate, Peterson Cos, accessed November 12, 2023, <https://www.petersoncos.com/team/milton-v-peterson/>.

⁵⁸ John F. Harris, “History and Politics Clash at Mall Site in Manassas”, *Washington Post*, June 19, 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1988/06/19/history-and-politics-clash-at-mall-site-in-manassas/78cae5c4-485b-4289-9035-b77e5465d6a8/>.

⁵⁹ John F. Harris, “History and Politics Clash at Mall Site in Manassas.”

⁶⁰ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 125.

in a “leafy, park-like environment.”⁶¹ Such a development was an improvement over the previous Marriott proposal, and although the water and sewage lines and the I-66 interchange would still need to be constructed, the Board of Supervisors supposed Hazel and Peterson had the political connections and money to achieve their goal via proffer agreement, in which they would pay for the developments, rather than the county. The Board also considered the development to be “a major milestone in the economic development of the county” and necessary for tax revenue for public infrastructure, considering the near doubling of the county's population in the prior 20 years.⁶²

The Northwest Prince William Citizens Association (NWPWCA), a local citizens organization involved in monitoring land development, “persuaded Hazel/Peterson to decrease the number of residential units.”⁶³ Meanwhile, the developers made several other concessions to various local organizations and “with these concessions in hand and knowing they had made the best of a bad situation, the NWPWCA spoke in favor of the William Center rezoning.”⁶⁴ Annie Snyder, a member of the NWPWCA, lodged no major complaints at the time and agreed that a housing development was the best option for potential developments. The Manassas battlefield superintendent at the time also endorsed the rezoning.

The local goodwill toward the project was short-lived because in January 1988 Hazel/Peterson suddenly announced it had joined with the DeBartolo Company to build a regional shopping mall at William Center. This surprise shift to add a major mall at the site was the catalyst for local antagonism

⁶¹ Russ Banham, *The Fight for Fairfax: A Struggle for a Great American County*, First Edition. (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 2009), 209.

⁶² Margaret Edds, “It’s War: Builders Advance on Heritage,” *Virginian-Pilot*, April 25, 1988, Annie Snyder Collection.

⁶³ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 130.

⁶⁴ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, 130.

toward the project. Snyder summed up the shocking move: “they dropped a bomb on this county.”⁶⁵ The SBC, with Snyder’s leadership, reactivated and began recruiting historically-inclined political supporters in Congress to oppose the mall addition. Meanwhile, the Board of Supervisors in Prince William County continued to support Hazel/Peterson with its proposed new development. While local opponents of the mall began to voice their opinions, Snyder returned to the strategy that was effective in the Marriott proposal battle. She wrote to numerous organizations and within the first few weeks “among the groups that [...] signed on to block the mall were the Civil War Roundtable, the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the National Parks and Conservation Association.”⁶⁶

Figure 4 shows a political cartoon from the *Weekly Messenger* in which Hazel/Peterson is depicted as a smarmy magician pulling over a trick on the local yokels (the Board of Supervisors). The Supervisors meanwhile are illustrated as enamored and fail to notice the cheating cards falling out of the magician’s sleeve, nor the dead rabbit he has pulled out of his hat. The comic artist captured the public’s perception of Hazel/Peterson as a “quick change and fancy footwork artist” following the surprise mall announcement.⁶⁷

Local newspapers vented the frustrations of those opposed to the mall about the perceived sleight of hand from the Hazel/Peterson developers. From the *Potomac News* the figure 5 political cartoon lampooned the future Hazel/Peterson had in store for Northern Virginia: “D.C. traffic backed up to North Carolina,” “Massive Domed Convenience Store,” “toxic waste dump to battlefield” and a skeleton waiting

⁶⁵ John F. Harris, “Manassas Mall Plan Pits Future Versus Past,” *Washington Post*, February 14, 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1988/02/14/manassas-mall-plan-pits-future-versus-past/f1e4f812-9046-4418-a7d9-6a20b364e073/>.

⁶⁶ Harris, “Manassas Mall Plan Pits Future Versus Past.”

⁶⁷ Lewis, “Aroun’ the County and Under the Bridge,” illustration, Annie Snyder Collection.



Figure 4. A Weekly Messenger political cartoon on the William Center. Photograph by author. Lewis, " 'Around the County and Under the Bridge.' " Box 2, Folder 35, illustration, February 10, 1988, Annie Snyder Collection. (Courtesy of the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection.)



Figure 5. A political cartoon from the Potomac News. Photograph by author. Chris Obrion, "Prince William in the 21st Century," Box 2, Folder 35, February 26, 1988, illustration, February 26, 1988, Annie Snyder Collection. (Courtesy of the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection.)

fruitlessly for the Springfield Metro expansion.⁶⁸ The good faith that Hazel/Peterson had cultivated for the project had soured. In a *Washington Post* article, even Til Hazel admitted, “The fat was in the fire.”⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Hazel/Peterson construction at William Center continued around the clock.

The SBC continued to adhere to the ideals it articulated against the Marriott proposal: the proximity of the William Center *with* the shopping mall was tantamount to an invasion of the battlefield. Unlike the previous fight however, the character of this battle was on a national and even international scale. Annie Snyder relied first and foremost on written correspondence in order to bolster support for the Save the Battlefield Committee.⁷⁰ Coining phrases like “DON’T MALL THE BATTLEFIELD!” and “Stand with the Virginians!” the SBC wrote to local and national newspapers and encouraged supporters to write to their political representatives. In every letter the SBC sent out, it also provided a section with instructions on how to donate money to the cause against Hazel/Peterson. The funds were not only to maintain the cost of stamps, printing, and envelopes (which were often provided by local businesses that believed in the cause), but ultimately to bring a lawsuit against the development of the mall. Additionally, at the bottom of every letter mailed out there was also a serrated tearaway section in which correspondents could provide their address to join the SBC and receive updates on the mall fight.

Figure 6 shows the letterhead and logo of the SBC, which depicted the famous Confederate and Union generals who were at the two battles as “PROMINENT CITIZENS WHO OPPOSED” the mall.⁷¹ Co-opting these historic figures for its purposes, the SBC placed their supporters into the company of important figures from the Civil War such as Robert E. Lee,

⁶⁸ Chris Obrion, “Prince William in the 21st Century,” illustration, Annie Snyder Collection.

⁶⁹ Harris, “History and Politics Clash at Mall Site in Manassas.”

⁷⁰ The Save the Battlefield Committee became the Save the Battlefield Coalition at this time.

⁷¹ Snyder, “Save the Battlefield Coalition Letter to Parade Magazine,” Annie Snyder Collection.

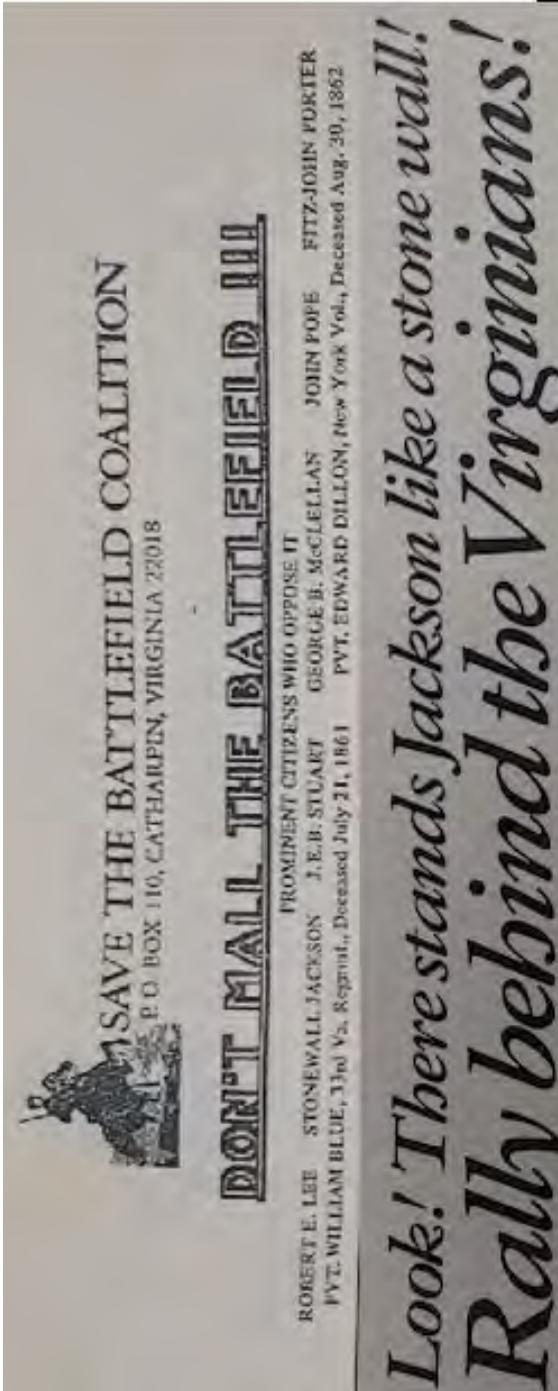


Figure 6. Official letterhead and logo of the SBC from Annie Snyder's correspondence. Photograph by author. Annie Snyder, "Save the Battlefield Coalition Letter to Parade Magazine," Box 2, Folder 1, October 16, 1990, Annie Snyder Collection. (Courtesy of the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection).

George B, McClellan, and Stonewall Jackson. In addition to engaging with individuals, the SBC invited collaboration with several local and national preservation groups, historical societies, environmental groups, Civil War enthusiasts, military groups, political allies, and anti-growth organizations. Many of these nationwide organizations had a hierarchical structure of communication, which made dissemination of information on the battlefield fight to geographically separated smaller groups easier.

Again, the SBC courted the Round Tables but this time through the Civil War Round Table Associates, the "national umbrella organization, formed in 1968 to provide an informational clearing house for all the Civil War Round Table Groups."⁷² The CWRT Associates published a recurring newsletter called the CWRT Digest that was "devoted to news of RT's and historic preservation," and which had a circulation of over 125 other Round Tables scattered around the globe.⁷³ The connection to the CWRT alone garnered troves of letters of support and funds to support the SBC. In a letter from June 1, 1988 the Western Reserve CWRT president wrote the mall construction would "not only hurt the overall quality and appearance of this significant land" resulting in a "traffic problem," but more importantly that, "the countless numbers of soldiers who fell on the field during the two battles, that still remain today, deserve more than to be bulldozed up for a shopping mall."⁷⁴ The concerns espoused about the physical impression the mall would have on the battlefield, traffic, and reduction of appearance, were classic buffer strip issues. But what was more was the cultural concept now being adopted: that a mall so close to the resting place of thousands of Civil War dead was sacrilege. The corresponding secretary for the Connecticut Norwich Civil War Round Table emphasized the

⁷² Jerry Russell, "Civil War Round Table Associates" (Civil War RT.), Box 2, Folder 1, Annie Snyder Collection.

⁷³ Jerry Russell, "Civil War Round Table Associates."

⁷⁴ Jeff Kinsley, "Western Reserve Civil War Round Table," Box 2, Folder 22, June 1, 1989, Annie Snyder Collection.

mall “will have an impact not unlike the operation of a year-around [sic] garage sale adjacent to the Lincoln Memorial.”⁷⁵ The proximity of the mall to the Manassas battlefield where the blood of tens of thousands had spilled was antagonistic to the purpose of the park. Consistently the narrative moved beyond the impact of the physical qualities of views and noise and toward identifying the historic significance of the battlefield and how a shopping mall nearby undermined the cultural character of the site. In July 1988, Scott A. Cummings of the 3rd Michigan Volunteer Infantry, Inc., penned to the SBC, “men died over this field and in respect of this hallowed ground this site should be purchased by the federal government and turned over to the National Park Service to be added to the Manassas Battlefield Park.”⁷⁶ Other correspondents felt that Hazel/Peterson ought to return to the original plan that excluded the mall, but with more assurances for wider buffers or else find a different location altogether.

In addition to the societies that considered themselves broadly interested in Civil War historic preservation and education, the SBC also found support in organizations that specialized in the memory of the veterans of the Civil War. The SBC collaborated with Confederate and Union veterans’ societies such as The Confederate High Command, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Sons of the Confederate Veterans, and the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, against the mall at William Center.⁷⁷ These organizations (figure 7), unlike the CWRTs, are motivated by protecting the heritage and legacy of Confederate and Union veterans.

The SBC did not view support from the Confederate organizations with a critical eye, rather it had no issue appropriating symbols such as the Stonewall Memorial to make

⁷⁵ Herb S. Crumb, “Norwich Civil War Round Table,” 1988, Box 2, Folder 22, Annie Snyder Collection.

⁷⁶ Scott A. Cummings, “3rd Michigan Volunteer Infantry Company A, INC.” July 27, 1988, Box 2, Folder 22, Annie Snyder Collection.

⁷⁷ “Organizational Letters of Support”, Box 2, Folder 22, Annie Snyder Collection.



Figure 7. Seals of Confederate and Union groups that lent aid to the SBC. Photograph by author. “Organizational Letters of Support,” Box 2, Folder 22, Annie Snyder Collection. (Courtesy of the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection.)

its point: the battlefield was America’s history. By engaging with both sides of the Civil War historic societies the SBC cast a broad net for allies: just as it co-opted Stonewall Jackson as a figure of resistance without the historic trappings of Confederacy, it invoked the names of the Union Generals on their letterhead. The inclusion of both Union and Confederate organizations was a callback to how the originator of the park, George Carr Round, envisioned Manassas battlefield: as a reunion place for healing between the two veteran groups.⁷⁸ Whether or not the inclusion of the Confederate memorial groups was prudent, it was nevertheless highly effective for the SBC’s cause. Its broad-based coalition focused on the goal of stopping the development without considering the impact of their relationship with one another.

The SBC expanded its correspondence to organizations beyond those only interested in the historical aspect of the battlefield. By June, 92 associations had signed on to support the Manassas battlefield. While the majority *were* history-related organizations, there was also representation from civic

⁷⁸ “History Spotlight: Manassas Peace Jubilee,” *Prince William Living* (blog), July 15, 2023, <https://princewilliamliving.com/history-spotlight-manassas-peace-jubilee/>.

ASSOCIATIONS JOINING BATTLE by JUNE 15, 1988	
1 THE NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, WASH., D.C.	47 THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF NEW YORK, INC., NY, NY
2 NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, WASH., D.C.	48 THE NORWICH CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, NORWICH, NY
3 PRESERVATION ACTION, WASH., D.C.	49 THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF KANSAS CITY, KANSAS
4 CONSERVATION FOUNDATION, WASH., D.C.	50 CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF LONG BEACH, CA
5 NATIONAL CENTER FOR PRESERVATION LAW, WASH., D.C.	51 THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, MARYLAND
6 EDUCATION FOR SCENIC BEAUTY, WASH., D.C.	52 JACKSON CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI
7 CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE ASSOCIATES, LITTLE ROCK, AR	53 HICKORYTOWN CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, HICKORYTOWN, MO
8 RESERVE OFFICERS ASSOC. OF THE UNITED STATES (OUSA)	54 LITTLE ROCK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS
9 AMERICA'S MILITARY PAST SOCIETY, D.C.	55 THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF TEXAS, FORT WORTH, TEXAS
10 AMERICAN CIVIL WAR COMMEMORATIVE COMMITTEE	56 ROCKRIDGE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, BROWNSBURG, VA
11 BATTLEFIELD COMPANY (THE ASSOCIATION)	57 BLAINSVILLE CIVIL WAR CLUB, BLAINSVILLE, PA
12 CHARITLBY BATTLEFIELD ASSOCIATION, CHARITLBY, VA	58 WESTERN RESERVE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, ROCKY RIVER, OHIO
13 THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF CIVIL WAR SITES	59 WILMINGTON CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, WILMINGTON, DE
14 THE U.S.C. - MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER, MA	60 THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
15 THE HISTORIC DUMFRIES ASSOCIATION	61 CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF LOS ANGELES, LOS ANGELES, CA
16 THE DUMFRIES TRAVEL GARDEN CLUB	62 CAPITOL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, ALBANY, NY
17 THE PR. WPA WILDFLOWER ASSOCIATION	63 GREATER BOSTON CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, BOSTON, MA
18 THE PR. WPA GENEOLOGICAL SOCIETY	64 CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, WROSTER, MA
19 THE HISTORIC CENTREVILLE ASSOCIATION	65 THE FIRST MICHIGAN SHARPSHOOTERS, SOUTHGATE, MICHIGAN
20 THE CIVIL WAR HISTORY GROUP OF CAPTAIN COMMERCIO	66 17TH MICHIGAN VOLUNTEER INFANTRY, WARREN, MICHIGAN
21 THE U. S. C. LA SALLE CORRETT PICKETT CHAPTER, AKRON, OHIO	67 ABRAHAM LINCOLN CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, WEST BLOOFIELD, MICHIGAN
22 THE JOHN PELHAM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, ROBERTSON, ALA	68 THE SOCIETY OF CIVIL WAR CORRESPONDENTS, BROOK, NY
23 MICHIGAN VOLUNTEER INFANTRY, WARREN, MICHIGAN	69 NORTH SOUTH SKIRMISH ASSOCIATION, MANDALIA, OHIO
24 V.M. I. CADET CORPS, NEW MARKET, VA	70 THE SOUTH FLORIDA RIFLES, MIAMI SHORES, FLA
25 FRIENDS OF CULPEPPER, CULPEPPER, VA	71 DEPT. OF INDIANA, SONS OF UNION VETERANS, RICHMOND, INDIANA
26 FARGOUST JUNCES, FARGOUST, TN	72 THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF NORTHERN NEW JERSEY, EAST ORANGE, NJ
27 SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS, CAMP RD, CAMDEN, S.C.	73 OHIO VALLEY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, ST. JOHNSVILLE, OHIO
28 ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED FEDERAL EMPLOYEES - CHAPTER 556, MANASSAS, VA	74 SOUTHERN SKIRMISH ASSOCIATION, SURREY, TN
29 VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE RECREATION CENTER, LEWISTON, NY	75 ATLANTA CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, DALLAS, GEORGIA
30 RESERVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION AND FORMER CHAPTER 1 OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	76 LYNCHBURG CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, LYNCHBURG, VA
31 HAWDOCK'S MEN OF HAVERDORP, HAVERDORP, PA	77 SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS, SHEPHERD, TEXAS
32 FAIRFAX AUDUBON SOCIETY, FAIRFAX, VA	78 SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR, SCANTON, PA
33 SONS OF UNION VETERANS, DEPT. OF INDIANA, CENTERVILLE, INDIANA	79 MICHIGAN REGIMENT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, SOUTH LYON, MICHIGAN
34 VIRGINIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION, ALEXANDRIA, VA	80 MARSHALL REGIONAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY, MARSHALL, VA
35 RIVERPORT GARDEN CLUB, ALEXANDRIA, VA	81 NATIONAL PARKS MID-ATLANTIC COUNCIL, LYNCHBURG, VA
36 SOCIETY OF FORT REPUBLIC PRESERVATIONISTS, FORT REPUBLIC, VA	82 LEE CHAPTER, UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY, PURCELLVILLE, VA
37 JOHN PELHAM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, HARRISON, VA	83 CHESTER DISTRICT GENEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, RICHMOND, SOUTH CAROLINA
38 FRIENDS OF FORT WARD, ALEXANDRIA, VA	84 21ST GEORGIA VOLUNTEER INFANTRY, ALEXANDRIA, VA
39 CHESTER DISTRICT GENEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, RICHMOND, SOUTH CAROLINA	85 FRIENDS OF FORT WARD, ALEXANDRIA, VA
40 LEE CHAPTER OF THE UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY, PURCELLVILLE, VA	86 NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
41 WILLIAMSBURG CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, WILLIAMSBURG, VA	87 COMPANY H, 119TH NEW YORK VOLUNTEERS HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, ROCKAWAY, NY
42 HOUSTON CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, HOUSTON, TEXAS	88 CHAYSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VA, INDEPENDENCE, VA
43 THE INDIANAPOLIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, INDIANAPOLIS, IN	89 CHAPTER 238 - UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY, WACO, TX
44 CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF SOUTHERN FAIRFIELD COUNTY, ROWAYTON, CONN.	92 CINCINNATI CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE, CINCINNATI, OHIO
45 CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA, ALLENTOWN, PA	
46 CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF NORTHERN NEW JERSEY	

Figure 8. List of associations supporting SBC by June 15, 1988. Photograph by author. "SBC Associations Joining Battle" (June 15, 1988), Box 2, Folder 22, Annie Snyder Collection. (Courtesy of the Manassas National Battlefield Park Museum Collection.)

organizations, gardening societies, wildflower associations, birding groups, and trail associations as well as broad support from service members from various military branches (figure 8). Earlier in the year the NPS Director, William Penn Mott Jr. had stood at Manassas battlefield and laid out his worry of future threats for the Park Service: "in a world of increasing landscape fragmentation, and increasing alterations outside many nature preserve boundaries, including national parks, it is important that we recognize many of them for what they may become; habitat patches in a matrix of disturbed landscape, which could influence the viability of the biota within them."⁷⁹ The mentality of integration of environmental conservation and the holistic vision of the National Park is similar to how the agricultural buffer strip functions. Combining the importance of historical value with the notion of

⁷⁹ William Penn Mott, "Remarks by William Penn Mott, Jr. at the Fourteenth Annual Natural Areas Conference," *The George Wright Forum* 5, no. 4 (1988): 5.

environmental protection at Manassas Battlefield created a compelling buffer strip alliance. In this spirit the clubs, associations, and organizations that were concerned with wildflowers, birding, and animals became powerful bedfellows of the historic preservationists, creating a synthesis of what the battlefield represented. The mentality of integration flowered into a coalition of support which provided a wellspring of reasons the buffer strips should exist and be protected.

Additionally, social studies teachers across the country encouraged their students to write letters with their opinions on the mall issue. A sixth grader from California, Tony Toth, wrote with simple logic that if the mall was built, “my children and my children’s children will not be able to see how stupid slavery was.”⁸⁰ Other students were less concerned about the educational mission and were more unnerved by the proximity of a mall to where people had fought and died. Amber Fisher asked, “if you were there in the civil war [sic] would you like someone putting a mall on a person you know or like who died their [sic]?”⁸¹ The cultural conceptions of why battlefields should be preserved were being espoused by children. The SBC sought to coordinate this synthesis of cultural, environmental, historical, and military values and bore it down forcefully upon the Hazel/Peterson Companies. As efforts evolved, “Mrs. Snyder led the charge with her Save the Battlefield Coalition, which grew to more than 120 history and preservation groups. They gathered more than 80,000 petition signatures and won the backing of several congressional leaders.”⁸²

The winning strategy, however, did not consist of using public opinion to persuade the Hazel/Peterson Companies to return to the original development plan, but rather to convince Congress to acquire William Center land for the battlefield.

⁸⁰ “Tony Toth Letter to County Commissioners,” Box 5, Folder 14, April 3, 1988, Annie Snyder Collection.

⁸¹ “Amber Fisher Letter,” Box 5, Folder 22, Annie Snyder Collection.

⁸² Dennis McLellan, “Annie Snyder -- Saved Civil War Battlefield from Development,” *SFGATE*, August 3, 2002, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Annie-Snyder-saved-Civil-War-battlefield-from-2815263.php>.

Historian (and in the year following, Pulitzer Prize winner) James M. McPherson testified to the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks, and Forests on behalf of the Manassas Battlefield to support the federal government purchasing the land from Hazel/Peterson. McPherson explained the historic value of the land of the proposed William Center as having been “Lee's headquarters. It was also Stuart's headquarters and Longstreet's headquarters. Jackson spent a fair amount of time there as well. There were at one time or another over 40,000 troops, Federal and Confederate on this property during the course of the three days.”⁸³ Originally this land had been left out of Manassas Battlefield due to the historic significance of the land being based on the amount of fighting the parcel of land had seen. But McPherson’s testimony showed the fighting did not occur on this parcel due to the nature of it being occupied by the mass of Confederate forces as a headquarters. In the same hearing, Snyder passionately implored for the senators to heed “the pleas of thousands throughout the nation to save the Manassas battlefield from incompatible development.”⁸⁴ She also directed a specific threat to her own Virginia senator: “I have here, sir, 75,000 petitioners, Americans, one third in Virginia, 26,500, Senator Warner, to be exact, who are petitioning for redress of this grievance.”⁸⁵ The SBC’s persistent outreach was successful: it had received letters of support for its cause from every state in America, showing the nationwide reach of the issue. In the end, the federal government paid Hazel/Peterson \$134 million for the William Center tract and incorporated it into the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

Beyond William Center

The conclusion of the William Center battle was not an ideal solution to the buffer strip battle. While it was a clear victory

⁸³ *Hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Lands, National Parks and Forests*, HR 4526, Manassas National Battlefield Park Amendments of 1988, 100th Cong., 2d sess., 8 September 1988, 168.

⁸⁴ HR 2526, *Hearing*, 160.

⁸⁵ HR 2526, *Hearing*, 161.

for the SBC, which was able to add valuable historic lands to the park system at Manassas Battlefield, there remained no solution to the problem of borderland development. However, a useful toolset emerged during the William Center fight. Future buffer strip skirmishers could study the success of the organization of the SBC and the nation-wide reach of its mission statement to conserve battlefields. Charming historically-inclined political partners, allying with environmental organizations, the use of a massive letter writing campaign, and frequent engagement with the news media proved to be potent strategies to protect the buffer strip at Manassas.

Indeed, the SBC continued to advocate for other NPS Battlefields and for future Civil War site acquisition. Using her new bonafides from having defeated the Hazel/Peterson Companies, Annie Snyder shifted to helping West Virginia's Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. In a letter drafted Christmas Eve 1990, she implored US Senator Robert Byrd that Harpers Ferry be "spared commercial and residential complexes that have no more business being constructed [...] then [sic] they did on a tract of Manassas battlefield two years ago."⁸⁶ In addition to advocating for Harpers Ferry she encouraged the protection of Honey Springs Battlefield in Oklahoma and a Civil War prison on Johnson's Island in Ohio. The SBC also successfully argued for a bill that would "enable the US treasury to mint coins commemorating the Civil War," the proceeds of which would "go to save endangered battlefields."⁸⁷

Further fervor for battlefield protection came from the release of Ken Burns's popular documentary *The Civil War* in September 1990. The *Christian Science Monitor* captured the impact: "The Civil War – the most watched series ever aired on public television" with a "record-breaking PBS viewership of 14 million" wowed viewers with its high-powered cast,

⁸⁶ Annie Snyder, "Annie Snyder to Robert C. Byrd," Box 2, Folder 3, December 24, 1990, Annie Snyder Collection.

⁸⁷ "Annie Snyder Letter to Friends of Honey Springs Battlefield Park," Box 2, Folder 7, July 9, 1990, Annie Snyder Collection.

authenticity, and a “treasure trove of archival photographs and war relics.”⁸⁸ The presumed public appetite for Civil War content later provided the Save the Battlefield Coalition with another serious fight, this time against a proposal from Walt Disney for a theme park in neighboring Haymarket, Virginia. While the theme park would have affected roads within the park and increased traffic it was not a buffer strip skirmish and is therefore beyond the scope of this article.

Buffer strip battles around the Manassas Battlefield are ongoing. In 2024, the development that threatens Manassas buffer strip is the Prince William (PW) Digital Gateway. The purpose of the PW Digital Gateway is to connect four geographically separated areas across the county to “create a technology corridor along Pageland Lane for the development of data center uses.”⁸⁹ At the epicenter of this plan is the creation of data centers, some of which are slated to be built on the periphery of Manassas Battlefield. Data centers are enormous buildings which house “servers, digital storage equipment, and network infrastructure for the purpose of large-scale data processing and data storage.”⁹⁰ These structures are necessary to support many new and essential data functions from cloud-based data storage to artificial intelligence.⁹¹ Their potential emplacement near the battlefield constitutes a buffer strip threat.

The PW Gateway has made significant progress in bringing data centers to the county. At the Manassas neighborhood of Great Oak, the Amazon Web Services data centers loom over

⁸⁸ Bruce Manuel, “Ken Burns: Making History Watchable: The Man Who Filmed TV’s ‘The Civil War’ Says It Tapped into an American Hunger for Self-Definition,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 3, 1990.

⁸⁹ “PW Digital Gateway,” PWCVA, accessed November 14, 2023, <https://www.pwcva.gov/department/planning-office/pw-digital-gateway>.

⁹⁰ Md Abu Bakar Siddik, Arman Shehabi, and Landon Marston, “The Environmental Footprint of Data Centers in the United States,” *Environmental Research Letters* 16, no. 6 (May 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/abfba1>.

⁹¹ Siddik, Shehabi, and Marston “The Environmental Footprint of Data Centers in the United States.”

nearby homes, emitting “a high pitched whirring noise 24/7.”⁹² The perpetual hum and the massive concrete buildings serve as visual and auditory reminders of the impact of data centers. The creation of data centers near the Manassas Battlefield is a direct violation of the buffer strip of the park and as such the PW Digital Highway project is not without its critics. The National Parks Conservation Association and local activists are currently fighting against the Prince William County Board of Supervisors on the grounds that the data center corridor threatens the “environmental integrity” of the Manassas National Battlefield.⁹³

Figure 9 shows the potential shared border between the data center areas and the Manassas Battlefield highlighting, potential viewshed and noise intrusion. Current Manassas Battlefield superintendent, Kristopher Butcher, is not ambivalent about the threats of the data centers on the park’s buffer strip. In a letter to the Board of Supervisors, “Butcher said he wants Prince William County officials and residents to know the NPS is concerned that the proposed data center developments will destroy historic sites ‘not yet protected by the park’” and that the developments could “degrade the integrity of those preserved by the park.”⁹⁴ From 1940-2023 the Manassas National Battlefield Park has known some years

⁹² Katelyn Weisbrod, “In Northern Virginia, a Coming Data Center Boom Sounds a Community Alarm,” *Inside Climate News* (blog), February 10, 2023, <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/10022023/virginia-data-centers-amazon-prince-william-county/>.

⁹³ “Keep Massive Industrial Data Centers Away from Our National Parks,” National Parks Conservation Association, accessed November 14, 2023, <https://www.npca.org/advocacy/102-keep-massive-industrial-data-centers-away-from-our-national-parks>.

⁹⁴ Shannon Clark, “Park Superintendent Warns of Data Centers’ ‘Wholesale Destruction’ to Historic Areas around the Manassas Battlefield,” *Prince William Times*, August 10, 2023, https://www.princewilliamtimes.com/news/park-superintendent-warns-of-data-centers-wholesale-destruction-of-historic-areas-around-the-manassas-battlefield/article_278caca0-37c3-11ee-9f99-abdeaa89493.html.



*Figure 9. Visualization of data centers and potential location in proximity to Manassas Battlefield. Hugh Kenny, *Industrial Sprawl Threatens Prince William's Rural Lands*, 2023, photograph, The Piedmont Environmental Council, <https://www.npca.org/advocacy/102-keep-massive-industrial-data-centers-away-from-our-national-parks>. (Courtesy of Hugh Kenny, The Piedmont Environmental Council.)*

free from buffer strip battles, yet the threat seems always to loom. Page Snyder inherited Pageland Farm from her mother, Annie Snyder, which is in sight of the proposed data centers. She spoke of the mounting fatigue in guarding the buffer strip: “We’ve spent our entire lives fighting one thing after another, it’s just gotten worse and worse. Basically, we’ve just thrown in the towel.”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Antonio Olivo, “A Fight over Turning a ‘Rural Crescent’ in Northern Virginia into a Hub for Data Centers,” *Washington Post*,

Conclusion

The history of the preservation of Manassas National Battlefield Park's buffer strip shows how tactics used by the SBC successfully defended the park from encroaching developments. Through a sophisticated blend of engaging with local and national media, courting politicians, and framing the preservation in accessible terms that applied beyond the historic, the SBC engaged in numerous avenues to safeguard the buffer strip. The arguments expressed by the SBC and its supporters highlighted the importance of the buffer strip intuitively, even without having a name for them. The SBC used common-sense arguments for why loud and character-changing developments should not be allowed on the land near a historic site unchecked.

By identifying and naming this unique physical space in the evidence of the park's history of preservation, this article seeks to make the buffer strips evident and therefore useful in conversations about how to protect historic sites. Another key component for addressing future buffer strip skirmishes at the Manassas battlefield is the need for an appropriate zoning system. Historians and preservationists should look to existing models such as Fairfax County's concept of Historic Overlay Districts to understand how local governments can protect historic sites. These Historic Overlay Districts seek to "provide regulations over and above the regular zoning protection to better protect those unique areas, sites, and buildings that are of special architectural, historic, or archeological value."⁹⁶ Applying this concept on a federal level and directed at buffer strips would go a long way in preventing future unwanted development that could threaten the physical or cultural qualities of the battlefield. Finally, the battles for the buffer strip of Manassas illustrated how Annie Snyder and the SBC

January 18, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/01/15/data-centers-prince-william-virginia/>.

⁹⁶ "Historic Overlay Districts | Planning Development," Fairfax County Department of Planning and Development, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/historic-overlay-districts>.

imagined the space around their park as a merger between important cultural values and a philosophy of how the senses interact with the environment around historic sites. Their efforts provided the framework for buffer strip to emerge as a term that will, hopefully, serve those who seek to articulate why the persistent developments on the borderlands of historic sites threaten their integrity in crucial ways.

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More than “Chester County’s Attic” A Case Study on the Chester County Historical Society Analyzing the Complex Relationship Between Local History and Community

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“ You've got to decide who you are...We cannot be Chester County's attic.”¹ Stephen Hoyt, the president of the Chester County Historical Society's board of directors in 1989, issued this statement in defense of the Society's decision to change its mission going forward, and he was not alone. The statement reflects the concerns of many historical societies across the United States at the end of the twentieth century. The birth of local historical societies began around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, as small groups of wealthy elites banded together to preserve and celebrate the history of their local communities.² The Chester County Historical Society was one of these, as local community members met at the end of the 1800s to create an institution that would protect and preserve

¹ Quoted in Shelly Phillips, “Historical Society To Sell 4 Houses,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 23, 1989.

² Debbie Ann Doyle, “The Future of Local Historical Societies,” *Perspectives on History*, December 1, 2012, <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/december-2012/the-future-of-local-historical-societies>.

their community's history. People trusted historical societies with one mission: to safeguard the family treasures that formerly collected dust in their attics and basements. However, as the United States became a more diverse nation throughout the twentieth century, people found they could not relate to the histories told through historical societies, and as a result, visitorship and interest declined. Toward the end of the 1900s, many historical societies in America struggled to maintain their collections and buildings due to a lack of visitor funds and donations.

Some historical societies sought to change how their communities viewed them in the hopes of gaining more visitors. The Chester County Historical Society (CCHS) in West Chester, Pennsylvania, made the bold decision to sell off some of its historic house properties with the goal of using the funds to renovate its building and expand its public programming. The community saw these sales as an act of betrayal against the very history the Society had sworn to protect. Legal battles resulted in the success of the sales, leaving the community feeling distrustful of the Society and hurt by its actions. CCHS had to work to regain the trust of its community after such a controversial event. Since the incident, the Chester County Historical Society (now called the Chester County History Center) has grown and further developed its educational programming, becoming one of the premier historical societies in the state of Pennsylvania and the country.³ However, some members of the community still remember this event as a black mark on the institution's record.

Historians view historical societies as an important place to preserve and interpret history for the public, making them key players in the historical profession.⁴ However, many historians

³ In June 2020, the Chester County Historical Society decided to rebrand and changed its name to the Chester County History Center. Since I will discuss the events in the years 1989-1991, I will mostly use the abbreviation CCHS to refer to the organization. However, if I use the abbreviation CCHC when talking about the society of the present day, it is the same organization.

⁴ Doyle, "The Future of Local Historical Societies."

and historical societies debate over the concept of shared authority and the role it plays in the interpretation of history. Shared authority means providing communities with the opportunity to work with historians and historical societies as they interpret the history of the area, allowing them to represent their voices and opinions in the history. The current “best practice” in the field of public history calls for public historians to establish a policy of shared authority with their communities. For public historians, the term ‘community’ refers to the people, places, and organizations located in the town or county of the public history site. But how much authority should the community have? What happens when the community desires to present a history that lacks certain viewpoints or voices? Public historians in many local history institutions across the country debate the answers to these questions as they struggle to determine the level of community involvement in their institutions’ missions.

In some cases of the interpretation of local history, the members of the community might want to downplay or even hide difficult history that they feel might harm the community’s reputation. Local historians today have a responsibility to serve their communities, but they also have a responsibility to provide, to the best of their ability, an objective interpretation of historical events. This article will briefly analyze the downside to shared authority in the interpretation of local history, but it will mainly focus on the issue of broken trust between local history institutions and their communities. When communities lose their trust in history institutions, it sets off a ripple effect with tangible consequences, such as the loss of donors and the reclaiming of artifacts from the institutions’ collection. Although the incident involving CCHS and the Chester County community dealt less with historical interpretation and more with the overall mission of the institution, it still reveals that these institutions have an obligation to promote open communication and listen to the concerns of their communities. Open communication establishes trust and allows the institutions to preserve history. In return for the institution establishing this shared authority,

the community should then trust that the history institution will effectively determine the best approach for preserving and interpreting the community's history through its mission.

To develop a better understanding of the complicated role of historical societies in the local communities they serve, I will treat the incident at CCHS as a case study. I will provide background on the history of CCHS as well as background on Humphry Marshall and his house, the most important historical property of the controversy. I will also explain how CCHS came to the decision to sell its properties and focus its efforts on educational programming. I will explain the conflict that ensued with the community and explore the effects the sale ultimately had on the community and the Society. I will conclude the case study by offering possible solutions for historic house museums and other local history institutions that can help them reevaluate their mission and better connect with their communities. I will also analyze how the concept of shared authority contributes to historical societies building trust and strengthening relationships with their communities.

Historiography

In order to understand the struggle of local history institutions to fulfill the history-based desires of their communities while staying true to their mission, one must understand the recent developments in the field of local history and historic house museums. Historic house museums and other small public history institutions have struggled to keep up, both financially and culturally. In her book, *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses*, Donna Ann Harris, the principal of a consulting firm that works in the field of historic preservation and heritage tourism, assesses the current state of house museums and offers new solutions for their preservation and how they can remain in their communities. Harris begins by asserting that many local community members will rescue a historic house and transform it into a museum due to emotional attachment and a lack of trust in private ownership, even if they lack the

funds and skills necessary to run it as a museum.⁵ She then focuses on a number of obvious problems facing house museums, like a lack of funding, but she also points out that the age and experience of the board members at these institutions can cause difficulties when it comes to preserving house museums.⁶ The solutions Harris offers range from finding creative ways to maintain the house museum to selling the property with protective easements. The idea of selling off a historic property appears quite radical, but Harris believes that the world of historic house museums is evolving, and sometimes the best option for a historic house is as a private home that its owners can restore, preserve, and love.⁷

Franklin Vagnone and Deborah Ryan's *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums: "A Ground-Breaking Manifesto,"* proposes additional, more radical changes to the old way of managing historic house museums. Vagnone brings his expertise as former president and CEO of Old Salem Museums and Gardens as well as a board member of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums, and Ryan shares her knowledge as a professor of architecture and urban design at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Both Vagnone and Ryan share the lack of emotional and personal connection they have often experienced at historic house museums and identify one of the key problems of these museums as being "increasingly viewed by their communities as irrelevant and unresponsive to the demographic and technological changes around them."⁸ They suggest some out-of-the-box solutions that challenge the traditional practices of public history, with the main purpose of making house museums more relevant and relatable to their communities once again. The authors emphasize that historic

⁵ Donna Ann Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums : Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses*, (AltaMira Press, 2007), 4.

⁶ Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums*, 13-14.

⁷ Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums*, 11.

⁸ Franklin D. Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums: "A Ground-Breaking Manifesto"* (California: Left Coast Press Inc., 2016), 39.

houses, in addition to catering to tourists, need to pay more attention to their local communities by giving them more representation in their own histories. Vagnone and Ryan place community engagement as a higher priority than historic preservation, stressing a balance between good preservation and strong neighborhood engagement. They provide examples of how artists used condemned historic houses as canvases for public artwork projects to give the properties a sense of pride for the community.⁹

Other historians have also explored the complicated relationship between public history and the public it is meant to serve. Public historians Katharine Corbett and Howard Miller address the issues public historians face when making decisions on how to interpret history in their article, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry.” Corbett and Miller argue that the field of public history is “always situational and frequently messy” and that the concepts of shared inquiry and other public history practices “emerge out of experimental give-and-take.”¹⁰ They acknowledge the difficulties that come with allowing audiences to have a voice in the interpretation of history, citing instances like the *Enola Gay* exhibit controversy at the Smithsonian.¹¹ However, since public history involves more interaction with the general public than the field of academic history, the authors believe that public historians

⁹ Vagnone and Ryan, *Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums*, 157-158.

¹⁰ Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (2006): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2006.28.1.15>.

¹¹ The *Enola Gay* incident refers to a conflict of interpretation during the creation of an exhibition about the bomber plane *Enola Gay* at the National Air and Space Museum in the 1990s. Some of the people involved wanted to portray a more heroic interpretation of the plane’s history in ending World War II while others wanted the exhibition to highlight the consequences of using atomic bombs in war. In the end, neither the public historians nor the community members working on the project were happy with the final interpretation, and the incident has become a well-known example of shared authority conflict in the field of public history.

have a stronger obligation to “meet their audiences where they are” than the typical academic historian.¹²

James Gardner, the former associate director of curatorial affairs at the National Museum of American History, explores a similar debate in history in his article, “Contested Terrain: History, Museums, and the Public.” Gardner focuses on the gap between academic historians and the public on the issue of contested history, addressing the fact that some academic historians tend to view the general public as having an emotional and nostalgic understanding of history, and arguing that this conflicts with the past that public historians actually seek to represent.¹³ Gardner, like Corbett and Miller, believes that all historians should work to foster a sense of shared authority and shared voice with their audiences, as they feel a sense of ownership in history.¹⁴ It is his understanding that this does not compromise the field of public history, but rather strengthens it.

In the past decade, more public historians have come forward to address the issue of public involvement in history and the evolving role of local history institutions. In 2012, Debbie Ann Doyle published her brief article entitled “The Future of Local Historical Societies” to examine the past role of historical societies and to understand how that role has changed and grown as the field of public history evolves. Doyle explains how the wealthy elite in communities originally founded historical societies to preserve their own history and ancestry, but now these societies struggle to attract funding and visitors due to many Americans’ increasing lack of interest in these histories.¹⁵ Historical societies are adapting to the current changes of society in order to maintain relevance and keep their doors open. Most importantly, they are trying to provide a space for the public to feel more involved in its history, a

¹² Corbett and Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” 20.

¹³ James B. Gardner, “Contested Terrain: History, Museums, and the Public,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 4 (2004): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2004.26.4.11>.

¹⁴ Gardner, “Contested Terrain,” 14.

¹⁵ Doyle, “The Future of Local Historical Societies.”

topic Lynn Dierking also discusses in her article, “Being of Value: Intentionally Fostering and Documenting Public Value.” Dierking, an Oregon-based researcher studying Free-Choice Learning in museums and other community settings, seeks to define the concept of “public value,” or the contribution of public-facing organizations to their communities. She wants to see how museums and other public history institutions can promote public value in their spaces and believes that these organizations need to establish meaningful connections and work to understand the true needs of their own communities in order to create a sense of public value.¹⁶ Both Doyle and Dierking understand that public history institutions need to work with their surrounding communities to provide better public service and remain relevant. This idea of public value in public history supports Gardner, Corbett, and Miller’s concept of shared authority, as public historians seek to reach their communities in new and evolving ways.

The issue of ethics is another aspect of public history that remains relevant in the field as well as to the topic of this article. Large public history organizations, such as the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), have published and updated their own codes of ethics for institutions to offer guidelines for this often confusing subject. AAM’s code of ethics speaks to the concept of loyalty, asserting that no matter what conflicts arise, museums must not compromise loyalty to their missions or to the public they serve.¹⁷ Other public historians have commented on and contributed to the ongoing discussion of ethics, including some specifically in the field of local history. Theodore Karamanski’s “Ethics and Local History,” focuses

¹⁶ Lynn D. Dierking, “Being of Value: Intentionally Fostering and Documenting Public Value,” *The Journal of Museum Education* 35, no. 1 (2010): 10, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25701637>.

¹⁷ “AAM Code of Ethics for Museums,” *American Alliance of Museums*, last accessed September 12, 2023, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/>.

on the intimate relationship local public historians must have with the histories of their communities. Each decision these historians make through their work at their institutions often has an immediate and deeply-felt impact.¹⁸

Local public history scholarship identifies many of the conflicts and dilemmas that public historians and their institutions face when it comes to interpreting and preserving their communities' history. While some of these scholars do offer solutions for these issues, the ongoing conversation remains complex in nature and is constantly evolving. This article will expand upon these ideas and demonstrate how they can be applied to real-world situations, specifically in the case of the Chester County History Center. Although CCHC itself is not a house museum and the event in question occurred over three decades ago, it can still benefit from the suggestions this piece of scholarship offers because of its status as a small, local history institution. As a case study, the story of what happened at CCHC can also serve as a lesson for other local history institutions that find themselves in similar struggles between their duty to history and their obligations to their communities.

Background

The Chester County Historical Society

In 1893, 40 individuals met at the West Chester Public Library with the mission of protecting and preserving the history of Chester County. This humble meeting marked the birth of the Chester County Historical Society.¹⁹ In these early days, the Society focused on the collection of historical items, the dedication of historical markers in the community, and the search for a permanent location.²⁰ As the decades passed, the

¹⁸ Theodore J. Karamanski, "Ethics and Local History," in *Encyclopedia of Local History*, 3rd ed., ed. Amy H. Wilson (New York: Rowman and Littlefield 2017), 206-211.

¹⁹ Phillips, "Historical Society To Sell 4 Houses."

²⁰ "About Us," Chester County History Center, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://mycchc.org/about-us/>.

historical society's members and collections grew, and in 1942, it moved its headquarters into a historical building in downtown West Chester known as Horticultural Hall.

As its museum collections continued to grow, it emphasized collecting "regional furniture, textiles and decorative arts objects, as well as material representing all aspects of life in southeastern Pennsylvania."²¹ Throughout the mid-twentieth century, CCHS continued to renovate Horticultural Hall to expand the exhibition space and accommodate its growing collections. In the early 1980s, CCHS partnered with the Chester County government to take care of the over 300 years of history housed in the public documents of the Chester County Archives.²² As a result of this partnership, CCHS prided itself on having one of the most extensive and impressive collections and archives in the state of Pennsylvania. This project, as well as its collections and exhibition space, also made CCHS one of the premier historical societies in the state of Pennsylvania. In addition to artifacts housed in its collection at Horticulture Hall, CCHS also owned a number of historic house properties at this time, including the home of well-known botanist Humphry Marshall.

Humphry Marshall and the House

In the eighteenth century, a modest Quaker living in the rural area of Chester County made a name for himself as the "father of American dendrology." Humphry Marshall (1722-1801), a stone mason, farmer, and amateur astronomer, had a passion for the wilderness of Chester County from a young age, and as an adult, he began to pursue this passion through the study of local plant life.²³ He traveled around the eastern coast of North America in search of trees and shrubs, and he

²¹ "About Us," Chester County History Center.

²² "About Us," Chester County History Center.

²³ J.F. Pirro, "Chester County Honors Humphry Marshall, Marshallton's Founder," *Main Line Today*, February 1, 2022, <https://mainlinetoday.com/life-style/humphry-marshall-marshallton/>.

would collect seeds to sell both locally and internationally. His research and writings attracted the attention of well-known scientists in North America as well as Europe, including Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia. Marshall had regular correspondence with Franklin regarding his research, some of which resides in the collections library at CCHC. His greatest accomplishment as a botanist was the publication of his book, *Arbustum Americanum: The American Grove, or An Alphabetical Catalogue of Forest Trees and Shrubs*, in 1785. The book was the first of its kind on North American trees and shrubs and doubled as a catalog for Marshall's botanical business.²⁴ Marshall sold more copies to people in European countries than in the United States, but he was still well-known as a botanist domestically, especially in southeastern Pennsylvania. Marshall's success and fame as a botanist extended past his death. The town where he lived was renamed "Marshallton" in his honor sometime after his death in 1801.

In 1773 and 1774, Marshall used his skills as a stone mason to build a house for himself. He also "established the nation's second proper botanical garden" on the grounds, with his older cousin and well-known botanist John Bartram's garden as the first.²⁵ The home boasts many features that Marshall designed to aid him in his studies of botany and astronomy. After Marshall's death in 1801, his nephew, Moses Marshall, made an effort to continue the upkeep of the gardens and the house, as Humphry had no children of his own. Due to Moses's other responsibilities as a doctor, the gardens fell into disrepair and remained that way after his death in 1813.²⁶ The Marshall house changed hands over the course of the nineteenth century until Campbell Weir, a man from Wilmington, Delaware and a relative of the Marshall family, purchased the house and property in 1946 and lived there until his passing in 1982.²⁷

²⁴ Pirro, "Chester County Honors Humphry Marshall."

²⁵ Pirro, "Chester County Honors Humphry Marshall."

²⁶ Pirro, "Chester County Honors Humphry Marshall."

²⁷ "Campbell Weir Collection," Chester County History Center, <https://mycchc.org/campbell-weir-collection/>.

The Marshall House and CCHS

In 1958, Weir reached out to the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) in the hopes of the organization taking interest in the Marshall house as a historic property worthy of national recognition. In response, the organization sent out a team to survey the property and determine its eligibility. Over time, Weir continued to work with the NTHP, and in 1971, the National Trust listed the house on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1987, it received its designation as a National Historic Landmark.²⁸ While the National Register lists notable historic buildings and sites across the United States, a National Historic Landmark is a site that significantly contributed to the history of the United States and deserves exceptional recognition. In the early 1960s, Weir also began correspondence with CCHS over his desire to give the Marshall house and property to CCHS in his will. In the 1960s and 1970s, Weir exchanged letters with the executive director of CCHS expressing his proposed plans for the transformation of the Marshall house into a historic house museum. The executive director as well as the board at CCHS approved of his suggestions and worked with Weir to come up with possible expenses and programming ideas for this new house museum. Among letters that contained projected expense reports for the future museum, Weir expressed his dislike of “sterile, period houses,” and Kurt Brandenburg, the CCHS executive director in 1978, responded in agreement, saying that CCHS also wanted the Marshall house to “be interpreted to the public realistically and honestly as the home of one of Chester County’s most noteworthy citizens.”²⁹

In 1976, as CCHS struggled to contain its growing collection of community-donated artifacts along with its exhibition space, the executive director, Conrad Wilson, wrote to the president of CCHS, John H. Ware III, about the possibility of moving the museum facilities of CCHS to the

²⁸ Pirro, “Chester County Honors Humphry Marshall.”

²⁹ Kurt E. Brandenburg, Letter to Campbell Weir, July 27, 1978, Chester County History Center Library, West Chester, PA.

Marshall property. Wilson explained how he consulted Weir on the matter, and that Weir “was enthusiastically in favor of the idea of a museum on his property,” which had enough space for parking for the many visitors and school groups that would come to the Historical Society.³⁰ It seemed as though the Marshall house would become a place for the Historical Society’s exhibition on Chester County, as well as interpret Humphry Marshall’s life and work as a botanist. However, after Weir passed away in 1982, CCHS never moved its museum operations to the Marshall house, possibly because it had found a different property to use as the location for its museum and educational programming.

In 1982, CCHS decided to open up the Marshall home to visitors as part of Chester County Day. This annual local celebration held on the first Saturday of October benefits the Chester County Hospital in West Chester and offers visitors the chance to tour many of the public and private historic buildings in West Chester and the surrounding towns.³¹ The Society also included the house on a walking tour of Marshallton that year. Those who purchased tickets for Chester County Day or the walking tour could visit the Marshall house and view the antique furniture that Weir had collected over his years of living in the house. Although the furniture did not belong to Humphry Marshall, it dated from the late 1700s and early 1800s, and all were originals.³² In this same year, the Society worked with the Southeast National Bank to evaluate the property and determine the best plan moving forward for its maintenance and use.³³

³⁰ Conrad Wilson, Letter to John H. Ware III, July 28, 1976, Chester County History Center Library.

³¹ Claire Lilley, “Title Unknown,” *Daily Local News*, September 16, 1982, Chester County History Center Library.

³² Lilley, “Title Unknown.”

³³ Lilley, “Title Unknown.”

The Conflict and Its Effects

The Decision to Sell and the Community's Response

As the Chester County Historical Society continued to expand in the 1980s, the board members realized they wanted to change the mission and purpose of the organization. Instead of focusing all its efforts on collecting items and buildings of historical significance to Chester County, they decided to place a heavier emphasis on education and programming for the community, expanding the role of its museum and exhibition space. There were only a few other historical societies at the time that began to focus more on programming and less on collections, making CCHS ahead of the curve in the field of local history. The board had already purchased the old YMCA building, next door to Horticultural Hall, and it had plans to renovate the space to house more of its collections, create a research library, and develop an exhibition on Chester County's history.³⁴ The board also realized the Society did not have the budget to manage its historic house properties and take on this extensive renovation. In April 1989, CCHS made the decision to list four of its historic house properties for sale, including the home of Humphry Marshall, and use the funds from the sale to finance this renovation.

Immediately after the Society announced its decision to sell the properties, members of the community protested the sales, especially that of the Marshall house. They felt angered and hurt. News of the sale attracted broader public attention, as well. In an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jonathan Wood, a supervisor in West Bradford township where the Marshall house is located, exclaimed, "it is very insensitive of the historical society to sell a piece of our township's history," and that "the property was given to the society as a bequest for all of us to enjoy, not to sell."³⁵ With Katherine Campbell, a descendant of Campbell Weir, as the leader, a group of citizens

³⁴ "About Us," Chester County History Center.

³⁵ Quoted in Denise Breslin Kachin, "Historical Society Blasted," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Apr 30, 1989.

within the community formed the Landmark Coalition in an effort to stop the sale. In late May, citizens banded together and organized a protest march outside of CCHS headquarters in downtown West Chester.³⁶ The coalition took CCHS to court, arguing that the sale of the Marshall house broke the agreement Weir had outlined in his will when he gave it to CCHS. Through an injunction that Chester County Court Judge Thomas Gavin issued in early June 1989, the Coalition succeeded in temporarily preventing CCHS from selling the property.

Legal Disputes and the Issue of Preservation

The members of the Landmark Coalition believed that CCHS's decision to sell the Marshall house and property defied the legal agreement Weir had established in his letters to CCHS directors. However, the stipulations for the preservation of the house never made it into Weir's actual will because, according to Chester County Court Judge Lawrence Wood, "they would have jeopardized the tax deductibility of the gift" due to certain tax laws during this time.³⁷ The lawyer representing CCHS argued that because these letters "were not probated with the will, they had no legal standing," therefore giving CCHS the right to sell the Marshall house.³⁸ Around the same time as the Landmark Coalition took CCHS to court, a judge settled a different case that began in 1987 involving CCHS's sale of the 1704 Brinton house. The judge stopped CCHS from selling or altering this property because the Brinton Family Association had given the title to CCHS, but the Association still controlled all decisions related to the property.³⁹ The outcome of the Brinton case gave the Landmark Coalition hope that the judge would rule in its favor. Even though Weir did not legally

³⁶ Tom Linafelt, "The Selling Of A Piece Of History," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 21, 1989.

³⁷ Tom Linafelt, "Judge Turns Witness In Historic-House Case," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 22, 1989.

³⁸ Linafelt, "Judge Turns Witness In Historic-House Case."

³⁹ Tom Linafelt and Michele M. Fizzano, "Judge Stops Historical House's Sale," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 11, 1989.

protect the Marshall house from being sold, community members believed that the judge would understand that the written letters between CCHS directors and Weir acted as an agreement in this case.

The community also raised concerns that the Marshall house sale would jeopardize its preservation, and that CCHS had misused the funds Weir provided in his will for the house. J. Boylston Campbell, a descendant of both Marshall and Weir, believed that CCHS “did not use [Weir’s funds] for what the ethical intent was, and that was to preserve the house.”⁴⁰ However, Roland Woodward, the executive director of CCHS at the time, clarified that CCHS did use the funds for upkeep and maintenance on the property. Since CCHS acquired the house in 1982, it “spent about \$50,000 on the house and surrounding property,” and Woodward claims that CCHS “paid special attention to the site, especially the garden area in front of the house.”⁴¹ The Society made every effort to use the funds donated in Weir’s will for the maintenance of the property from 1982 until its decision to sell in 1989. In fact, cost was one of the factors that CCHS board members considered as they made the decision to sell the property. Even with the generous endowment Weir provided, Woodward and the board members determined that the cost to hire full-time staff for a historic house museum and continue maintenance on the property would be too great for the Historical Society to take on.

Woodward also argued that CCHS always planned to ensure the preservation of the house. Before the sale, CCHS worked to draft easements that would protect the historic properties from development or significant alterations. He stated that “preservation has never been an issue...The house will be preserved, there is no question about that. For us the issue was whether or not to operate the property as a house museum.”⁴² In the eyes of the community, the sale of the

⁴⁰ Quoted in Tom Linafelt, “Plan To Sell Historic Home Raises Ire,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 11, 1989.

⁴¹ Quoted in Linafelt, “Plan To Sell Historic Home Raises Ire.”

⁴² Quoted in Linafelt, “Plan To Sell Historic Home Raises Ire.”

Marshall house to a private owner meant a failure to preserve the property, but CCHS simply did not want to operate the property as a historic house museum. Woodward also pointed out how many historical sites and resources in the United States have private owners and that public ownership is not a requirement for preservation.⁴³ The community had cherished the idea of the Marshall house becoming a historic house museum, especially since Weir had expressed this desire in his correspondence with CCHS. However, with the threat of the sale, the chief concern became preserving the house, as members of the Landmark Coalition believed that the sale to a private owner would result in the degradation of the historic property.

Historians at other local history institutions defended CCHS's decision to sell the Marshall house, arguing that the sale was, in fact, the proper process of deaccessioning. In the field of public history, deaccessioning refers to the process of permanently removing an object from a museum or history institution's collection with the purpose of improving or preserving the collection.⁴⁴ Ann Barton Brown, the director of the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia, believes that "Every history museum has to do [deaccessioning]," or institutions become overwhelmed with donations, "storage becomes too tight, and [institutions] have a tendency to stack things on other things, and they break or get hurt."⁴⁵ Although deaccessioning is a common practice for history institutions throughout the country, many Chester County community members still felt betrayed by the sale, especially because they believed, incorrectly, that CCHS used the funds that Weir left in his will for its own financial gain instead of for the preservation of the Marshall house. They also

⁴³ Linafelt, "Plan To Sell Historic Home Raises Ire."

⁴⁴ "AASLH Statement of Standards and Ethics," *American Association for State and Local History*, revised 2018, <http://download.aaslh.org/AASLH+Statement+of+Standards+and+Ethics+-+Revised+2018.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Phillips, "Historical Society To Sell 4 Houses."

believed that using the funds from the sale of the house for renovation of the YMCA building would be unethical.

The Purpose and Mission of Historical Societies

The community believed that CCHS had betrayed its duty as a historical society with the sale of the Marshall house. J. Boylston Campbell argued that Weir gave the property to CCHS in the first place because he “[believed] it to be the most trustworthy repository of such an historically valuable property.”⁴⁶ The community members of Chester County had trusted CCHS with the preservation and protection of their historically valuable items and properties for decades, and it hurt them to see CCHS sell these properties for, in their eyes, money. In the words of Edward Brinton, a member of the Brinton Family Association board of directors, “People don't donate their homes to a society so that it will sell the house for cash and use the money for whatever they please.”⁴⁷

In response to the backlash from the community over the Marshall house sale, Hoyt and Woodward explained the changing mission and goals of CCHS. From the beginning, the decision to sell the historic properties came out of a desire to increase the focus on educational programming at the Society. According to Hoyt, “every asset [CCHS has] must play a role in some program and must have programmatic use,” and the board of directors determined the Marshall house did not serve that purpose.⁴⁸ Hoyt also argued that CCHS did not want to be “an owner and manager of real estate,” and he perceived the ownership of historic house properties as more of a business venture than serving a purpose for the Historical Society.⁴⁹ In 1997, CCHS faced another issue with the sale of the “Singing Woods” estate, another historic property in its collections. In an article discussing the proposed sale of this property to a

⁴⁶ Quoted in Linafelt, “Plan To Sell Historic Home Raises Ire.”

⁴⁷ Quoted in Linafelt and Fizzano, “Judge Stops Historical House's Sale.”

⁴⁸ Phillips, “Historical Society To Sell 4 Houses.”

⁴⁹ Quoted in Phillips, “Historical Society To Sell 4 Houses.”

private owner, Woodward continued to defend the decision to sell the Marshall house and three other properties back in 1989, explaining how maintenance and the Society's service to the public were key factors in the decision to sell. He stated that CCHS "could not run a far-flung empire of historic sites, understaffed, poorly maintained, and serving no long-term public purpose."⁵⁰

The Sale of the House and the Expansion of CCHS

At the suggestion of the judge, CCHS and the Landmark Coalition attempted to settle the dispute out of court. The West Bradford Township had stepped in and offered to buy the house and preserve the surrounding 50 acres as a public park in the early stages of the sale, before Judge Gavin issued the injunction. During negotiations, the plan shifted and the land split up. The township agreed to buy 35 of the original 50 acres and use it as public land. The Historical Society would then sell the remaining 15 acres that included the house to a private buyer, as the township did not have the funds to take care of the entire 50 acres.⁵¹ CCHS signed an agreement with the township, and in 1990, it looked like the dispute over the land had come to an end. However, in the same year, the township lowered the price it had agreed to pay for the land, and CCHS rejected this new offer, thus canceling the agreement.⁵² With the Brandywine Conservancy enforcing the restrictive easements placed on the land to protect its historic value, CCHS struggled to find a new buyer for both sections of the property. In the end, CCHS sold the 15-acre section with the house to a private buyer and the 35-acre section to another private buyer.

The sale of the Marshall property left the community feeling hurt and betrayed. Jack Hines, a board member at CCHS

⁵⁰ Quoted in Rachel Smolkin, "Judge Attaches Strings To Sale Of Historical Society Property," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug 10, 1997.

⁵¹ Tom Linafelt, "Marshall House Accord is Reached," *Daily Local News*, June 6, 1989, Chester County History Center Library.

⁵² Richard A. Oppel Jr., "Court Allows Division of Historic Land," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 30, 1991.

during the time of the sale, remembers that people felt “outraged,” blaming CCHS for the poor maintenance of the property and accusing staff members of taking advantage of the property and the artifacts inside the house.⁵³ The sale also caused community members to question their decision to donate family items to the Society. For example, the Weir family began to question whether it could trust the Society with its family artifacts, particularly the Congressional Medal of Honor that Campbell Weir’s grandfather, Captain Henry C. Weir, received in 1899 for his service in the Union army during the Civil War. Weir had donated the medal, a letter of commendation from Abraham Lincoln, some regimental flags, and more of his grandfather’s belongings to CCHS, together with the Marshall house property after his death in 1982.⁵⁴ The family questioned where CCHS was keeping the medal and other items, or if it had sold them like the Marshall property and the contents of the house. CCHS told the family that the medal was on display in an exhibition, and that it had recently framed the flags.⁵⁵ Despite the reassurance from CCHS, the trust the Weir family had once placed in CCHS to guard its family artifacts was broken.

In the 1990s, CCHS moved forward with its renovation of the YMCA building and development of educational programming and exhibits. In the early 2000s, it hosted exhibits and programs that explored more relevant and interesting topics in Chester County history, such as an exhibit dedicated to the invention of the Slinky. They were designed to engage the community and draw more visitors into the space with relevant and relatable topics. Another motivation for these exhibitions was the decrease in government funding due in part to the attacks on September 11, 2001. The American economy managed to bounce back fairly soon afterward, but government spending for defense increased significantly to

⁵³ Correspondence with Jack Hines, September 26, 2023.

⁵⁴ Tom Linafelt, “Family Questions Society’s Custodianship of Medal,” *Daily Local News*, June 6, 1989, Chester County History Center Library.

⁵⁵ Linafelt, “Family Questions Society’s Custodianship of Medal.”

over \$2 trillion, which could have taken funding away from cultural and nonprofit organizations.⁵⁶ This decrease in funding affected CCHS when the director of educational programs, Bill Kashatus, was laid off shortly after September 11 because the Society no longer had the budget to keep him on staff.⁵⁷ The Society managed to recover and continued to produce programs and exhibitions that made the history of Chester County more approachable to the community. The chairman of the Society's board in the early 2000s, Bruce Mowday, argued that "history is not just what happened in the 17th and 18th centuries."⁵⁸ By the end of the 2010s, CCHS had rebranded to become the Chester County History Center. It hoped that the name change would strengthen its mission to reach the community through relevant educational programs.

Analysis

Options for Historic House Museums and Other History Institutions

The primary reason for CCHS selling the Marshall property was funding. The endowment Weir left in his will did not entirely cover the costs of maintaining the Marshall property long term or the use of the house as a historic house museum. Also, a decrease in visitorship contributed to the funding issue. Jeff Groff, a former staff member and director of several historic house museums in southeastern Pennsylvania and Delaware, recalls a similar situation during his time as executive director of the Wyck Historic House in Germantown, Pennsylvania. The Germantown Historical Society maintained several historic houses, but the expenses of the properties grew

⁵⁶ Sarah A. Binder and Molly E. Reynolds, "20 years later: the lasting impact of 9/11 on Congress," *Brookings*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/20-years-later-the-lasting-impact-of-9-11-on-congress/>.

⁵⁷ Susan Weidener, "Not just about History Anymore: The Chester County Historical Society Embraces a Mission: To be Relevant and Educational," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 2, 2005.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Weidener, "Not just about History Anymore."

at a time when visitor interest was declining. Like CCHS, it made the decision to sell the properties with preservation easements and consolidated its collections and other materials in a new building. Groff explains how the Germantown Historical Society's main purpose was to "best preserve local history while diversifying both collections and stories to reflect a demographic that was so different than the days of their founding in the early 1900s."⁵⁹ Groff also notes that although the Society did lose the support of longtime donors and families with connections to the houses, it still managed to reach a new audience and focus on its new goals of diversifying its collections and history through funding from new supporters and grants.⁶⁰

According to Groff's own experience, CCHS was not the only historical society willing to sell its historic properties in order to update its collections and programming with the goal of increasing visitorship. However, both CCHS and the Germantown Historical Society were at the beginning of the trend to update the content of historical societies and place a stronger focus on educational programming for the community. Debbie Ann Doyle's article, "The Future of Local Historical Societies," cites a conference called the Kykuit II Summit held in 2007 that discussed the transformation of historical societies into community centers in the twenty-first century.⁶¹ Through sponsorship from national organizations like AAM, AASLH, NTHP, and the American Architectural Foundation, the Summit brought together many historic site leaders and representatives of service organizations with the goal of discussing possible solutions for the sustainability of historic sites.⁶² Doyle explains how the conference marks a shift in the role of historical societies, but she focuses mainly on the financial struggles of these institutions in the twentieth century with no mention of any changing missions.

⁵⁹ Interview with Jeff Groff, March 11, 2023.

⁶⁰ Interview with Jeff Groff, March 11, 2023.

⁶¹ Doyle, "The Future of Local Historical Societies."

⁶² Jay D. Vogt, "The Kykuit II Summit: The Sustainability of Historic Sites," *History News* 62 (Autumn 2007), 17–21.

Unlike many of these struggling historical societies in the United States, CCHS had enough funding to purchase an additional building for its exhibitions and collections, but it still needed additional funding to renovate the space to include more educational programming. CCHS needed to adapt in order to combat the growing disinterest among visitors and remain relevant in its community. However, it is possible that because CCHS initiated this change in its mission before most other historical societies, the community members felt more confused and hurt by the Marshall house sale. Given the drastic nature of CCHS's change in mission, it should have been more open in the communication of this decision as well as with the Marshall house sale.

With the issue of decreased audience interest and a lack of sufficient funding, historic house museums need new approaches to how they function in order to stay relevant and operational. Many of these museums in the twenty-first century have implemented new programs and procedures with the intention of becoming more relevant to their local communities, even with their limited budgets. Some historic house museums have opened up their spaces for community and civic engagement programs. For example, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York offers English as a second language classes for its community members, and the Grumblethorpe Historic House Museum in Germantown, Pennsylvania has installed a vegetable garden to combat the neighborhood's food desert issue and involve the youth volunteers with its upkeep.⁶³

These solutions for historic house museums may not promote the collection of artifacts, but they do protect historic buildings from demolition and ensure that these properties remain relevant in their communities. These actions also encourage citizens to take an interest in the local history of their communities. These types of programs also demonstrate how historic house museums can allow members of the community to have a voice on what matters to them, like

⁶³ Vagnone and Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, 50-53.

language skills and food security. This opens the door for people to share their own history that might have been previously underrepresented in the historic house museum. Some of these programs may even cost less than focusing solely on restoring the property or staging it with historically accurate furnishings.

Another way these museums have adapted to increase visitor interest and relevance in their communities is through contemporary art installations. Instead of viewing historic houses as buildings frozen in the past, some historic house organizations have partnered with contemporary artists to change the way visitors see and interact with the space. The Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks (PSPL) has facilitated a number of events and projects in historic buildings. Candy DePew, a Pew Fellow artist, worked with PSPL to produce *Between Worlds*, an exhibition that placed the original collection of the Physick House and its rooms alongside her own creative artifacts.⁶⁴ In New York, the Merchant's House Museum temporarily installed neon chandeliers while the original bronze chandeliers from the 1850s underwent conservation.⁶⁵ To some visitors, these contemporary art installations might appear jarring in the context of eighteenth and nineteenth century historic homes, but others might find the new interpretation of the spaces intriguing. These installations do not damage the preservation but rather enhance the visitor experience by offering them the opportunity to view these spaces in a context that feels new. It challenges visitors to view the past through a contemporary lens and helps the older, sometimes tired interpretations of historic house museums feel new and exciting again. Some may view this as a degradation of the historic house's role to interpret the past, but partnerships with disciplines outside of history may help bring in audiences that would otherwise find these spaces too boring and academic.

⁶⁴ Vagnone and Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, 151.

⁶⁵ Vagnone and Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, 154.

In some situations, a historic house museum may not have the resources needed to remain relevant or operational within its community. In these cases, the board members of the historic house or the historical society that owns the property may need to consider the possibility of selling or donating the property. If the board members do not want to completely sell to a private owner, they could lease to a private owner or organization, reducing their role to a titleholder for the property while the private owner seeks a different use. With this possibility, the board still owns the historic house and acts as a landlord to collect rent from the private owner. However, the leaseholder of the property has the right to determine how they would like to use it going forward, which could affect interior or exterior features of the property.⁶⁶ If the board members determine that they can no longer hold onto it in any capacity, they have options for who they can sell to. Whether they decide to sell to a private owner, a non-profit organization, or a government organization, they should make every effort to place protective easements on the property to ensure its preservation.⁶⁷ Although some might argue that the board members are failing in their mission to preserve and protect the historic property, it is likely that the private owner has more sufficient funds to take care of it.

Regardless of how historic house museum board members choose to move forward with their properties, effective communication with community members will help the process go smoothly. Open communication with community members establishes trust and helps them to see that the board members of the historic house museum have the best interests of the property in mind. It can also help the organization avoid lengthy legal battles like the one CCHS faced, or the case of the Robert E. Lee Boyhood home owned by the Lee-Jackson Foundation in Virginia. In the 1990s, the interests of the

⁶⁶ Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums*, 91-93.

⁶⁷ Easements are legal agreements between a qualified organization and the owner of the historic property where the owner agrees to maintain the property forever without destroying or dividing it. (Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums*, 71)

Foundation changed, and it decided to sell the home and donate the proceeds to a scholarship program.⁶⁸ The Foundation ended up selling the property to a local couple without ever listing the house for sale, shocking the community. The public involved the state attorney general to stop the sale, but the Foundation proceeded. After this incident, Virginia passed a state law requiring nonprofit owners to notify the office of the city and the state attorney general ninety days prior to the sale of a historic property.⁶⁹ In this case, the Foundation's actions led to the development of a state law to ensure proper communication between community members and historical organizations. The sale of the Lee Boyhood home further emphasizes the need for open communication between a historical society and its community members.

Building Community Trust and Relationships

From a legal perspective, CCHS did not break any laws or legally-binding contracts in selling the Marshall house because the correspondence between Weir and the Society was never probated in the will. Ethically, it broke the mutual understanding it had with Weir as a donor and therefore damaged its relationship with the community. The "AAM Code of Ethics for Museums" states that museums have a responsibility to uphold their integrity in addition to upholding legal standards so that they can maintain the confidence of the public. It also states that museums must put their loyalty to their mission and to the public first, even in the face of conflict.⁷⁰ Violations of ethical standards in the field of public history do not necessarily warrant legal punishment, but they can break down the trust that a historical society has worked hard to establish with its surrounding community. It is difficult and unproductive to label CCHS's decision to sell as ethical or unethical because of the often ambiguous nature of ethics.

⁶⁸ Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums*, 196-197.

⁶⁹ Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums*, 197.

⁷⁰ "AAM Code of Ethics for Museums."

Museums and historical societies have to use the practice of deaccessioning, sometimes through sale or donation, to ensure the protection and longevity of their collections. Regardless of whether or not its decision held up in a courtroom, CCHS could have taken steps to help the community see that the sale of the Marshall house was also in the best interest of the community and the Historical Society's mission.

CCHS did not give the community enough time to voice its concerns about the sale of the Marshall property and other historic house properties. The community felt CCHS left it in the dark on an important decision regarding its local history. According to J. Boylston Campbell, "[CCHS wanted] to get [the sale] done before the end of the month. Four weeks is not long enough to muster up public opinion."⁷¹ If CCHS had made the decision public sooner, the community members could have voiced their concerns about the sale, and CCHS could have addressed these issues. Some people would likely still have opposed the sale and felt hurt, but CCHS possibly could have avoided much of the negative backlash in the press as well as going to court over the issue. CCHS succeeded in selling the Marshall house and surrounding property to two private buyers with protective easements, but as a result, many community members lost trust in CCHS's ability to safeguard their history. Weir's family even wanted to take back other family artifacts that Weir had donated alongside the Marshall house because of the sale.

In the process of collecting, preserving and interpreting history, public historians have a responsibility to establish effective communication with the people and organizations within their communities. Oftentimes, public historians struggle with surrendering some of their control when it comes to the interpretation and preservation of history because it goes against the training they received during their time in academia.⁷² While public historians may have considerable knowledge of the history of their communities, it is important

⁷¹ Quoted in Linafelt, "Plan To Sell Historic Home Raises Ire."

⁷² Corbett and Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry," 36.

that they recognize the unique perspectives that the community members contribute as well. This does not mean that public historians should leave the integrity and mission to interpret history entirely to the public, but rather they should share the authority with their communities and work together to preserve the local history.⁷³ In the case of the Marshall house, the community felt that the property represented a unique and vital aspect of Chester County's history and that CCHS, as the premier history institution for Chester County, should maintain ownership of the property. CCHS felt otherwise and sold the house, thus damaging its relationship with the community. Practicing shared authority by allowing community members to contribute to the new educational programs could help strengthen the trust CCHC worked to rebuild with the community.

Although public historians should practice more shared authority at their local history sites, community members should acknowledge the authority that public historians have in the fields of preservation and interpretation of history. The emotional attachments that communities have to artifacts and stories of the past can sometimes cloud their judgment because to them, these items represent heritage instead of history. Heritage and history usually exist in separate worlds, as history tends to be a narrative while heritage offers a tangible, inherited view of the past.⁷⁴ History and heritage often come into conflict with each other, with community members fighting to protect their heritage on one side and public historians fighting to present their interpretation of history on the other. Residents of Chester County saw Humphry Marshall as a pivotal figure of their community's heritage, which could have eclipsed the reality of how expensive it would be to operate his house as a museum or for CCHS to maintain it as part of its collection. CCHS also wanted to tell the entire story of Chester County's rich history through its programming and not focus all of its resources on Humphry Marshall. However, history

⁷³ Gardner, "Contested Terrain," 14.

⁷⁴ Corbett and Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry," 22.

and heritage do not always have to oppose each other. If the community can acknowledge the authority public historians have as interpreters of history and public historians acknowledge the attachments community members have to their heritage, the two groups can effectively work together to preserve local history with minimal conflict.

Additionally, communities should recognize that historical societies have expanded beyond their original mission to collect artifacts and buildings related to local history. It might be difficult, but the community needs to see how museums and local history institutions want to focus more on the significant and meaningful issues in history instead of only focusing on artifact collection and verification.⁷⁵ Communities have viewed historical societies in particular as organizations that collect and preserve rather than interpret history, but in the early twenty-first century, historical societies want to play a more active role in community history. CCHS wanted to be more than just a repository of valuable Chester County properties and artifacts, and expanding its educational programming and exhibitions would allow it to grow as a history institution and contribute more to its community. In this way, CCHS saw the change in its mission as a benefit to its community instead of an act of betrayal. Breaking away from tradition, especially tradition that has existed since the Society's founding in the nineteenth century, can be difficult for people to accept, but if public historians at local institutions are willing to listen to the opinions and concerns of their communities, the communities should have an open mind and trust the public historians on issues of change.

Despite the protests and complaints of community members, CCHS went through with the sale and used the funds to expand its educational programming. It is clear that this incident damaged the trust members had in the Society, and broken trust is not always easily repaired. However, CCHS managed to continue its mission, introducing new exhibitions and programming in the early 2000s and rebranding its name

⁷⁵ Gardner, "Contested Terrain," 15.

in 2020. There is still some tension between CCHS and members of the Marshall family, but overall CCHS remains active and dedicated to serving its members and the rest of the community. Perhaps if CCHS had approached the sale of the Marshall house differently, it could have avoided the lawsuit and worked together with the Marshall family to come up with a better solution. However, the relationships between historical societies and their communities are complex and there is no clear answer or solution when it comes to making these decisions.

Conclusion

Historical societies and other local history institutions perform a balancing act with every decision they make. They must remain loyal and dedicated to their established mission, but they must also maintain the trust of the community that they serve. Sometimes, these two duties come into conflict with each other and can result in the community losing trust in the institution. While it is sometimes difficult to see the consequences of this broken trust, it can result in the loss of important donors and the community's desire to take back artifacts from the institution's collection. In order to prevent these consequences and keep the trust of the community, historical societies should strive for open communication and practice shared authority with their communities, especially when making significant changes to their collections or mission statements. In return, the residents of the community should acknowledge that historical societies usually have their best interests in mind in the cases of preserving and interpreting history.

With the field of public history constantly changing, public historians face challenges as they adapt and seek to remain relevant in their communities. Understanding the consequences of breaking trust with their communities and the methods that can help reduce the risk of disappointing the community helps public historians and their institutions continue to survive and grow. It is also important to understand that incidents like the one involving CCHS can

differ depending on the institution, and there is no one solution that fits all scenarios. Using these suggestions as a guideline can help struggling historical societies and institutions avoid alienating their communities and strengthen their relationships with them. Historical societies are done serving as attics, and with good communication and shared authority, they can help their communities understand the need to change their missions without major conflict.

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FILM REVIEW

Oppenheimer

(Dir., Christopher Nolan, 2023)

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[NOTE: Spoiler alert!]

“ They will not fear it until they understand it, and they will not understand it until they use it.” This is one of the many struggles that the titular character of Christopher Nolan’s epic biopic confronts throughout *Oppenheimer*. The film follows the story of J. Robert Oppenheimer’s journey leading up to the creation of the atomic bomb: his background, motivations, and how he dealt with the fallout of his creation. It also gives the viewer a glimpse into his personal life, depicting his relationships with his brother Frank and wife Kitty, and his affair with Jean Tatlock.

Oppenheimer is a fascinating work by Nolan and company. The visuals are stunning, the musical score is captivating, and the cast members shine through in their own distinctive ways with each of their roles. While some artistic liberties are taken with the telling of the story, the movie stays true to its source material. The changes that are made do not detract from the story at all—they are merely implemented in order to better fit the cinematic medium.

One of the most noteworthy departures from the history involves the portrayal of the selection of the target cities. In the movie, Henry Stimson, the United States Secretary of War, says that Kyoto must be spared because he and his wife honeymooned there. They did not, and in reality, the selection process was complicated and long; this moment was perhaps inserted in order to condense it into a humorous scene.

Thankfully, there are no major factual errors, simply a series of minor tweaks done to enhance the cinematic narrative.

The movie seems to be more concerned with the “telling” rather than the story. This is one of the trademarks of Nolan’s work, captivating camerawork along with a slew of practical effects due to his dislike of overreliance on computer-generated effects. The bomb testing scene utilizes very little computer-generated imagery, though the ensuing soundwave from the explosion receives post-production editing in order to enhance the volume. The most common criticism of Nolan, and it is no different in *Oppenheimer*, is the way that dialogue is often buried beneath many layers of other sounds. He has no problem when music or other sound effects play over characters speaking, which can leave the viewer a little confused as to what is transpiring on screen. While the overall experience does not suffer too much, it is a rather frustrating recurrence. Regardless, the sound design does combine together with the other practical effects to create an intense cinematic experience.

One of the more thought-provoking aspects of this movie is that it abstains from taking a stance on the issues it portrays. The film is constructed in such a way that it does not preach to one side or the other, and instead presents both viewpoints on the dropping of the bomb. Oppenheimer is given a full stage to present and defend his views on the dangers of an atomic weapon, and other characters are used as devices to present similar perspectives. Yet the advocates for the bomb’s use, including Lewis Strauss (Robert Downey Jr.), also receive plenty of screen time. Strauss, a former traveling shoe salesman, would go on to become one of the heads of the Atomic Energy Commission. He is placed in the role of “villain” in the movie, as he would interact many times with Oppenheimer and eventually become a major reason for the atomic scientist’s downfall. The movie also does not recreate scenes from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or portray the people that dealt with the fallout of the two bombs. The audience is informed that the first bomb had been dropped by a radio broadcast made by President Harry Truman, at the same time that Oppenheimer learns of it. The closest the movie gets to

showing its consequences comes when Oppenheimer is on stage about to give a speech at an event celebrating the conclusion of the war. The haunted and guilt-stricken scientist begins to hallucinate and imagines all of the audience members horribly scarred from the bomb's detonation. The movie makes Oppenheimer's stance on the matter clear, but does not present it as the right one, presumably so as to not alienate any potential viewers. The decision to drop the bomb was an immensely complicated and impossible one to make, and the movie captures that tense feeling perfectly.

In the list of top quality actresses and actors *Oppenheimer* employs, it could be difficult for one to stand out, but a few do so by delivering especially unforgettable performances. Cillian Murphy plays the role of the titular character marvelously. In the many close-ups that the director has on the leading man, Murphy conveys a multitude of emotions and thoughts in his eyes that are somehow always looking into the middle distance. Robert Oppenheimer was far from a perfect person, and the movie does not shy away from this. The affair he commits with Jean Tatlock (Florence Pugh) has very real and even deadly consequences: Tatlock would eventually commit suicide after the affair. It serves to remind the audience that this is a main character rather than a straightforward hero.

Emily Blunt comes very close to outshining everyone in the movie, and in some scenes she accomplishes this. The story of Oppenheimer's wife, Kitty Oppenheimer, carries a lot of emotion, and this reviewer could not help but wonder whether she was the strongest character in the story. Throughout the movie she sticks stubbornly to her beliefs, and there are several negative events that could have been prevented if Murphy's character had simply listened to her.

Gary Oldman also makes a brief cameo as President Harry Truman, and although his screen time may not total even five of the movie's 180 minutes, its impact continues past his lone appearance. During the disastrous meeting between the scientist and the president, Oppenheimer says that he "feel[s] that I have blood on my hands." There is some debate around the response to this statement. In the movie, Truman takes out a handkerchief and says, "Oh, would you like to wash it off

then?” However, this is unlikely to have been what actually happened. *American Prometheus*, the book on which *Oppenheimer* is based, recounts that the most likely response was “The blood was on my hands” and “to let me worry about that.”¹ Regardless, the meeting destroyed any chance of a positive relationship forming, with the president developing a fair bit of contempt for Oppenheimer, later referring to him in a letter as “a crybaby scientist.”²

Overall the film is very well made. The story of J. Robert Oppenheimer is an intense one, and the creators do a comparatively good job of sticking closely to the true source material. A few changes are made, but nothing that would ruin the experience of someone well versed in Oppenheimer’s life story. Nolan’s film provides an educational as well as an emotionally evocative showcase of a crucial figure in a pivotal time in American history.

¹ Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 2024), 332.

² Bird and Sherwin, *American Prometheus*, 332.

The history of *History Matters*

Appalachian State University, Department of History

Have you ever spent so much time and effort on something that you wanted to share it with other people? Have you ever felt unfulfilled receiving only a grade and your own satisfaction as rewards for your hard work? Have you ever wanted to get your work published?

For these reasons *History Matters* was founded. In the spring of 2003, Eric Burnette, a freshman at Appalachian State University, was looking for an outlet for his research paper. He was frustrated by the lack of venues for undergraduate research, and he figured that other students probably felt the same way. Dr. Michael Moore, who had edited *Albion*, a professional journal of British history, for more than 25 years, began advising Burnette on how best to go about starting an academic journal for undergraduate historical research. Another Appalachian student, Matthew Manes, was asked to join the interesting experiment, and together they laid the groundwork for *History Matters*.

Our first deadline was in late January 2004. For the editorial staff, it was an extensive and time-consuming process of reading, revising, and communicating with both the authors and the Faculty Editorial Board. In the end, the collaboration published one research paper, one research essay, and three editorial book reviews. This first issue of *History Matters: An Undergraduate Journal of Historical Research* was published online on April 28, 2004.

From the beginning, Burnette and Manes wanted to expand the journal. The more students who were involved, the more students who had the opportunity to be published and the better those papers would be. The 2004-2005 school year saw the participation of the University of North Carolina Asheville and Western Carolina University, as well as submissions from half a dozen schools nationwide. The 2005 issue was published with two research papers, one from Appalachian State University and one from a student at Villanova University. Five book reviews from all three participating departments were also published.

Since 2004, *History Matters* has grown drastically. Over the years our submission base increased from 11 papers in 2004-2005 to 136 papers in 2016-2017. We now receive submissions from all over the United States from distinguished universities including Yale, Harvard, Brown, Cornell, UC Berkeley, and Stanford. *History Matters* has also expanded internationally. We have received submissions from Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and South America while also employing international staff members as contributing editors.

Today, *History Matters* continues to grow and prosper thanks to a supportive faculty, department, university, and, most importantly, the students who have worked hard on their papers and work with us to get them published.

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FILM REVIEW

Oppenheimer (2023)

Matthew McCurry

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