Black Suburbanization on Philadelphia's Main Line, 1894–1975

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Trecia Pottinger

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Katherine Solomonson, Adviser

July 2015

© Trecia Pottinger 2015

Acknowledgements

A project of this scope emerges from a network of mentors, educators, colleagues, friends, and family members. I left Minnesota immediately after my preliminary exams, and I have seen my adviser Katherine (Kate) Solomonson only five times in the last nine years. Despite this time and distance, she has been a dedicated and encouraging adviser. She talked with me regularly by phone—prompting me with questions as I gathered primary source materials and encountered exciting archival finds, reading and commenting on drafts of chapters in various states, and sharing her own approaches to research and writing. When I took a full-time position as a college administrator, Kate also became a model in how to navigate work environments with professionalism and grace. I have learned so much from her.

Kate along with John Archer introduced me to the study of suburbs in my first year as a graduate student in the survey course Suburbia. My undergraduate education had trained me in the study of cities, but the Suburbia course was the first time that I considered suburbs as potential sites of scholarly inquiry. John generously read an earlier draft of my dissertation in the fall, and his review was instrumental in my revision process leading up to the defense. In response to John's feedback, I dove into materials on topics like community-based planning and the process of laundering clothing in the early twentieth century while sharpening my arguments; his thorough and thoughtful comments elevated my work. Jennifer Pierce served as my first adviser in graduate school, and my advising relationship with her provided a strong foundation for my

graduate school experience. Both Jennifer and George Henderson have been incisive readers of my work, and I have valued their contributions to this process.

In my early years as a graduate student, Colleen Hennen and Marie Milsten Fiedler in the American studies department helped me to navigate the many types of paperwork that came with graduate school. More recently, Melanie Steinman has been a wonderful resource. Her knowledge and kindness helped me to move through the multiple administrative steps needed to complete my degree. The staff members of the Graduate Student Services and Progress office have patiently answered my many questions and assisted with technological challenges.

My path to graduate school began in the classrooms and offices of my high school. Mr. Clark, Mrs. Long, and Mr. McKeand were influential guides who envisioned possibilities for me that I could not yet see for myself, and their support led me to Bryn Mawr College. Indeed, I never would have known about or considered Bryn Mawr had it not been for Mr. Clark and Mrs. Long. In my first semester at Bryn Mawr I gained a seat in Gary McDonough's oversubscribed course Urban Culture and Society, a class that directed me from my intended chemistry major to the interdisciplinary Growth and Structure of Cities major. Gary became a mentor who offered support and precise feedback. He reminded me to start writing, because I couldn't revise what was in my head. This lesson has stayed with me fifteen years later. The conversations we shared shaped my education at Bryn Mawr and beyond; he introduced me to the idea of graduate school and suggested that I might pursue this path. Also in the Growth and Structure of Cities program, architectural historians Carola Hein and Jeffrey Cohen introduced me to

the study of the built environment, a requirement of the major that I approached with reluctance but came to enjoy and then integrate into my doctoral research. Azade Seyhan in the German department also mentored me, and she has enriched my life with her wisdom, humor, and insight.

In the American studies department, I found a supportive community of graduate students, and I didn't realize how special this environment was until years later. I learned from and valued the guidance of other graduate students, including Nalo Johnson, Jasmine Kar Tang, L. Joyce Mariano, David Monteyne, and Jason Ruiz. I met Harrod Suarez at the department's recruitment weekend, and I appreciated sharing the milestones of my third year—prelims and teaching assistantships—with him.

After completing my exams, I moved back to Philadelphia for research and connected with old colleagues and formed new friendships. My colleagues, friends, and mentors Vanessa Christman, Jody Cohen, and Michaile Rainey offered wisdom through personal and professional challenges. Jody pressed me for details of next steps in my research and writing process when I was vague, and Vanessa and Michaile held me accountable for completing this dissertation. My colleagues in the undergraduate dean's office at Bryn Mawr College were encouraging, funny, and thoughtful, and I treasured working with Judith Balthazar, Raima Evan, Chuck Heyduck, Anne Marie McElwee, Michelle Mancini, Joann O'Doherty, and Patricia Wilkins. With Powen Shiah, I explored the streets and cafés of Philadelphia. With Nia Turner, I enjoyed meals, stories, and laughter. And with Kristine Lewis, I shared writing dates and walks in Mt. Airy. Maria McMath and Brandon Woods provided feedback on early chapters as we enjoyed

brunches that rotated among our West Philadelphia apartments. These connections were invaluable through the sometimes-solitary research and writing process.

After leaving Philadelphia, I came to the Bonner Center for Service and Learning at Oberlin College. Beth Blissman, director of the center, has been incredibly generous and flexible in allowing me time to devote to writing while balancing the demands of a full-time position. I arrived at Oberlin at the same time as Tania Boster. I appreciated learning alongside her as we both explored the field of civic engagement. When I imagined worst-case outcomes for my dissertation, she reassured me that sometimes dissertations take a long time and that other people in similar circumstances had finished their degrees, too. A well-timed conversation with Dana Hamdan provided a critical push from "I need to contact the American studies department to initiate the defense process" to actually doing so.

Many departments and foundations have funded this dissertation. At the University of Minnesota, the American studies department, the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change, and the Office for Equity and Diversity provided fellowship, research, and conference grants. I also received generous financial support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the SSRC-Mellon Mays Graduate Initiatives Program, and the Ford Foundation. The Mellon Mays and Ford Fellowship programs were instrumental in my graduate school success by providing meaningful opportunities to connect with an intergenerational network of scholars of color.

The collections of Philadelphia-area archives and libraries allowed me to explore the nuances of black suburbanization in Ardmore: Charles L. Blockson Afro-American

Archives, Temple University Urban Archives, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Free Library of Philadelphia, Library Company of Philadelphia, and Lower Merion Historical Society. Anytime the Lower Merion Historical Society added material to its collections related to black history on the Main Line, I received an email from Ted Goldsborough. From scanning archival documents to offering to host me during a research trip, Ted has been extraordinarily generous with his time over many years of research. This dissertation has benefited from the labors of many people unknown to me who saved, sorted, cataloged, and stored items from another era on the chance they might have some future use. I thank the residents and community members who gave their time for interviews about their experiences in Ardmore. Through Gary McDonogh, the program in the Growth and Structure of Cities at Bryn Mawr sponsored a research associate position that provided me with access to research databases, books, and other library materials I could not have done without. Katie van Heest was a wonderful copyeditor who expertly addressed all of my questions about citations and helped me to polish the final drafts of my dissertation. Portions of Chapter 5 were previously published in John Archer, Paul J. P. Sandul, and Katherine Solomonson, eds., *Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); copyright 2015 by the Regents of the University of Minnesota.

I am grateful to those friends who have sustained me for the duration of this undertaking from the first day of graduate classes through to the submission of my dissertation. Jason Ferguson has been a frank conversation partner who has never hesitated to challenge me. Jennifer Schlissel’s positivity and confidence in me never

waivered, even when I doubted myself. Maria Paz Gutierrez Esguerra and I have maintained our connection through many transitions, sharing walks, stories, and laughter from Minneapolis to Oberlin and from Ann Arbor to Philadelphia. Jason, Jenny, and Maria Paz listened, whatever the academic, personal, and professional question that presented itself and celebrated in my successes. In the final years of my dissertation process, Asher Kolieboi has been a supportive companion and interlocutor. He has enriched my life with his perspective and kept me laughing along the way while pushing me to finish with the refrain "Just get it done."

I could never have started or finished this process without my parents. Their support of my educational pursuits reaches back to elementary school and has been steadfast and expansive. They have modeled for me the importance of being resourceful, doing work well, and maintaining a positive outlook. I have drawn on these lessons throughout my graduate school process.

Especially in the months leading up to my defense, many of the conversations I had with my parents ended with a request for an update on my dissertation progress. My parents, along with other family members, are perhaps even more excited and relieved than I am to witness the completion of this dissertation. They have waited a long time for this moment, and I am delighted to share it with them.

Dedication

For my parents

Abstract

Railroad suburbs first saw deliberate development in the mid-nineteenth century, and since then, both scholarly writing and popular culture have linked these suburbs to images of wealth, whiteness, and power. Yet, interwoven between large single-family homes on expansive tracts of land there has always been heterogeneity in more modest homes and communities whose residents historically have been African Americans. This dissertation departs from portrayals that overlook these individuals and families and asks what suburban identities and geographies of railroad suburbs look like when viewed through the homes, neighborhoods, and lives of black residents. To explore this question with depth and complexity, I ground my dissertation in a case study located on Philadelphia's Main Line, which is among the most prominent examples of all railroad suburbs, and I focus on the presence of black residents in Ardmore, one community on the Main Line. This interdisciplinary project investigates the life experiences and the built environment of the black suburbanites who settled in Ardmore in the late nineteenth century and links these origins to the changing neighborhood context of the black residents who lived there in the postwar era. This alternative narrative will show how black Main Line residents negotiated and shaped racial and class identities through different environments.

Table of Contents

List of Figures x

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: Constructing the Main Line 35

Chapter 2: Building Ardmore 69

Chapter 3: Home 104

Chapter 4: Associations 155

Chapter 5: Postwar Activism in Ardmore 205

Conclusion 246

Bibliography 257

List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of the Philadelphia area highlighting Ardmore. 5

Figure 2. Rendering of White Hall train depot and White Hall Hotel. 48

Figure 3. Rendering of the original Bryn Mawr commuter station. 54

Figure 4. Rendering of the Bryn Mawr Hotel. 55

Figure 5. Map of Cheswold, including the gatehouse and outlying buildings. 58

Figure 6. Front view of Cheswold main house. 59

Figure 7. Alexander Cassatt with his daughters in front of Cheswold. 61

Figure 8. Atlas plate of Wynnewood with 317 Aubrey Road highlighted. 65

Figure 9. 317 Aubrey Avenue. 66

Figure 10. Original Autocar building. 77

Figure 11. Autocar plant building 77

Figure 12. Autocar plant next to another building on Lancaster Avenue. 78

Figure 13. 156 Simpson Road and its twin, 154 Simpson Road. 104

Figure 14. Bevan properties on Maple Avenue highlighted. 115

Figure 15. 300 block of West Spring Avenue. 117

Figure 16. Detached, single-family house on Cricket Avenue. 118

Figure 17. Map highlighting Athens and Bellevue Apartments. 120

Figure 18. Athens Apartments. 121

Figure 19. Bellevue Apartments. 121

Figure 20. Real estate agent Herbert Nelson's storefront at 20 Ardmore Avenue 134

Figure 21. Rear of Simpson Road 140

Figure 22. 152 Simpson Road. 143

Figure 23. Downingtown Pennsylvania Hall. 164

Figure 24. Downingtown campus. 165

Figure 25. Downingtown lower campus. 165

Figure 26. Downingtown administration building and girls' dormitory. 166

Figure 27. Front view of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church. 183

Figure 28. Mt. Calvary Baptist Church main entrance. 183

Figure 29. An interior view of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church 184

Figure 30. Main Line Negro Business League hall site. 199

Figure 31. ArdSpring Condominium building site. 237

Figure 32. The Centennial Village Condominiums 239

Figure 33. North-facing units of ArdSpring Condominiums. 240

Figure 34. Yards of ArdSpring Condominiums. 242

Introduction

In 1920 the African American newspaper the *Philadelphia Tribune* ran a front-page story that showcased the African American population of the Main Line, a popular designation for a string of suburbs west of Philadelphia.[1] The article had a particular focus on the town of Ardmore. "Right outside the gates of Philadelphia, just as you start to penetrate the beautiful fields of Montgomery [County] . . . lies the beautiful suburban town of Ardmore. And Ardmore is in reality the beginning of that wonderful stretch of country villages and towns that runs even into the very depths of Chester County . . ." Beginning in the 1910s, growing numbers of African Americans settled on the Main Line. By the time the *Philadelphia Tribune* published its feature in 1920, Ardmore had emerged as a center of black life on the Main Line. The writer described Ardmore and the Main Line as a place where "unusual success and prosperity . . . follows the efforts of the colored people" and defined success in terms of homeownership and occupation. In Ardmore, "almost every family . . . lives in their own home" and "every man works and for his work receives ample compensation."

The article also profiled several leading African Americans, and York Nelson was one of these. Nelson exemplified success both in his professional pursuits and in his home. He was, according to the writer, "one of the ablest landscape gardeners in the country"; his house, an "unusual attraction" counted among Ardmore's "showplaces."

---

[1] An Old Timer, "The Suburban Business Men to Build Villages," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 22, 1920.

Nelson's home along with his profession exemplified the article's aim to characterize African Americans on the Main Line as prosperous suburbanites.

The *Philadelphia Tribune* article is one of many descriptions published about the Main Line since the area was first developed in the 1870s, and the article incorporated elements common across representations of the Main Line. It ordered towns from east to west, aestheticized the natural environment, emphasized homeownership, and highlighted the accomplishments of prominent residents. While the *Philadelphia Tribune* fashioned these elements into a narrative that presented the Main Line and Ardmore from the perspectives of African American residents, the majority of other narratives focused on the lives and perspectives of affluent white residents. The master narrative of the Main Line began in the 1870s, when developers started promoting the Main Line as a destination for affluent white Philadelphians. Promoters offered elite white Philadelphians the vision of an idyllic house in the countryside as an alternative to the ills of city life, including rising immigration, overcrowding, and pollution. The towns of the Main Line stretched out along the Pennsylvania Railroad's western commuter line, and the train was a central aspect of the Main Line story: it provided a link to the city for social, consumer, and economic purposes and transported white male income earners from houses in suburbs to the city for work and back home again—all while providing distance from the supposedly undesirable aspects of urban life. Since the 1870s, developers, boosters, journalists, and, at times, scholars have characterized the Main Line (and other suburbs like it) as a landscape of wealth, whiteness, and power. However, the

Main Line has never been the exclusive domain of the white and wealthy, and social and physical diversity has always existed.

As this dissertation will do, the 1920 *Philadelphia Tribune* article foregrounded the experiences of black Main Line residents. From the article's opening lines, it offered subtly different understandings of place and the relationships between suburb and city. Rather than begin at Broad Street Station, the Philadelphia terminus of the commuter rail line, the article began "right outside the gates of Philadelphia." These figurative gates interrupted the connection between the urban area and its environs found in dominant representations of the Main Line, suggesting a clear division between city and suburb and the possibility of life independent of the city. The article did not rely on the Pennsylvania Railroad's train line to transport the reader into and through this suburban space; the reader could imagine conveyance by foot, train, trolley, bus, or automobile. By describing Ardmore as "the beginning of that wonderful stretch of country villages and towns," the article shifted the starting point of the Main Line to Ardmore, bypassing Overbrook, Merion, and Narberth (the first three stations on the Main Line commuter rail route) to begin at the first town that had a significant black population. There were other differences, too. Work formed a critical part of the article's assessment of this suburban setting. In Ardmore, African Americans lived *and* worked, and homeownership was a testament to this population's hard work and thrift. While women received only a passing mention, the article acknowledged women's contributions in attaining success in a way that dominant representations of the Main Line did not.

This dissertation disrupts prevailing images of the Main Line that have emphasized wealth and whiteness and either ignored African Americans or seen them primarily as poor residents and as employees for their wealthy white neighbors. Domestic service employment often drew the first black migrants to the Main Line. Over time, however, African Americans came to work in diverse fields. Several Main Line towns developed significant black populations. Many of these African Americans were part of a larger process of black migration from the South. Residents represented the earliest examples of black suburbanization, which would continue to grow in the decades that followed. This dissertation traces the origins of African Americans who settled on the Main Line between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s and examines their experiences of home, neighborhood, and association. Attention to their lives demonstrates that most African Americans did not understand the Main Line exclusively in relationship to its white elite and, more broadly, that the Main Line encompassed diverse realities—even within the African American population. There was no singular "black Main Line experience" positioned opposite a "white Main Line experience."

Understanding the multidimensional experiences of African Americans in a suburban context like the Main Line necessitates a case-study approach. By examining the specificities of one location, nuanced understandings of these understudied and narrowly understood black suburban sites can emerge. This project therefore focuses on one neighborhood in the Main Line town of Ardmore. Ardmore was one of several Main Line communities (including Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Wayne) that developed significant black populations. The neighborhoods where African Americans lived shared

certain characteristics. African Americans lived mostly in spatially distinct neighborhoods on the southern side of the Main Line's primary thoroughfare. Their neighborhoods were multiethnic, and many of their neighbors were Irish and Italian immigrants or first-and second-generation US citizens born of Irish and Italian parents. Ardmore, however, represents the largest concentration of black residents on the Main Line over time. In addition, Ardmore's mix of residential, commercial, and institutional land uses position it as an ideal site in which to examine dimensions of suburban life that encompass but also extend beyond the home.

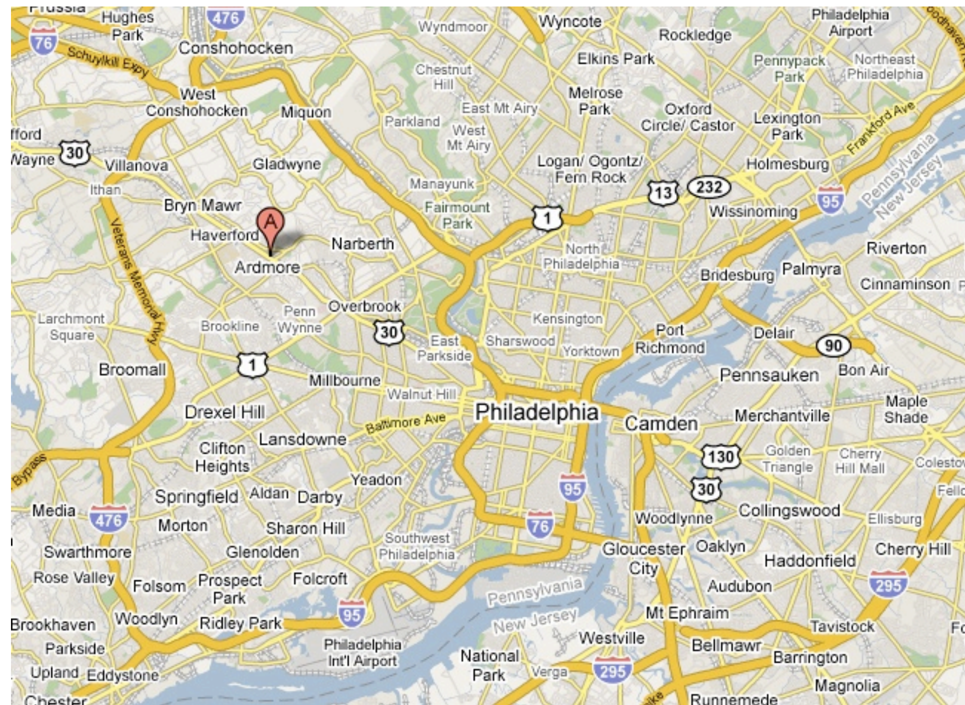

Figure 1. Map of the Philadelphia area highlighting Ardmore. (Google Maps, 2009).

The ways African Americans in Ardmore shaped, reshaped, and negotiated their environments allowed them to establish themselves and relationships with one another in a changing suburban context, assert power, and advance sociopolitical aims. These

processes also produced alternative experiences and narratives of the Main Line that existed alongside and in relationship to dominant narratives of the area. Centering the experiences of African Americans causes well-documented sites take on divergent meanings and overlooked spaces come to the fore. Entering the Main Line through the lives of African Americans in Ardmore also suggests new ways of understanding relationships between places in the metropolitan region. The lives of Ardmore's African American residents stretched beyond Ardmore, and connections to places and people outside of Ardmore were integral to the experiences of black suburbanites in Ardmore. While scholars often position early suburbs in relation to urban centers, African Americans in Ardmore also developed and sustained intersuburban, regional, and national connections. For African Americans, Ardmore was not solely a suburban satellite of the urban center but a node positioned in a network of crisscrossing connections.

"Railroad Suburbs"

A case-study approach to black suburbanization on the Main Line allows me to build most productively on the foundations established by other scholars of suburban development by providing the opportunity (1) to move past generalizations about railroad suburbs that focus on white elite residents, (2) to address multiple facets of black suburban experiences, (3) to explore the diversity that existed within the Main Line's African American population, and (4) to engage with experiences of the built environment in detailed ways.

I challenge the term *railroad suburbs*, a concept that suburban historians created to capture shared characteristics in suburban areas like the Main Line. Similar suburbs emerged near other cities, including Chicago, New York, and Boston; however, Philadelphia emerged as the most famous example of this suburban type.[2] The foundational works of suburban historians like Robert Fishman and Kenneth Jackson define railroad suburbs as affluent white suburban developments linked to the expansion of daily commuter rail service. Fishman's *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* and Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* characterize them as sites that offered respite from the perceived ills of the city (including overcrowding and working-class, immigrant, and ethnic populations) in favor of an environment defined by domesticity and cultivated nature. These early works in suburban history view railroad suburbs through the lens of the white elite and are uneven in their attention to internal difference of these sites. Jackson, for instance, drawing on the work of Ronald Karr, acknowledges the presence of working-class residents; however, he sees them primarily in relationship to the white elite for whom they worked. In this literature, the term *railroad suburb* also corresponds with

---

[2] Chicago, New York, and Boston each had suburbs that stretched out in all directions along multiple railroad lines, sometimes owned by competing companies and sometimes representing different branches of the same company's lines. Along the Lake Michigan shoreline north of Chicago, the suburbs of the North Shore developed beginning in the late 1850s; in New York it was the suburbs of Westchester County and in Boston. However, in Philadelphia and in other metropolitan regions the better-known railroad suburbs were those noted for their associations with affluence. To get a sense of the range of such suburbs that could exist in a metropolitan region, see Carl Abbott and John Stilgoe on Chicago: Carl Abbott, "'Necessary Adjuncts to Its Growth': The Railroad Suburbs of Chicago, 1854–1875," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 73 (Summer 1980): 117–31; John Stilgoe, "Chicago," in *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 139–49.

a particular aesthetic that includes curvilinear streets and large, single-family, detached houses with deep setbacks and expansive lawns.[3]

Though the designation *railroad suburb* has proved useful in understanding a significant suburban trend of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this dissertation troubles the concept. The railroad was central to the Main Line's development, and some residents relied on the train to travel between work and entertainment in Philadelphia and residence in spacious suburban houses. However, the *railroad suburb* designation has functioned like an overlay that highlights the lives, houses, and movements of a narrow segment of the population—affluent white residents. In addition to class and race, there is also a gendered dimension to the concept of the railroad suburb, as Delores Hayden asserts: "Categorizing places by commuters' choices—railroad suburb, street car suburb, automobile suburb . . . leads to a focus on middle-class and upper-class male breadwinners and their housing."[4] However, Many African Americans in Ardmore did not commute to Philadelphia for work, and those who did commute traveled not only by train but also by trolley and bus. Though it was foundational to the area's development, the railroad—and its connection to Philadelphia—was not the defining element of life for all Main Line suburbanites.

---

[3] Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 134–154; Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87–102, 99. See also Ronald Karr, "The Evolution of an Elite Suburb: Community Structure and Control in Brookline, Massachusetts, 1770–1900" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1981).

[4] Delores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 5.

This case study of black suburbanization in Ardmore offers the chance to push past the generalizations about "railroad suburbs" to explore the racial and economic heterogeneity of these suburbs. Other suburban historians have adapted case study approaches, and this dissertation builds on the foundation these works established. Because of their greater depth, these case studies have produced more nuanced analyses of suburbs that developed along rail lines than survey works likes *Crabgrass Frontier*, and they have attended to dimensions of ethnic, racial, and religious differences to varying degrees.

Michael Ebner's 1988 monograph *Creating Chicago's North Shore: A Suburban History* considers the development of a collection of suburbs similar to the Main Line. Ebner takes a regional perspective[5] and traces the formation of a broader North Shore identity across its constitutive suburbs. Ebner characterizes the North Shore as "enduring affluent suburbs," but he brings into relief various forms of difference, including ethnic, racial, and religious, that existed within and across the towns that came to make up the North Shore. Ebner also recognizes racial difference in a limited form: he briefly addresses the presence of African Americans, but their experiences remain secondary to the housing, institutions, and endeavors of white residences. Nonetheless, Ebner's work serves as a reminder that suburbs like the North Shore were not only multiracial but also

[5] For another example of a text that takes a regional approach, see Abbott, "Necessary Adjuncts to Its Growth." Abbott looks not only at the North Shore but at all the suburbs that developed around Chicago railroads from the 1850s to 1870s. Looking at attitudes Chicago residents had toward suburbs and the rhetoric that developers used to promote these new suburbs, he acknowledges that even in suburbs known for upper-class residents there was class diversity.

multiethnic and multifaith, two categories of difference that were particularly salient in the early twentieth century.

Whereas Ebner focuses on a collection of suburbs, other authors have narrowed their attention to case studies of individual suburbs. In the Philadelphia region, David Contosta's *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850–1990* examines another suburb that developed around a rail line:[6] Chestnut Hill, located in the northwest section of Philadelphia. Contosta is interested in Chestnut Hill's unique political position as an area within a city that had many of the characteristics typically associated with a suburb. While Contosta's work emphasizes the identities of affluent white residents and their participation in civic life, he also considers how people of different socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds experienced Chestnut Hill by examining neighborhoods, religious institutions, schools, and social networks. Contosta finds that in early twentieth century Chestnut Hill "this suburban neighborhood . . . did not function as an integrated community," and "there were several communities within Chestnut Hill." (159) Like Contosta, I look at how one suburban area can encompass multiple experiences. Ebner and Contosta consider nonmajority residents minor characters in their stories, whereas I focus on the experiences of black residents.

[6] David Contosta, *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850–1990* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995). Up until 1854 the area now known as Chestnut Hill was part of the county of Philadelphia. The 1854 consolidation of the city and the county brought the area into the municipal boundaries of the city. According to Contosta and to Sam Bass Warner, issues about policing and crime motivated the consolidation. See Contosta, *Suburb in the City*, 39, and Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 152–57.

Focusing on the Boston metropolitan area, Ronald Karr's dissertation, "The Evolution of an Elite Suburb: Community Structure and Control in Brookline, Massachusetts, 1770–1900" presents a detailed analysis of social stratification in Brookline. His work also offers lessons in the study of heterogeneity in suburbs like the Main Line, and his attention to intragroup differences informs my research. Often employing quantitative methods, Karr moves beyond a binary of rich and working class to consider differences within each of these categories. This approach produces a more nuanced study of Brookline, and I similarly strive to grapple with differences present within Ardmore's black population as I consider both race and class in this suburban context.

Michael McCarthy's short essay "Corrupt and Contented? Philadelphia's Stereotypes and Suburban Growth on the Main Line" considers the Main Line in his assessment of the field of urban and suburban history in the late 1980s.[7] Urban and suburban historians, McCathy asserts, rely on stereotypes, and the incorrect assumption that the Main Line was exclusively white, wealthy, and elitist exemplifies this. McCarthy highlights the presence of working and middle-class residents before discussing examples of progressive ideals and housing reform on the Main Line. Though the perspectives of prominent white actors on the Main Line again remain primary in his essay, McCarthy's call to move beyond stereotypes about cities and suburbs is integral to this dissertation.

Black Suburbanization and the New Suburban History

[7] Michael P. McCarthy, "Corrupt and Contented? Philadelphia's Stereotypes and Suburban Growth on the Main Line," in *Suburbia Re-examined*, ed. Barbara Kelly (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989), 111–18.

The instance of black suburbanization explored in this dissertation is one example of a larger phenomenon of black suburbanization, a topic of study that first garnered significant scholarly attention in the 1970s. This early scholarship on black suburbanization was often based in sociology and largely examined the time period from the 1950s forward. Two trends of the postwar era shaped this research: first, the exponential growth of suburbs as they became more accessible to a wider cross section of the US population and, second, the increased ghettoization of African Americans in urban centers because of privately and governmentally supported racial discrimination. This scholarship thus considers the place of African Americans in the expanding postwar suburban landscape in light of postwar patterns of urban segregation and inequality.

Three significant texts published in the early 1970s were "The Changing Distribution of Negroes within Metropolitan Areas: The Emergence of Black Suburbs," by sociologist Reynolds Farley; "Black Movement into the Suburbs: Suburbs Doubling Their Black Populations during the 1960s," by historian Harold Connolly; and *Black Suburbanization: Access to Improved Quality of Life or Maintenance of the Status Quo?*, by geographer Harold Rose. The temporal, geographic, and thematic emphases of these works varied, but a common set of questions recurred. Rose, Connolley, and Farley each investigated the characteristics of black suburbanites and the suburbs to which they moved and considered how black suburbanites fared in comparison to their white counterparts. Implicit in these works was the question of whether suburbs might offer a meaningful solution to ghettoization and achieve the promise of integration left largely unfulfilled by cities—or would they replicate patterns of urban racial segregation?

However, Connolley, Farley, and Rose all found evidence of racial segregation in suburbs. In seeking answers to these questions, these researches drew heavily on quantitative methods, particularly analyses of census data. This type of literature provides valuable data to understand national (and in some cases regional) trends in black suburbanization in the post–World War II era. However, such quantitative approaches also pose limitations in their ability to explore lived suburban experiences and the significance of the built environment in daily life.[8]

Scholarship on black suburbanization in the last thirty years spans the class spectrum and demonstrates the diversity of black suburban experiences. Public policy and planning scholars have addressed the rising presence of black households in their discussions of so-called "first-ring suburbs"—suburbs that are adjacent to cities and experience many of the challenges present in central cities, including low tax base, aging housing stock, and poverty. An example of this literature includes urban planning researchers Nancey Green Leigh and Sugie Lee's "Philadelphia's Space In Between: Inner-Ring Suburb Evolution," which situates this suburban type in a metropolitan

---

[8] See, for instance, Harold X. Connolly, "Black Movement into the Suburbs: Suburbs Doubling Their Black Populations during the 1960s," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1973); Reynolds Farley, "The Changing Distribution of Negroes within Metropolitan Areas: The Emergence of Black Suburbs," *American Journal of Sociology* 75, no. 4 (1970): 512–29; Harold M. Rose, *Black Suburbanization: Access to Improved Quality of Life or Maintenance of the Status Quo?* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1976). John Logan and Mark Schneider framed their 1984 article as an update to earlier findings about the continuity of segregation in suburbs and found that segregation had persisted. John Logan and Mark Schneider, "Racial Segregation and Racial Change in American Suburbs, 1970–1980," *American Journal of Sociology* 89, no. 4 (1984): 874–88.

context, and quantitative methods figure prominently in this policy-focused work.[9] Other scholars writing on black suburbanization, including Joel Garreau, Mary Pattillo, and Karyn Lacy, have addressed the black middle class, particularly through qualitative case studies.[10] Implicitly and explicitly, such studies on the black middle class often form part of a larger debate concerning the state of black *urban* neighborhoods, with some scholars arguing that the migration of the black middle class from cities to suburbs negatively impacted black urban neighborhoods.

---

[9] Nancey Green Leigh and Sugie Lee, "Philadelphia's Space In Between: Inner-Ring Suburb Evolution," *Opoli* 1 no. 1 (2005): 13–32. This literature on first-ring suburbs is in some ways a continuation of the work of early scholars like Harold X. Connolly, who noted in an 1973 article that suburbs adjacent to urban concentrations of African Americans were among the suburbs that had experienced the greatest rise in black suburban populations, a type of suburbanization he called "ghetto expansion." Connolly, "Black Movement into the Suburbs," 97.

[10] See, for instance, Joel Garreau, "Atlanta: The Color of Money," in *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 138–78; Mary Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Karyn R. Lacy, *Blue Chip Black* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Valerie Johnson's *Black Power in the Suburbs* centers black middle-class suburbanites but also considers the divisions between these suburbanites and working-class black suburbanites who also reside in Prince George's County. Valerie Johnson, *Black Power in the Suburbs: The Myth or Reality of African-American Suburbanization* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002). In addition to such case studies, the topic of the suburbanization of the black middle class was also taken up tangentially by scholars like William Julius Wilson, who asserts that the out-migration of the black middle-class residents to suburbs destabilized predominantly black urban areas. Sugrue challenges the idea that black neighborhoods were ever truly class integrated, finding in Detroit that middle-class black families consistently moved to the edges of concentrated black neighborhoods. William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantage: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 197–207.

Most salient in relationship to this dissertation, however, has been the scholarship that addresses black suburbanization from historical perspectives. A small but growing number of scholars have explored early histories of black suburbanization before World War II. In particular, Andrew Wiese's survey *Places of Their Own* provides a broad framework for understanding patterns of black suburbanization. Addressing both more recent forms of black suburbanization *and* their antecedents, Wiese uses mixed methods to emphasize the processes and motivations that give rise to black suburbanization. However, more in-depth analysis of particular suburbs (and the lives of residents in the years and decades after they settled there) is beyond Wiese's scope. I give greater attention to the geographies of African Americans' lives in domains outside the home and examine their collective endeavors. Through analyzing early twentieth-century practices as well as collective endeavors across multiple generations, this dissertation examines not only *why* African Americans settled in Ardmore but also of *how* black suburbanites in Ardmore lived individually and with one another.

Both in *Places of Their Own* and in an article, Wiese has given particular attention to African Americans in suburban areas like the Main Line. Wiese argues that women were often "pioneers" of affluent suburbs in that they established themselves in domestic service positions, and he characterizes the enclaves where black residents lived as "domestic service suburbs."[11] This categorization casts the primary identity of these

[11] See Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 61–65; Andrew Wiese, "Black Housing, White Finance: African American Housing and Home

suburbanites as workers and orders other aspects of their lives around work. Work was a significant factor in motivating people to settle in Ardmore, but there were other reasons that African Americans chose to live there.

Several other historians of black suburbanization also take case study approaches.[12] Historian Shirley Ann Wilson Moore's book *The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910–1963* traces the development of the working-class black population in the San Francisco suburb of Richmond before, during, and after the town's World War II shipbuilding boom. As in Ardmore, employment opportunities in a particular field (shipbuilding here and domestic service in Ardmore) were interlaced with black settlement in Richmond, and labor is an organizing framework for much of the book. However, Moore also addresses other aspects of black life in Richmond. By delving into areas such as medicine, nightclubs, churches, state clubs, and sports teams, Moore examines how southern practices like music and worship styles sustained and empowered black newcomers and how these evolved in the multiracial setting of the Bay Area. Moore considers the significance of social practices and sites outside the home, both of which are also important in understanding African American experiences in Ardmore.

Ownership in Evanston, Illinois, before 1940," *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 2 (1999): 429–60.

[12] Among these are Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910–1963* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Bruce Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

Another case study that explores themes similar to this dissertation is Sociologist Bruce Haynes's *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb*. In this longitudinal study, Haynes traces the development of black suburbanization in the Nepperhan section of Yonkers, a suburb of New York City, from its early development in the mid-nineteenth century through the 1980s. While this dissertation considers black suburban experiences at the group, household, and individual levels with an attention to daily practices, Haynes is concerned primarily with Nepperhan at the level of the group. Haynes argues that a shared racial consciousness of middle-class black suburbanites emerged as a result of racially segregated neighborhoods and in response to local political struggles. Haynes engages with archival material to tell the story of black suburbanization in Nepperhan; however, cohesive analysis is lacking, and his treatment of Nepperhan's history is often more descriptive than analytical. In addition, as Andrew Wiese has similarly noted, Haynes too often draws on scholarship that documents historical and social processes at a national scale or in other locations rather than delving into how they happened in Nepperhan.[13] In doing so, Haynes sometimes misses the opportunity that a case study presents: to understand a nationally relevant issue in a local context.[14]

---

[13] For instance, after noting that a "split labor market" existed in Nepperhan that elevated white workers over black workers, Haynes draws on David Roediger's work on how working-class European men were racialized as white. However, Haynes fails to examine how this process operated in Nepperhan. Haynes, *Red Line, Black Spaces*, 5–7.

[14] Andrew Wiese, review of *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb* by Bruce Haynes, *Journal of American History* 80, no. 3 (2002): 1135–36.

The scholarship on African American suburban history is part of a larger shift toward grappling with heterogeneity in suburban history scholarship. This "new suburban history," as some have called it, has broadened previously narrow definitions of what constitutes "suburban" in historical perspective. While Wiese has addressed African American suburbanization, other scholars, such as Becky Nicolaides and Richard Harris, have discussed working-class and unplanned suburbanization, respectively. Rather than presume suburbs to be the domain of the white middle and upper classes (as foundational texts on suburban history have), such works have investigated suburbs defined by racial, ethnic, class, and physical diversity. They have thus recuperated suburbs that a previous generation of suburban historians largely bypassed and overlooked.

This dissertation builds upon foundational works in the new suburban history not only by recuperating suburban experiences that earlier generations of scholars neglected but also by probing how attention to heterogeneity in suburbs can reshape understandings of suburbs more generally. Thus, this dissertation centers the experiences of African Americans rather than inserting them on the peripheries of existing narratives of the affluent Main Line. This shift offers new ways of understanding the Main Line and suburbs more broadly.

The existing body of literature on the history of black suburbanization highlights some of the ways space was significant in defining suburban experiences for African Americans historically. This has often revolved around issues like housing (both public and private) and the efforts of African Americans to access affordable, quality housing in suburban neighborhoods—at times in the face of discrimination enacted by individuals,

groups, and government. However, scholars less often look at the built environment itself to answer questions about black suburban experiences.[15] For instance, Moore chronicles the construction of public housing in Richmond, but she gives only a limited sense of such projects' physical form or the ways African Americans inhabited them. This dissertation takes a different approach: engaging the built environment as a form of evidence to produce a spatial and material analysis of African American life in Ardmore.

bell hooks and Barbara Mooney have discussed the particular significance of the built environment in African American history.[16] hooks argues that, for African Americans in the South, self-determination was linked with space: "Indeed, black folks equated freedom with the passage into a life where they would have the right to exercise control over space on their own behalf, where they would imagine, design, and create spaces that would respond to the needs of their lives, their communities."[17] Whereas hooks discusses the built environment in terms of African Americans themselves, Mooney explores how the built environment has been significant in interracial exchanges between African Americans and white Americans. Some African American intellectuals

---

[15] Wiese and Haynes provide two examples of how scholars have analyzed the built environment. Wiese discusses some of the ways early twentieth-century black suburbanites utilized their homes—for instance, as sites of economic productivity. Haynes considers control of space at the neighborhood level by addressing the political debates that surround the built environment, particularly regarding zoning. See for instance Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 85–86, and Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces*, 31–32 and 109–13.

[16] bell hooks, "Black Vernacular: Architecture as Cultural Practice," in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995), 145–51; Barbara Burlison Mooney, "The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 1 (2002): 48–67.

[17] hooks, "Black Vernacular," 147.

and institutions asserted that a particular type of domestic environment, along with appropriate behaviors, would dispel negative images of African Americans and demonstrate that African Americans were prepared for full citizenship; however, these ideas were also a source of friction, revealing intraracial class and ideological differences.[18] Both hooks's and Mooney's insights find relevance in Ardmore, where African Americans exercised agency in shaping homes and institutions to meet their needs but also did so in a context shaped by intra- and interracial dynamics.

In using the built environment as a site of analysis, I draw on models exemplified by architectural historians Annmarie Adams and Abigail Van Slyck.[19] These authors look to the built environment, in conversation with other sources, to answer questions about people's values, identities, and social relationships. Most relevant to my work, they analyze the types of activities that take place in different areas of a building, the relationship between a building and its surroundings, how a person's identity allows access to certain spaces, and how space is instrumental in the production of identity. In embracing their work, I approach Ardmore's built environment not merely as a backdrop to the lives of its black residents but as a site requiring analysis.

The experiential is at the forefront of my analysis, and I consider people's interactions, choices, and practices across different environments. Experience encompasses not only particular places but also movement through spaces. Here, Dell

---

[18] Mooney, "The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage," 48–49.

[19] See, for instance, Annmarie Adams, *Medicine by Design: The Architect and the Modern Hospital, 1893–1943* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and Abigail Van Slyck, "The Spatial Practices of Privilege," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70, no. 2 (2011): 210–39.

Upton's notion of the "social experience of architecture" informs my approach to studying African American experience in Ardmore. Upton explains that a social experience of architecture "requires us to account for the entire range of spatial divisions from the scale of furnishings to that of settlement patterns. An individual's perception of a landscape changes with the experience of moving through it." The question of how African Americans experienced the suburban spaces through which they moved threads across chapters, and my attention to the experiential operates at the scales of home, workplace, neighborhood, suburb, and region. Attention to the experiential is especially important in studying the lives of these early black suburbanites. While the archive of materials that documents the lives, practices, and environments of affluent white residents is expansive, materials that directly address African Americans suburban lives are rare. An experiential approach allows me to interweave materials that *are* widely available, particularly the census, maps, and community notes columns, in order to examine the conditions of African Americans in early Ardmore. I am guided by the question, what might it have been like to be in or move through a particular location in a particular moment in a particular body?

I bring experience into dialogue with representation. Representation has been central to the Main Line's story from its earliest development. Representations took on textual and visual forms, for instance, through newspapers, promotional materials, maps, drawings, and photographs, and they served diverse purposes. For African Americans in Ardmore and outsiders, representations informed understandings of black residents and the neighborhoods in which they lived.

Race, class, and gender strongly impacted how individuals experienced and made sense of the Main Line suburbs. Location matters in understanding categories of race, gender, and class and their interrelationships. “Racial identities,” as John Hartigan writes, “are produced and experienced distinctly in different localities.”[20] Thus, the racial identities (and, by extension, gender and class identities) of black suburbanites in Ardmore were shaped in part by the shifting social, political, and historical particularities of this site. From the start, developers and textual representations knitted whiteness into the narrative of the Main Line and bound whiteness with affluence. In framing her study of whiteness in postwar suburban development, Dianne Harris asserts, “By 1945 the connections formed among homeownership, white identities, and citizenship had existed for decades in the United States, with the precise alignment of white identities and ideas about home shifting according to both time and locale.”[21] While Harris’s work focuses on the postwar period, her assertions provide a useful framework for considering the early twentieth-century Main Line. The dominant narrative of the Main Line associated elite, white Philadelphia families with spacious suburban homes. This same narrative positioned African Americans on the periphery of the Main Line and considered African Americans only as members of a uniform service class that supported affluent white residents. By troubling the narratives of the Main Line, I simultaneously trouble its attendant racial categories. Through spaces and forms of association, African Americans

[20] John Hartigan, *Racial Situation: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 14.

[21] Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 14.

in Ardmore articulated diverse black suburban identities that the popular ideas about the Main Line often elided or negated.

Though white outsiders often perceived African Americans in Ardmore as a homogeneous group, status in relationship to other African Americans was an important aspect of African American life in early Ardmore. The ways that African Americans in Ardmore understood class reflected patterns that scholars have found in other settings in this time period. The work of St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton on Chicago provides an excellent example of the many categories African Americans employed in ordering one another socially. Drake and Cayton show that these categories included skin color, occupational prestige, income, education, consumption choices, public behavior, family, and social connections. Income was but one of these categories, and it was possible for an individual to attain high social status within the African American community without a high income if other factors were in place. In Ardmore, references to this array of class markers appeared regularly in African American–produced documents; homeownership, occupation, practices, education, and membership in particular groups served as indicators of class.[22]

Gender also shaped black experiences in Ardmore. At work, at home, and in community, the roles, spaces, and opportunities available to black women compared with

---

[22] St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, "The Measure of a Man," in *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), 495–525. For an important example of how African Americans in Ardmore discussed class, see George Benjamin Goode and Charles Brown Plant, *Who Is Who: The Afro-American Social Directory* (Ardmore: Ardmore Printing Company, 1922), Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

black men were often distinct and entwined with class. Consistent with experiences elsewhere, different occupations were available to black men and women in early twentieth century suburban Ardmore. While black residents inhabited their homes in diverse ways, they did so within the larger context of gendered expectations circulating in this time period, both for African Americans broadly and for suburban domestic environments. Socially, residents often moved between spaces that were single gender and mixed gender.

Sources

Few sources focus on the experiences of African Americans in suburban environments; even fewer focus on African American experiences in Ardmore. Thus, I combine a variety of sources to examine dimensions of black suburbanization in Ardmore. Archival materials produced by individuals and organizations provide insight into how African Americans lived their lives at home, at work and in community and how both African Americans and others imagined the Main Line context in which they lived. This includes the records of churches, schools, associations, and corporations. All of these sources was produced with distinct purposes and audiences in mind and, as such, often provide overlapping perspectives on issues. The resources of the Lower Merion Historical Society, the Temple Urban Archives, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the manuscript collections of the Library of Congress proved especially significant.

The Federal Census of the United States provides demographic information that complements other source materials. This includes details on address, homeownership, marital status, employment, place of birth, and household size and their relationships to

one another. I utilize the census in two ways: first, at individual and household levels, to gain information about specific individuals and, second, at an aggregate level, to understand patterns within the African American population. To better understand patterns in African American suburbanization, I rely on transcriptions generated from manuscript pages for the 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 censuses, and information about individual African Americans living in Ardmore was transcribed for analysis. Aggregated data from the 1940, 1950, 1960, and 1970 Census provide demographic information at the census tract level. Because Ardmore's borders are nonpolitical and cross county lines, they do not map neatly onto census divisions. Most of Ardmore is located in Lower Merion Township, but its southern edges spill over into adjacent Haverford Township in Delaware County. For aggregated demographic data, I look at the section of Ardmore located in Lower Merion Township, because the great majority of African American households, and all African American institutions, were located there. Altogether, the census data offer a unique and detailed view into the lives African Americans created in Ardmore.

Attention to the built environment is central to making sense of experience and representation in this context, and I draw on archival collections of photographs, real estate atlases, fire insurance surveys, deeds, and township and company records along with textual descriptions of physical environments. The Main Line real estate atlases are particularly important. Beginning in 1881, various publishers started producing real estate atlases, which they organized following the geography Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Nine atlases were published between 1881 and 1937 and provide a view onto

development over time at the scales of neighborhood, town, and region. Information about ownership, street names, property lines, property size, and land use likely served the needs of those involved in the purchase, sale, construction, and subdivision of real estate as well as planning entities. For the purposes of this dissertation, real estate atlases, combined with other sources, (1) reveal the roles developers and municipal entities have played in shaping and reshaping the physical environment of the Main Line, (2) provide clues to the environments that African Americans inhabited and shaped, and (3) illuminate alternative notions of suburban space that have existed alongside and in relation to the wealthier areas of the Main Line on which suburban scholars have focused.

Analysis of mass media sources—each of which had its own racial, class, and political orientations—is also central to this dissertation. Philadelphia's main African American newspaper was the *Philadelphia Tribune*, and each week's paper included columns from nearby towns and suburbs. Among these was Ardmore, which appeared first under the heading Ardmore News and then under a combined Main Line News before becoming the Ardmore Notes. The column performed a diversity of functions. Part bulletin board, part society pages, the Ardmore Notes chronicled lifecycle milestones, including marriages, illnesses, deaths, and births; summarized significant events at churches; reported on the activities of fraternal organizations and social clubs; announced upcoming events; noted individuals' and families' travels to places near and far; and listed the private parties and dinners of the previous weeks. The potential readership for the column was both local and regional, possibly shaping how *Philadelphia Tribune* readers in Ardmore would think of their neighbors and how readers elsewhere would

think of Ardmore and the quality of the African Americans who lived there. Taken together, the Ardmore Notes represent one of the most significant sources of information about African American experiences in early twentieth century Ardmore.

Yet, as sources, the columns also present limitations. There were likely restrictions, both explicit and implicit, on who could enter news in the notes columns and on what they could address. First, it is possible that an individual had to subscribe to the paper in order to submit notes.[23] If this were the case, only those with the disposable income and interest in purchasing a newspaper subscription would have had access to the notes columns and to shaping its content. Second, the publication process included mechanisms to screen what appeared in the columns. Individuals in Ardmore would have submitted notes through an intermediary: the local *Tribune* delivery person. If the agents had editorial responsibilities or the ability exclude notes that others submitted, then they would have shaped what appeared in the columns. There was also the suggestion that the *Tribune* itself set limitations on the types of notes it published, and a 1916 entry in the Bryn Mawr Items column warned "all persons desiring to enter the news column" that "[t]he Tribune does not publish everything, so be careful." Third, the material published in community notes columns could, according to William Gatewood, reflect social

[23] References to the notes included in at least two columns suggests this was the case: "See S.H. Causby, 247 Preston Ave., when you want the Tribune. He will send your news to print and deliver the paper to your door." Another agent wrote, "Have your notes ready when you receive your paper." Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 28, 1910; Bryn Mawr Items, *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 12, 1916.

aspirations rather than a person's current experience of status in relationship to other black residents.[24]

The *Tribune*, and the Ardmore Notes column that appeared in it, was enmeshed in its own political questions that likely included some residents and excluded others. In 1910, the editor or the local delivery person for the newspaper noted, "[the] writer will make a census canvassing report of the per cent of residents who read the Tribune according to the population of Bryn Mawr, Haverford and Ardmore . . . It would be very interesting for the public to know the persons who read and those who do not read the happenings of our race."[25] In this statement, the writer suggested that reading the *Tribune* reflected upon a person's commitment to engaging with the "happenings of our race." With their emphasis on black progress and success, the Ardmore Notes columns paid less attention to crime and other activities that might detract from narratives of success.

I surveyed every edition of the *Philadelphia Tribune* published in 1915, 1920, and 1925 for references to Ardmore and the Main Line. These years encompassed the peak of African American population growth in Ardmore, and this process helped identify significant issues in Ardmore for more focused research. I coded feature-length articles by topic and coded sentences within community notes columns by topic. This approach allowed me to follow discussions of different issues across time.

---

[24] See Willard Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 197–98. Chapter 4 will discuss the role of social aspiration in community notes columns in greater detail.

[25] Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 28, 1920.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* also offered perspectives on early black life in Ardmore and on the development of the Main Line and the Philadelphia Inquirer. The *Inquirer* was one of the city's major daily newspapers, and it included coverage of Ardmore and Main Line primarily from white perspectives. Thus, the newspaper provides perspectives on the suburban development of the Main Line as affluent suburbs for white residents. African Americans figure primarily in the margins of these papers, for instance in employment classifieds. In addition, The *Philadelphia Inquirer* portrayed African American experiences in a negative light, foregrounding black criminality, civic disorder, and poor housing conditions.[26]

Interviews with religious and civic leaders and current and former residents of Ardmore also informed this research. Semistructured interviews addressed family and educational histories, participation in organizations and institutions, and understandings of place. Between 2008 and 2009, I conducted 22 interviews with individuals. While I cite these interviews less frequently than other sources, these interviews proved integral

---

[26] I base these assertions on a review of articles published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* between 1868 to 1922 that discussed African Americans in Ardmore and other Main Line. To read the pages of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would have left a reader with the impression that African Americans in Ardmore and on the Main Line were criminals who regularly perpetrated crimes against white residents and against other African Americans; African Americans appeared in the newspaper only occasionally in other roles as witnesses or bystanders to accidents or as victims of crimes or accidents themselves. This appears to have been consistent with trends in other newspapers. In George Simpson's study of how Philadelphia's major daily newspapers covered African Americans between 1908 and 1932, he concluded, "[The] most common attitude in Philadelphia is one of indifference to Negroes unless a Negro interferes in some way with the habits or the belies of white men." George E. Simpson, "Race Relations and the Philadelphia Press," *Journal of Negro Education* 6, no. 4 (1937): 628.

to shaping this research by identifying issues that remained important for African American residents across decades and generations.

Chapter Summaries

This dissertation examines how African Americans inhabited, shaped, and transformed the environments over which they had the greatest control: their homes, their institutions, and, eventually, their neighborhood. Focusing on these aspects of African American life in Ardmore redefines the ways that dominant narratives have characterized the Main Line and the place of African Americans there.

Discrimination and intraracial conflict are not the focus of this dissertation, though I interweave attention to these issues throughout my analysis of Ardmore. Like their peers who migrated to other suburbs and cities in the early twentieth century, African Americans in Ardmore and on the Main Line contended with discrimination and conflict. I also do not examine African American education in Ardmore, because schools, while integrated in Lower Merion Township, were outside the direct control of black residents. Numerous scholars have capably examined these dimensions of black experiences in this time period, particularly in the form of case studies.

This dissertation works first on the Main Line and its narratives, unpacking this key suburban category. Chapter 1 traces the construction of the Main Line as site of wealth, whiteness, and country estates. Before its transformation into a suburban enclave, the area that would become the Main Line had a long history of agricultural and industrial uses. Through business decisions and marketing, the Pennsylvania Railroad and developers erased this past in favor of an image of grand residential estates, wealth, and

whiteness. The Pennsylvania Railroad and developers invoked these images to promote their business interests, while obscuring the area's physical and demographic diversity. The image of the Main Line forged in this early time period would shape the Main Line for decades to come.

The next three chapters complicate the dominant images of the Main Line by focusing on black suburbanization from the late nineteenth century to the early 1930s. This time period spans significant local and national developments. By the early twentieth century, the image of the Main Line as a suburb of affluence was pervasive in popular publications, and growing numbers of subdivisions made this ideal accessible to a white professional class. Parallel with this, a concentration of African American residents emerged in Ardmore beginning at the turn of the twentieth century.

As black migration from the South increased as part of the Great Migration, the number of African Americans in Ardmore grew. Some African Americans first came from the South at the turn of the twentieth century, while others arrived after the 1910s or were born in Pennsylvania. Over seven hundred African Americans resided in Ardmore by 1920. African American residents of Ardmore counted among themselves laborers who worked on the assembly lines of a local factory, domestics who served on the estates of the white elite, sole proprietors, and men who laid and serviced railroad tracks. A number of conditions, including access to employment, availability of affordable housing and expanding institutions, positioned Ardmore as an ideal site for black migrants. Chapter 2 traces these developments and examines Ardmore's history through the lens of African American settlement there. The African Americans who lived in Ardmore shared

common areas of residence, but they had arrived there traveling different paths, and the geographies of their everyday lives crossed the thresholds of different houses and led to different sites and experiences of work.

Chapters 3 and 4 address two specific dimensions of African American life in early twentieth-century Ardmore: domestic and collective life. In the first decades of the twentieth century, dwellings and black institutions were the environments over which African Americans had the most control. Focusing on these aspects of black suburbanization illustrates how particular sites became instruments for the articulation of identities and the achievement of collective goals. The year 1920 often serves a reference point in these chapters in the discussion of demographic, housing, and employment trends. Though the African American population would continue to grow, by 1920 Ardmore's African American population was well established and much of South Ardmore's significant residential, commercial, and industrial construction was complete. The availability of both census manuscripts and a real estate atlas for 1920 provides greater opportunities to understand black residents and their experiences of physical environments.

Chapter 3 investigates the environments where African Americans lived. The chapter first discusses the housing options that were available to African Americans before exploring the ways African Americans inhabited their homes in everyday life. They lived in twin, row, and detached houses that they rented and owned and shared their homes with nuclear and extended family members as well as with lodgers and boarders.

However, dwellings were often more than places of shelter, and African Americans also utilized their homes as sites of work and sociability.

Chapter 4 turns to collective life in Ardmore, considering the organizations and institutions that some African Americans established to improve the lives of African Americans locally and regionally. Control of the built environment was integral to such efforts. However, scholars in African American history who have examined the roles of entities like churches, women's clubs, or fraternal organizations in black communities have largely overlooked the material spaces associated with them. In Ardmore, African Americans took control of the built environment to forge ties locally and to develop connections with other African Americans in the region. These activities laid the groundwork for more expansive organizing that would take place in the decades following World War II.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, moves to the 1960s and 1970s to examine how African Americans worked to define and meet their needs in the areas of planning and affordable housing. As was true in the prewar era, the goal of improving the lives of African Americans in Ardmore remained. However, individuals and organizations broadened the scope of their efforts and sought to holistically address the socioeconomic needs of black residents at the neighborhood scale.

Looking at the experiences of African Americans in Ardmore is an opportunity to examine the shifting interconnections between agency, identity, and the built environment in a suburban context. However, the experiences of black residents took

place in a suburban district that had a history stretching back decades before most arrived there. Thus, the first chapter of this dissertation turns to the Main Line’s origin story.

Chapter 1: Constructing the Main Line

Theodore Bean's 1884 opus, called *History of Montgomery County*, devoted eight pages to a section on "Manufacturing Industries" in Lower Merion Township. Among these industries was the Merion Flour Mill owned by Evan Jones. Jones's commercial pursuits lay in both industry and agriculture, and Beam noted, "The mill is beautifully located in the midst of a farm of seventy acres of fertile soil, belonging to the proprietor of the mill. . . . It is sixty-five by forty-five feet, three stories in height; has an engine of forty-five horse-power and a capacity of fifty barrels a day." The Merion Flour Mill represented just one of eleven mills in the area whose employees ranged from fifteen to seven thousand and whose monthly output included eighty-five tons of newspaper and two thousand yards of wool.[1]

A few years after the publication of Bean's volume, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* daily newspaper published a feature on the growth of the Main Line suburban district entitled "Beautiful Suburbs" (1889). Though the mills Beam described continued to thrive in the area, the article offered no suggestion of the industry that coexisted with residences within the suburban district branded as the Main Line. Rather, the article invited the reader to learn about the "desirable spots where city people are flocking to build homes" and then took them along a journey that began at the central Philadelphia passenger train station and moved through Main Line towns as though traveling by train. Readers learned about the homes of prominent Philadelphians who had already

---

[1] Theodore Bean, *History of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1884), 612–19, accessed July 29, 2015, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9g45bh93.

constructed houses, including the “stately modern Colonial mansion of General Manager Charles E. Pugh, of the Pennsylvania Railroad.” They also learned about new construction. In one section of the Main Line, the article noted, “Avenues have already been macadamized and curbed, and will soon be lined with beautiful Queen Anne and Renaissance cottages costing from $4,000 up.”[2]

These two texts produced strikingly different representations of overlapping geographical areas, and their contrasts highlight the tensions between narrative, representation, and lived realties that recur in the story of the Main Line. The industries Beam described reflected only one aspect of the Main Line’s heterogeneity, for the area now known as the Main Line has long been a place that embodies diverse values and practices. It was first an area where Lenape Indians hunted game and foraged. As Europeans dispossessed and displaced Native Americans, the area was a site where Quakers owned and existed alongside enslaved laborers, industrial mills neighbored farms, and transportation routes and taverns served people and goods moving east and west. By contrast, late nineteenth-century efforts to shape the Main Line into a suburban district, which the Pennsylvania Railroad initiated and others extended, encouraged new patterns of living in a context already layered with diverse (and sometimes conflicting) populations, land uses, and social practices. The railroad’s development efforts encouraged the formation of a dominant narrative that negated or recast the area’s historical and continuing heterogeneity.

[2] “Beautiful Suburbs: How the Pennsylvania Railroad Has Been Dotted with Towns,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 9, 1889.

This chapter troubles the single story of the Main Line, which usually begins in the 1870s with references to a mythic Welsh past and then follows the lives of affluent white suburbanites. This chapter's more inclusive approach, by contrast, (1) begins before the Welsh settled, (2) considers movements of people not only from city to suburb but also from the South and from abroad, and (3) examines land uses beyond the residential. There was a persistent tension between the dominant Main Line narrative and the more diverse context into which the Pennsylvania Railroad and others inserted this narrative. With this critical framework, this chapter examines the development of the geographical area that, through the displacement of agriculture and native peoples, business decisions, and careful promotion, became the suburban Main Line. The dominant narrative of the Main Line was rooted in exclusion and framed the area as a preserve of wealth, spacious estates, and country living amid cultivated nature. For the white elite who chose Main Line residence, this narrative established a contrast between the disharmony of urban Philadelphia and the retreat of the suburban Main Line, fortifying it against the socioeconomic difference, immigration, and industry its inhabitants negatively associated with the urban center. This narrative of suburban retreat promoted by the Pennsylvania Railroad, boosters, and developers was exclusionary in other ways, too. African Americans, Irish immigrants, and Italian immigrants found a place primarily as solutions to the "servant question." This narrative regarded productive agriculture as part of the area's fading past and recast agricultural practices as the activity of gentleman hobby farmers. It largely overlooked the presence of industry, only occasionally noting its presence in particular areas like Ardmore.

Presuburban Histories

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, populations with varied values and practices inhabited the area that would become the Main Line. American Indians, Welsh Quakers, enslaved African Americans, and German, English, and Swedish immigrants created and inhabited the region as hunters, farmers, mill operators and workers, and forced laborers. While hegemonic narratives of the Main Line would oftentimes overlook them or incorporate them selectively, dimensions of these early landscapes would persist into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The earliest known inhabitants of the Delaware Valley region, which includes the present-day Main Line, were the Lenape Indians.[3] Translated into English as "The People" or the "Original People," the Lenape in Southeastern Pennsylvania lived around the tributaries of the Delaware River, which the Lenape called Makeriskhickon; in addition to Southeastern Pennsylvania, the Lenape also lived in areas of present-day New Jersey, Delaware, and southeastern New York. The Lenape most likely lived in small bands of twenty to twenty-five based on kinship and sustained themselves through hunting, fishing, gathering, and, to a more limited extent, planting. They divided the

---

[3]Archaeologists and historians are uncertain about how long or whether the Lenape existed as a group prior to the arrival of Europeans. The Europeans eventually referred to the Lenape, as well as Indians from surrounding areas, as the Delaware Indians, a name taken from Virginia's first governor, Sir Thomas West, Lord de la Warr, and applied it to the river at the center of the region and to the inhabitants of its valley. Marshall Joseph Becker, "The Lenape of Southeastern Pennsylvania: A Brief History," *Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society History Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1985): 3–8, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.tehistory.org/hqda/html/v23/v23n1p003.html.

wooded inland areas that served as hunting sites among bands, and, while primarily peripatetic, they seem to have spent springs and summers in camps on riverbanks.[4]

Though the Lenape's first sustained interactions with Europeans came through the Dutch and Swedish fur traders based near the Delaware River, the land sales that ensued from William Penn's establishment of Pennsylvania as a colonial refuge for Quakers in 1681 rapidly increased the number of Europeans in the area. Operating from different assumptions about what constituted productive uses of land, European colonists dispossessed the Lenape and transformed the land. Europeans misapprehended Lenape systems of communal land ownership and land use.[5] From the perspectives of many Europeans accustomed to individual ownership and European-style agriculture, the land was, in the words of historian Thomas Sugrue, "vacant." However, as Sugrue continues, "Land that seemed unused was not abandoned as many Europeans imagined. What seemed to be vacant woodland was invisibly subdivided into hunting grounds under the jurisdiction of the kin group whose sovereignty was acknowledged by members of nearby bands."[6] Europeans imposed their vision of productive use on the land by transforming

[4] Marshall J. Becker, "Lenape Archaeology: Archaeological and Ethnological Considerations in Light of Recent Excavations," *Pennsylvania Archaeologist* 50, no. 4 (1980): 19–30; Becker, "The Lenape of Southeastern Pennsylvania."

[5] See Michael Dean Mackintosh, "New Sweden, Natives, and Nature" in *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*, ed. William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 9–10; Thomas Sugrue, "The Peopling and Depeopling of Early Pennsylvania: Indians and Colonists, 1680–1720," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 116, no. 1 (1992): 19–21.

[6] Sugrue, "The Peopling and Depeopling of Early Pennsylvania," 21.

woodlands into fenced farmlands and damming streams and rivers to serve mills.[7] The consequences for the Lenape were severe, and the incursions of Europeans displaced the Lenape and forced them westward.

In a portion of the forests where Lenape had hunted and gathered, a group of Welsh Quakers envisioned a "Welsh Tract." The area included but also extended beyond what would later be called the Main Line, and here, Welsh settlers bound place to religious and ethnic identities. Having experienced persecution, these Welsh Quakers sought a place "within the which all causes, Quarrels, Crimes & Titles were tryed & wholly Determined by officers, Magistrates, Juries of our own language, which were our Equals."[8] Groups of Welsh, referred to as "companies," purchased land in what they hoped would be part of a larger, exclusively Welsh settlement. They began arriving in 1682 and named the township Merion.[9] From its earliest years, the Welsh Tract proved more heterogeneous in its population than its name suggested. Despite the intentions of

---

[7] Becker, "The Lenape of Southeastern Pennsylvania."

[8] Griffith Owen, "At a Meeting of the Comm, 13th of 10 mo., 1690," in *Pennsylvania Archives: Selected and Arranged from Original Documents in the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, Conformably to Acts of the General Assembly, February 15, 1851, and March 1 1852*, by Samuel Hazard (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns and Company, 1852), 108, accessed May 4, 2015, http://books.google.com/books/about/Pennsylvania_Archives.html?id=GwEQAAAAYAAJ.

[9] William J. Buck, "The Welsh," in *History of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*, ed. Theodore Bean (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1884), 139, accessed July 29, 2015, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9g45bh93?urlappend=%3Bseq=153. Jean Barth Toll and Michael J. Schwager, eds., *Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years* (Norristown, PA: Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983), 306; Charles Browning, *Welsh Settlement of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1912), 33–34, accessed May 4, 2015, https://archive.org/details/welshsettlemento00brow.

Welsh purchasers, the area was never exclusively Welsh, nor were their parcels always adjacent one another: English colonists were sold land within the promised 40,000 acres envisioned as the Welsh Tract, and some parcels were discontinuous and located a distance away.[10] As English newcomers, and later Germans, arrived, Welsh Quakers no longer predominated.[11] However, the legacy of the Welsh would prove enduring, and the Welsh and their vision for a Welsh tract would find a prominent place in later narratives of the suburban Main Line.

Though white immigrants constituted the majority of inhabitants, those of African descent were also present in eighteenth-century Merion as enslaved laborers. The largest concentration toiled in the tobacco fields of plantation owner Richard Harrison in the first half of the seventeenth century; but more commonly they labored alone or in pairs in inns, in mills, and on farms. Over the next century, the number of enslaved African

---

[10] There are various accounts of why surveyors assigned those who were not Welsh lands within the ostensibly Welsh Tract. Some focus on William Penn reneging on his promise, while others describe local political machinations that fragmented the tract. On the discrepancy between Welsh intentions for a Welsh Tract and the realities that ensued, see for example George Smith, *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania: From the Discovery of the Territory Included within Its Limits to the Present Time, with a Notice of the Geology of the County and Catalogues of Its Minerals, Plants, Quadrupeds and Birds* (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, 1862), 164–77, accessed May 18, 2015, https://archive.org/details/historyofdelaw00smit; Thomas Allen Glenn, "The Great Welsh Tract or Barony in the Province of Pennsylvania 1682 to 1700," in *Merion in the Welsh Tract: With Sketches of the Townships of Haverford and Radnor* (Norristown, PA: Herald Press 1896), 21–55, accessed May 4, 2015, https://archive.org/details/cu31924010481723.

[11] William J. Buck, "Lower Merion Township," in *History of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*, ed. Theodore Bean, (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1884), 931, accessed July 29, 2015, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9g45bh93?urlappend=%3Bseq=1043; Glenn, *Merion in the Welsh Tract*, 27; Lower Merion Historical Society, *The First 300: The Amazing and Rich History of Lower Merion* (Darby, PA: Diane, 2000), 13.

Americans in Lower Merion declined: a 1780 township assessment revealed eight people who enslaved African Americans and a 1785 assessment documented seven instances of slaveholding. By the 1800 census, this number had declined to three.[12]

Through the nineteenth century, a larger free black population also lived in the area. These black residents lived both in their own households and as laborers listed under the households of white farm owners.[13] In 1850, African Americans in Lower Merion Township (which included the area where Ardmore would later develop) represented approximately 20 percent of the population of black residents in Montgomery

---

[12] According to an 1890 article by George Vaux, Richard Harrison, a Maryland tobacco farmer, moved to what would become Bryn Mawr following the wishes of his wife, a Philadelphia native. He purchased a seven-hundred-acre estate in 1719, brought enslaved African Americans north, and continued tobacco farming on his new property. A fair amount of lore surrounds the people owned by Harrison. Allegedly, the ship on which the slaves sailed northward was pirated and, after the pirates released them, the slaves found their way to Merion on their own. Supposedly, slaves disliked the area and hoping to return to Maryland, unsuccessfully attempted to poison the Harrison family. George Vaux, "Settlers in Merion: The Harrison Family and Harriton Plantation," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 13, no. 4 (1890): 447–59. The author, George Vaux, appears to have been either a descendent of Richard Harrison or married to one. See http://www.lowermerionhistory.org/burial/harriton/tree.html. The abolitionist sentiments of early Quakers living at the area of the time were not as strong or widespread as they would later come to be, and a number of Quakers appeared to have been slave holders at this time; however, Harrison's fellow Quakers admonished him for the significant numbers of slaves he owned. Lower Merion Historical Society, *The First 300*, 32. Even as the abolitionist movement rose in the nineteenth century, "Lower Merion was indeed traditionally in the hands of pro-slavery persons who were sympathetic to southern slave owners." Charles Blockson, *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania* (Jacksonville, NC: Flame International), 50.

[13] Prior to 1910, census takers did not indicate the specific street or address where an individual or household live. This limits possibilities for understanding the spatial distribution of African Americans at the neighborhood or village levels.

County and 4 percent of the Lower Merion population.[14] Most African Americans listed their occupations as "laborer"; given the prevalence of farming and agriculture, these individuals likely worked in these industries. Other African Americans worked as domestics, salesmen, or hostlers tending to horses at inns.

In many instances, nineteenth-century black-headed households existed amid those headed by Irish immigrants. Though listed as "white" on the census, Irish immigrants, as many scholars of race and ethnicity have shown, existed as racialized others within a hierarchy of whiteness that positioned Anglo-Saxons at its peak.[15] Irish immigrants engaged in occupations similar to those of African Americans, including work as laborers on farms and in mills and as domestics, though some were also craftsmen.[16]

Farming constituted the primary occupation of most of the area's early white residents from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century[17]; however, the industry that

---

[14] William J. Buck, *History of Montgomery County within the Schuylkill Valley* (Norristown: E. L. Acker, 1859), 29, accessed July 29, 2015, https://archive.org/details/historymontgome01buckgoog. Lower Merion Township, *A Plan for Lower Merion Township 1937* (Ardmore, PA: Lower Merion Township, 1937), 33.

[15] See, for instance, Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), especially "Anglo-Saxons and Others, 1840–1924," 39–90.

[16] This information is based on my survey of censuses from 1800–1850.

[17] Agriculture defined the impressions of the landscape that some visitors recorded in travelogues. An early eighteenth-century account noted "many fine plantations of corn" and an "abundance of cattle." John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America* (London, 1708), 1:177, accessed May 5, 2015, http://archive.org/details/britishemireina00oldm. The observations of a later traveler written in 1809 but published in 1926 suggested a shift in agricultural practices: "There are however some good farmers but in general no large staple produce: the supply of the

Theodore Bean documented in his description of "Manufacturing Industries" was also significant. The first Welsh arrivals in the 1680s envisioned the possibilities for mills, and in a 1682 letter back to Wales, Edward Jones entreated those who would follow to bring supplies to construct mills.[18] Beginning in the late seventeenth century, when Welsh Quaker John Roberts began the area's first mill, mills emerged on the banks of the creeks and river that flowed through Lower Merion, particularly along Mill Creek. Cotton, textile, paper, lumber, and gunpowder mills followed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and with these industrial uses came workers' housing in the forms of tenements and twin houses. Some workers lived in housing adjacent the mills while others resided in areas like Elm, Athensville, and West Manayunk (later known as Narberth, Ardmore, and Belmont Hills, respectively). Milling in Lower Merion Township thrived until an 1893 flood destroyed much of the industry, leaving only the traces of houses and industrial buildings.[19]

---

city with butter, milk, hay, wood, oats being the chief object rather than raising large crops of corn." Joshua Gilpin, "Journal of a Tour from Philadelphia Thro the Western Counties of Pennsylvania in the Months of September and October, 1809," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 50, no. 1 (1926): 65.

[18] Edward Jones to John Ap Thomas, quoted in Buck, "The Welsh," 139.

[19] Lower Merion Historical Society, *The First 300*, 57–63, 104, 109. For a detailed listing of mills and manufactories in Lower Merion in the 1850s, including a count of the workforce, see Buck, *History of Montgomery County within the Schuylkill Valley*, 30; Theodore W. Bean, ed., *History of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1884), 612–619, accessed July 29, 2015, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9g45bh93. For a map of eighteenth century mills, see Douglas Macfarlan, *The Mills of Mill Creek, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania as They Were in 1776 with Certain Additions, etc*., 1937, accessed May 31, 2015, http://www.lowermerionhistory.org/atlas/mills.html.

The area also functioned as a crossroads in varied ways. Dating back to the American Indian Allegheny Path that traversed the area and preceded the arrival of Europeans,[20] the area that would become the Main Line has been positioned amid significant transportation routes.[21] It linked not only periphery to urban center but also the East Coast with the interior of the country as well as commodities moving to eastern US markets. One of the most significant routes constructed by white arrivals was the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, which connected Philadelphia to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and became the first long-distance toll road in the United States when it was constructed in approximately 1794.[22] The construction of the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad by the State of Pennsylvania between 1828 and 1834 added horse-drawn and then steam train travel to an existing network of transportation routes that crossed through the area. The line transported freight, and, to a lesser extent, passengers.

---

[20] The Allegheny Path began in Philadelphia at the Delaware and stretched through present-day Lower Merion township to Paoli (popularly considered the western edge of the Main Line) and from Paoli onward to Harrisburg and farther west. Sections of this path formed the basis of travel routes laid out by Europeans. Paul A. W. Wallace, *Indian Paths of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1965), 19.

[21] For a more detailed overview of transportation routes that crossed the Main Line, see George Langdon, "Evolution of a Transportational Route as the Core of a Suburban Region" *Scientific Monthly* 76, no. 6 (1953): 325–34.

[22] Langdon, "Evolution of a Transportational Route as the Core of a Suburban Region," 327. The Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike represented the first long-distance macadamized toll road and inspired the creation of many other toll roads, though not all achieved the success of the Philadelphia and Lancaster route. For a detailed history of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, see Charles I. Landis, "History of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike: The First Long Turnpike in the United States," pts. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 42, no. 1 (1918): 1–28; 42, no. 2 (1918): 127–40; 42, no. 3 (1918): 235–58; 42, no. 4 (1918): 358–60; 43, no. 1 (1919): 84–90; 43, no. 2 (1919): 182–90.

While goods and people moved through the Main Line by varied means, these transportation routes were not intended for daily commuting. (For instance, in 1837, there was only one train daily in each direction between Philadelphia and Columbia that served passengers, and the trip from Philadelphia to the Whitehall Station in present-day Bryn Mawr took one hour and twenty minutes.)[23] The Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad represented a part of the larger east-west transit route known as the Main Line of Public Works of the State of Pennsylvania, which later gave the area its popular name.[24]

Suburban Development

Through the 1850s and 1860s, the string of villages and towns stretching out from Philadelphia's western border remained primarily farmland with a notable presence of milling and was populated by US-born white residents as well as concentrations of African American, Irish, and Italian residents. However, the 1860s brought new landscapes of leisure and domesticity to this context as boarding houses and hotels and then housing developments drew Philadelphia's leading white families and attendant service workers and tradespeople; the Pennsylvania Railroad was instrumental in this process. The narratives that emerged around the lives and homes of these summer and then year-round residents often eclipsed the lives and experiences of others who lived in the area and overtook longstanding and continuing agricultural and industrial practices.

---

[23] *Columbia and Philadelphia Railway Timetable* (1837), Gerald A. Francis Collection, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

[24] In addition to the railroad, the Main Line of Public Works included canals, and in Columbia, where the railroad ended, the Main Line continued on with a series of canals to then-outlying Pittsburgh. Langdon, "Evolution of a Transportational Route," 327–28, and Lower Merion Historical Society, *The First 300*, 69–70.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the area became a destination for white Philadelphians seeking an escape from Philadelphia during the summer months, and these Philadelphia vacationers heralded the residential suburban development that would emerge in the next half century. Though lacking the ocean boasted by New Jersey's waterfront towns and the substantially cooler temperatures of places in coastal Maine (which later emerged as popular summer vacation destinations for Main Liners), the area did offer white Philadelphians with means nearby retreats from the heat—and, in some instances, disease—of the urban summer. Families could relocate for all or part of the summer within reach of Philadelphia, while men who worked could retain their jobs and travel by train to be with their families on the weekends. A summer stay at a place like the White Hall Hotel, the Wildgosses Boarding House, or the taverns and inns along the Lancaster Turnpike allowed seasonal guests and boarders to enjoy the supposed benefits of fresh air, higher elevations, and rural surroundings, all within a train ride of Philadelphia. African Americans and Irish immigrants were among the employees who supported summer residences at these boarding houses and hotels through their labor.[25] The introduction of summer leisure created new types of connections between the

---

[25] John Townsend, *The Old Main Line: Personal Reminiscences of the "Main Line," Principally in the Sixties and Seventies* (1922), 22–24, 28–29 and 45–46. In her history of the Bryn Mawr Hotel and its connections to the Pennsylvania Railroad, Alison Reed links mid-nineteenth-century assertions about the unhealthy qualities of urban air to the rise of resorts in places like Bryn Mawr. Alison Janet Reed, "The Bryn Mawr Hotel: The Relationship Between the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Nineteenth-Century Railroad Resort Hotel" (master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania 1989), 24–26, May 16, 2015, http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses/361. On the development of Maine as a summer destination for Philadelphia's elite see E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (1958; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1989), 220–22.

metropolitan center and this “borderland” that served as prologue to the widespread suburbanization that ensued in the decades ahead.[26]

Figure 2. Rendering of White Hall train depot and White Hall Hotel. n.d. First 300 Photographic Collection, record no. 177, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

Out of a place shaped by diverse people and practices, the Pennsylvania Railroad in concert with other actors fashioned a suburban narrative that rested on associations with wealth, grand houses, and country living defined first through leisure and then through domesticity. While the railroad did not singlehandedly develop the Main Line, its expansive and varied participation in the suburbanization process warrants detailed attention. The Pennsylvania Railroad, simultaneously acting as railroad and developer, took an active role in establishing the “Main Line” as both a physical and imagined space. To brand this region as the Main Line and to promote its development, the railroad deployed a number of strategies: setting aside sections of the area named Bryn Mawr as an elite residential enclave (which served as a model for other developers), expanding rail

[26] John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1939*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

service, engaging an active marketing campaign, and encouraging railroad executives to take up residence there. By the late nineteenth century, the image of the Main Line as a center of wealth was dominant, and sections of the Main Line had developed into a thriving suburban residential district for many of Philadelphia's white elites. The ascendancy of this narrative eclipsed the presence of other lived experiences and land uses.

The Pennsylvania Railroad's acquisition of the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad in 1857 set in motion the transformation of the Main Line into a commuter line and the creation of what would become the Main Line suburban district. The subsequent actions of the railroad in developing this route as a suburban commuter line support historian Robert Fishman's assertion that "the ultimate purpose of suburban transportation lines is not to move people; it is to increase the value of the land through which it passes."[27] The Pennsylvania Railroad supported residential development on the Main Line through expanded service, increasing the frequency of service and adding a number of station stops on the eastern section of the route between Philadelphia and Paoli. (Though additional stations lay west of it, Paoli would become the western boundary of the Main Line suburban district.) When the Pennsylvania Railroad acquired the Philadelphia and Columbia railroad, it made only seven stops between Philadelphia and Paoli; eight additional stops were then introduced.[28] The area surrounding these

---

[27] Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois* Utopias, 143.

[28] Pennsylvania Railroad, *Guide for the Pennsylvania Railroad with an Extensive Map; Including the Entire Route, with All Its Windings, Objects of Interest, and Information Useful to the Traveler* (Philadelphia: T. K. and P. G. Collins, 1855), 7–8, and

stations became known as the Main Line, although the area had no fixed political boundaries and designations have remained vague.

A hodgepodge of British allusions proved central to shaping the Main Line. The place names, architecture, landscape, and historical narrative of the Main Line blended Welsh and English references with little regard for the disdain that the area's Welsh had held for the English in their midst. According to Robert Fishman, for an anxious, white, native-born, Protestant elite, these British references positioned the suburb as a retreat from the perceived threats of the Catholic and immigrant masses growing in the city.[29] John Groff also suggests that British references afforded an air of historicity to a newly moneyed industrial white elite attempting to gain inroads into Philadelphia society.[30]

After the railroad began promoting the Main Line, it changed the names of existing stations and made calculated choices to give new stations names that gestured toward the area's historical Welsh associations.[31] Some of these names came from the estates of earlier Welsh settlers, while other Welsh and Irish names had no preexisting local significance. Speaking of Bryn Mawr, the railroad explained, "The name was borrowed from a locality in Wales, and was doubtless bestowed in compliment to the early settlers of this portion of the State, who were generally Welsh." The Railroad added the footnote, "[Robert] Proud, in his 'History of Pennsylvania,' says that Rowland Ellis, a

---

Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad, *Suburban Stations and Rural Homes on the Pennsylvania Railroad* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1874).

[29] Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 145.

[30] John Marshall Groff, "Green Country Towns: The Development of Philadelphia's Main Line" (master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1981), 4, 85–88.

[31] Lower Merion Historical Society, *The First 300*, 79.

prominent man among the early Welsh settlers, came from 'Bryn Mawr, a place near Dolgelly, in the county of Merioenth.' *Bryn* signifies hill, and *Mawr*, big-broad. *Ard More* means precisely the same in Irish."[32] Thus, the existing stations of Humphreysville, Athensville, and Elm became Bryn Mawr, Ardmore, and Narberth, respectively, while Wynnewood and Merion were among the new stations added. Not unlike the practices of later developers, the Pennsylvania Railroad used the names of the towns along the railroad to allude to a mythic past of Wales and of Welsh settlement in Pennsylvania.

One of the Pennsylvania Railroad's earliest and most deliberate interventions into the formation of the Main Line and its residential growth came in Bryn Mawr. Places like the White Hall Hotel had already established the Main Line as a summer vacation destination, and the Pennsylvania Railroad sought to turn these summer visitors into property-owning residents. At Bryn Mawr, the railroad built a hotel for summer guests and subdivided and sold plots for housing construction. With the opening of the Bryn Mawr Hotel in 1872 and the sale of building lots, the Pennsylvania Railroad simultaneously promoted Bryn Mawr as a summer resort destination and as a place for country cottages and estates. The design of the hotel and the limitations the Pennsylvania Railroad imposed on the houses built on plots it sold suggested the exclusive, residential character the railroad envisioned for the nascent Main Line.

The Pennsylvania Railroad's endeavors in Bryn Mawr originated with a decision to change the path of its train tracks. In the area now known as Bryn Mawr, the railroad

---

[32] Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad, *Suburban Stations and Rural Homes,* 23.

straightened a curve in the railroad line and, concurrent with this shift, purchased a number of parcels of land that surrounded the new train tracks.[33] This included a total of seven properties, which created a larger, 428-acre parcel that would serve as the site for development.[34]

Before the first houses were built in the railroad's subdivided Bryn Mawr tract, the railroad constructed the Bryn Mawr Hotel with the intention of luring some of Philadelphia's elite for the summer months and showcasing Bryn Mawr. It was a strategy not unique to the Main Line, and developers elsewhere hoped hotels would serve as gateways to suburban residence.[35] The experience of the Bryn Mawr Hotel began at the train station, and visitors disembarking from trains arrived opposite the Gothic Revival style passenger station built in 1869 and designed for the Pennsylvania Railroad by the Wilson Brothers.[36] From the station, a horse-drawn bus could take arriving guests to the

---

[33] The Pennsylvania Railroad's reasons for embarking on this land acquisition are uncertain, and there are different accounts of the company's motivations. The Pennsylvania Railroad publication *Suburban Stations and Rural Homes* stated that it proved more economical for the railroad to buy the land through which the realigned tracks would run rather than to compensate the landowners for the right of way. Another publication authored by a Pennsylvania Railroad employee explained the land acquisition and subsequent development as a means to encourage ridership on its suburban line (23). W. Hasell Wilson, "Reminiscences of a Railroad Engineer" (1895), quoted in Joseph Tripician, "The Role Played by the Pennsylvania Railroad in the 'Main line' Area of Philadelphia" (unpublished manuscript, 1960), 9, folder: Railroads-Pennsylvania (1) to 1979, record no. 29, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

[34] Alison Reed, "The Bryn Mawr Hotel: the relationship between the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the nineteenth-century railroad resort hotel" (master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1989), 98–99.

[35] Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias,* 144.

[36] The Wilson Brothers designed a number of structures for the Pennsylvania Railroad. See Wilson Brothers Company, *Catalogue of Work Executed* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Company, 1885), 11–12; James C. Massey, "Pennsylvania Railroad Bryn

nearby hotel, which the Wilson Brothers firm also designed. The hotel itself was set back deeply from the property line and guests would travel along a curving path to the main entrance, perhaps passing other guests sitting on the lawn or walking along one of the other paths that crossed the lawn. The original hotel was four stories high with a mansard roof and built primarily of stone, suggesting an expectation of longevity and thus the railroad's intentions for a long-term plan of developing the Main Line. A two-story, wrap-around veranda afforded guests a view of the twenty-six-acre property; from any of the hotel's three hundred rooms guests could look out onto the surrounding landscape as it transitioned from farmland to suburban.[37]

Mawr Station," Historic American Building Survey, National Park Service, 1964, May 16, 2015, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/pa0622/

[37] Alison Reed, "The Bryn Mawr Hotel: The Relationship between the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Nineteenth-Century Railroad Resort Hotel" (master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1989), 106, 130–133. William Sipes, *The Pennsylvania Railroad: Its Origins, Construction, Condition, and Connections* (Philadelphia: Passenger Department, 1875), 81–82. Wilson Brothers Company, *Catalogue of Work Executed*, 55.

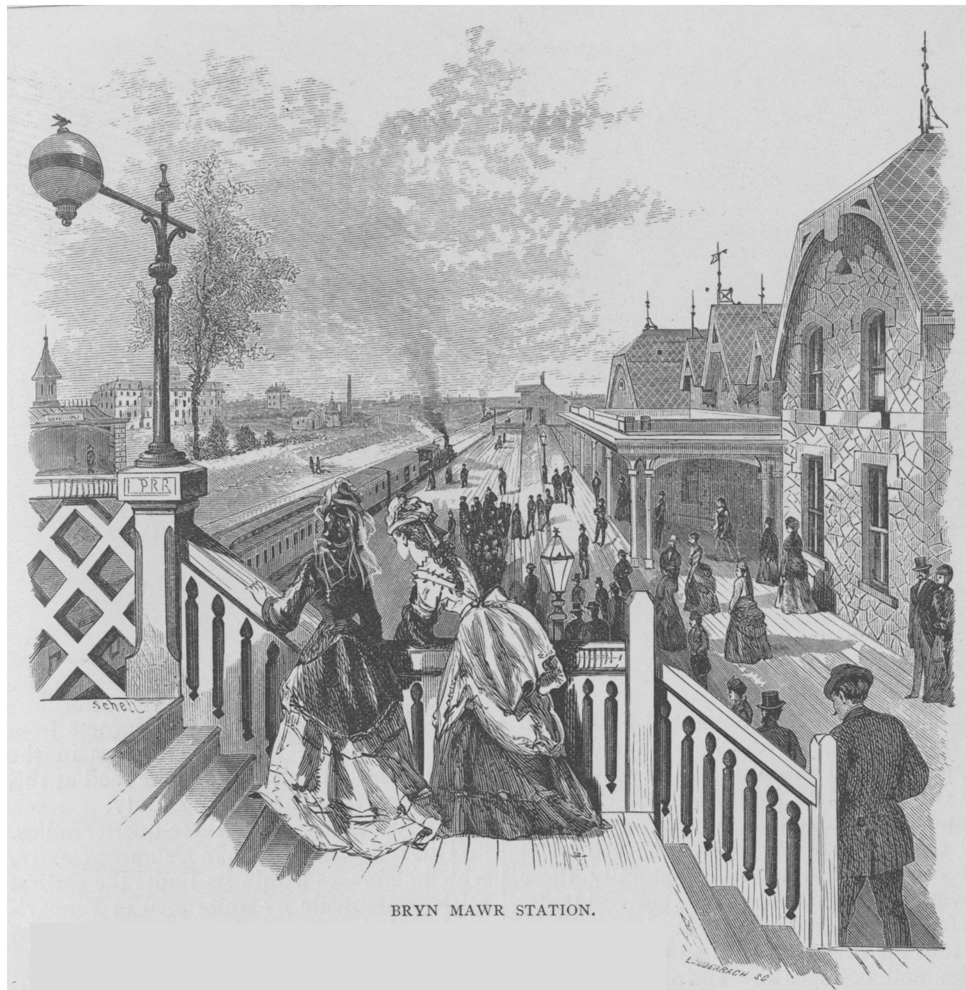

Figure 3. Rendering of the original Bryn Mawr commuter station. William Sipes, *The Pennsylvania Railroad: Its Origins, Construction, Condition, and Connections* (Philadelphia: Passenger Department, 1875), 81.

Figure 4. Rendering of the Bryn Mawr Hotel. William Sipes, *The Pennsylvania Railroad: Its Origins, Construction, Condition, and Connections* (Philadelphia: Passenger Department, 1875), 82.

The hotel drew prominent guests from Philadelphia, many of whom stayed the entire summer. Reflecting on the early years of the Bryn Mawr Hotel, area resident John Townsend remarked, "The Main Line showed the first symptoms of getting gay, when the hotel got well under way in its second summer . . ." In addition to regular "entertainments of the summer" like concerts or comedy, "[i]n the afternoon nearly everyone drove or rode. Cavalcades of perhaps twenty-five riders would go out together and explore the country roads for miles around."[38] The Bryn Mawr Hotel thus linked the leisure and social lives of a section of Philadelphia's white society to a developing

[38] Townsend, *The Old Main Line*, 52–59. The original Bryn Mawr Hotel burned down in 1887 and was rebuilt in 1890 by Frank Furness, Evans, and Company in 1890. Beginning in 1896 through 1913, the Preparatory School for Girls run by Florence Baldwin leased the hotel during the off-season, and when the hotel closed in 1913, the building's sole purpose was as an educational institution.

suburban district as the Pennsylvania Railroad refashioned portions of a largely agricultural and industrial region into the "Main Line."

The Pennsylvania Railroad utilized restrictions to produce an exclusive suburban district. While the Pennsylvania Railroad developed a relatively small area of the Main Line itself, the limitations it set established a precedent followed by subsequent developers. It exercised control over the houses built on land it sold, and it instituted deed restrictions to encourage the presence of certain people and practices and to exclude others. Homes built on land sold by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1874, for instance, required a minimum purchase price of five or eight thousand dollars, depending on the location as well as specific setbacks. The Pennsylvania Railroad also prohibited nonresidential uses, including commercial and industrial land uses such as "manufactories or other buildings of offensive occupation."[39]

Though its real estate interests were limited to Bryn Mawr, the Pennsylvania Railroad extended its promotion first of "country" and then of "suburban living" to other areas on the Main Line, and the presence of Pennsylvania Railroad executives on the Main Line supported these efforts. Groff suggests that because Philadelphia's elite revered the Pennsylvania Railroad as a company, the estates of its executives offered one way to imbue the budding Main Line with added prestige that other members of Philadelphia's white elite would notice.[40] Thus, many company executives constructed

---

[39] Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad, *Suburban Stations and Rural Homes on the Pennsylvania Railroad*, 23, 25.

[40] Groff, "Green Country Towns," 20.

Main Line estates, and according to some accounts, were pressured to do so.[41] With their grand interiors and exteriors, these houses became emblems of the Main Line.

Among these early estates was that of the eventual Pennsylvania Railroad president Alexander Cassatt. Cassatt's estate was one of the earliest estates constructed in the Main Line, and it embodied many elements that would emerge as central to prevailing images of the Main Line in its architecture and its relationship to the surrounding landscape. Architect Henry A. Simms designed the original house that was built between 1872 and 1873 at a cost of fifty thousand dollars; Frank Furness designed subsequent additions in 1880 and 1910 in his tenure at the firms Furness & Hewitt and Furness, Evans & Company, respectively. The name Cassatt gave his estate—*Cheswold*, meaning "chestnut woods"—reflected the reverence Philadelphia's elite accorded to British associations as well as the significance of nature: *wold*, a primarily British word, referred to "an elevated tract of open country or moorland" or "rolling uplands."[42]

Cheswold embodied the suburban ideal of the country house as a restorative retreat from the crowding and pollution of the city. Easing Cassatt's movement between the sphere of work and productivity at his offices in Philadelphia and the sphere of domesticity and leisure at Cheswold, Cheswold Lane led directly from the Haverford train station to the Cassatt property where a visitor would have encountered a gatehouse.

---

[41] Stephen Birmingham, *The Right People* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968), 188–90.

[42] New Oxford American Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. "wold." Lower Merion Historical Society, "Derivation of Local Names: Towns, Roads, and Lanes," in *The First 300: The Amazing and Rich History of Lower Merion* (Darby, PA: Diane, 2000), 272. On the significance of British associations for the Philadelphia elite, see Groff, "Green Country Towns," especially "A Bit of Old England in Pennsylvania: Country Life for Philadelphia's Old and New Rich," 61–88.

Once past the gatehouse, Cheswold Lane aligned with a private path that curved through the Cassatt property and up to the main house. The gatehouse along with the deep setback of the house from the property line imparted a sense of retreat and separation from the surrounding context and, by extension, from the concerns of the world.

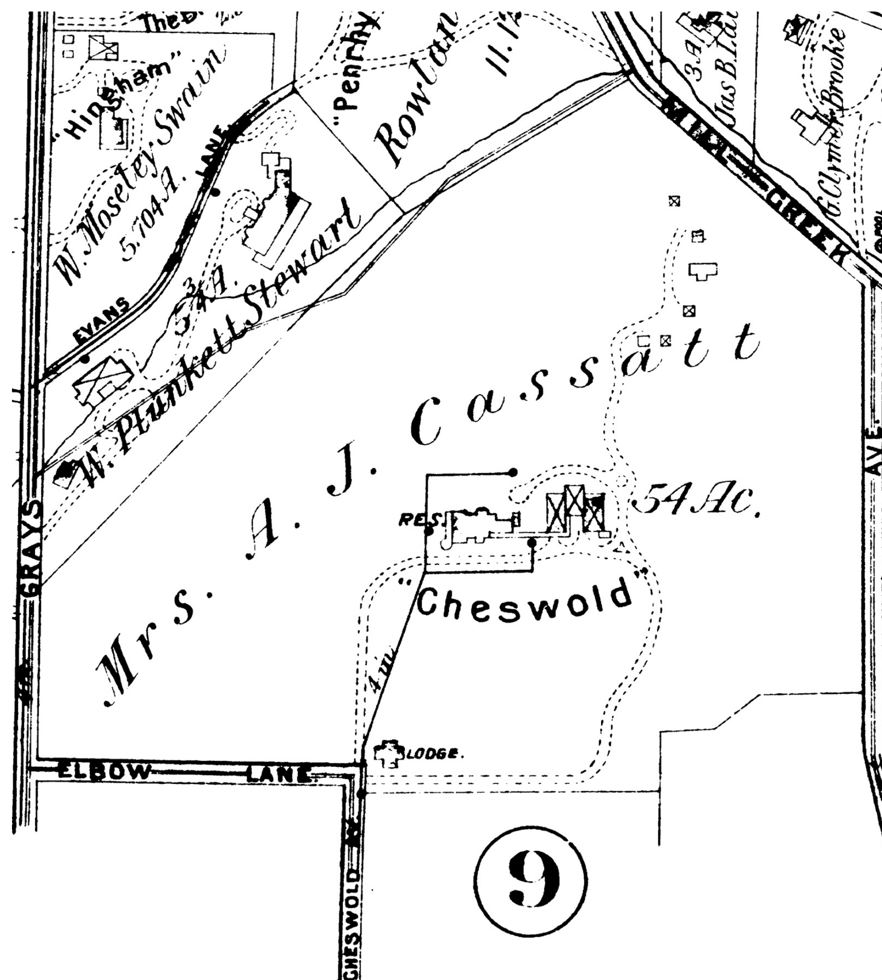

Figure 5. Map of Cheswold, including the gatehouse and outlying buildings. Ellis Kiser, *Atlas of Properties on Main Line Pennsylvania Railroad from Overbrook to Paoli* (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1908), plate 7.

Figure 6. Front view of Cheswold main house. Moses King, *Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians* (New York: M. King, 1902), 82.

The three-story Queen Anne house stretched out horizontally and was oriented toward the lawn. Given Cheswold's slightly elevated siting, its abundant windows provided views of the sloping lawn with its scattering of trees. Though interior plans are unavailable, photographs and textual accounts of the property offer some suggestion of the interior spaces of Cheswold. Guests entered the house through "a vast, walnut-paneled entrance hall lighted by stained glass windows" that conveyed the grandeur of the estate.[43] Cheswold contained thirty rooms, including seven bedrooms with private bathrooms as well as a library, study, music room, and drawing room, and was richly appointed in its furnishings, carpets, paintings, chandeliers, and wood paneling.[44]

---

[43] Patricia Talbot Davis, *End of the Line: Alexander J. Cassatt and the Pennsylvania Railroad* (New York: Neale Watson Academic Publishers, 1978), 43.

[44] Davis, *End of the Line*, 43.

The Pennsylvania Railroad consistently boasted of the restorative benefits of fresh air and natural surroundings afforded by country living, and Cheswold also reflected a union of domesticity, leisure, and cultivated nature. Porches and verandas provided spaces for people to converse and to look out onto the grounds that one publication described as "a large, verdant, undulating lawn."[45] The lawn provided space for children to play as well as for formal social occasions like lawn parties.[46] The stables that adjoined the main house reflected Cassatt's fondness for horses, and the fifty-four-acre grounds offered Cassatt ample room for riding. Within eighteen years of Cheswold's construction, ivy covered nearly the entire house, and the house merged even more fully with its natural environment.

---

[45] S. F. Hotchkin, *Rural Pennsylvania in the Vicinity of Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Co., 1897), 141.

[46] For a description of lawn party hosted by the Cassatts, see, for instance: "The Social Season in Town and Country," *New York Times*," September 17, 1899.

Figure 7. Alexander Cassatt with his daughters in front of Cheswold. William H. Rau, ca. 1900, The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Like other houses of this size, Cheswold required labor to sustain it, and as many as sixteen staff members attended to the needs of the Cassatt household.[47] In 1900, when the Cassatt household numbered four, census records show that its live-in staff consisted of eight.[48] A housekeeper and a butler headed the staff, a valet attended to Mr. Cassatt, a laundress washed the family's clothing and textiles, and four additional servants worked in the household. Three-quarters of the live-in staff were immigrants, reflecting one of the ways the Main Line continued to function as a destination for newcomers. Hailing from Scotland, Ireland, England, and Germany, they undermined the dominant image of

[47] Davis, *End of the Line,* 43.

[48] 1900 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery, Lower Merion, district 213, sheet 12A.

the Main Line as the preserve of a white, native-born elite and demonstrated how the area's ethnic heterogeneity permeated the property lines of the wealthiest estates.

Connecting Cassatt's estate to the development of the area, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* asserted that, with Cheswold, Cassatt started "the present magnificent settlement of Haverford, which contains more beautiful summer residences, comparatively, than any other point on the Pennsylvania Railroad."[49] Mirroring developments on the Main Line, Cheswold began as a summer residence before the Cassatts shifted to living there year-round. Cassatt was not the only Pennsylvania Railroad executive to choose residence on the Main Line, and others who followed included the company's future presidents and their families and servants.

Philadelphia's white elites constructed their estates surrounding new and renamed stations like Bryn Mawr, while the Pennsylvania Railroad and others simultaneously rendered the Main Line in text and image to broad audiences. These representations solidified the image of the Main Line as a center of wealth, whiteness, and prestige. The Pennsylvania Railroad produced some of the earliest representations of the Main Line as part of a marketing campaign to encourage the affluent to build homes in this emerging suburban district. In 1874 the Pennsylvania Railroad published *Suburban Stations and Rural Homes on the Pennsylvania Railroad*, which would be the first in a series of publications that promoted the virtues, benefits, and prestige of Main Line suburban

[49] "Millions in Land Phenomenal Growth of Real Estate Values in the Suburbs," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 7, 1890.

life.[50] The guide took the traveler from the eastern terminus of West Philadelphia through each of the station stops, highlighting attractive lots for building, the promise of future "improvements," and natural features like undulating hills. The Pennsylvania Railroad followed with other publications that similarly offered brief descriptions of the amenities of each town that surrounded the station stops along the railroad, all with convenient access to Philadelphia; they enticed readers to summer at one of the boarding houses listed or to purchase houses amid idealized garden environments.

As the close of the nineteenth century approached, representations of the Main Line shifted. The Main Line at this point represented a site of suburban domesticity, and Philadelphia represented a site of employment and, to some extent, social life.[51] Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Pennsylvania Railroad publications reflected the solidification of the Main Line's exclusive image, and the shift to primarily suburban residence for many white elites. In its 1913 publication *Thirty Miles Around Philadelphia on the Lines of the Pennsylvania Railroad: Information for the Suburban Home Seeker and the Summer Sojourner*, the Pennsylvania Railroad proclaimed the Main Line as the "choicest suburban district adjacent to Philadelphia" and noted that "along this division . . . are located the country estates of wealth and the homes of refinement and culture." The writers also emphasized the Main Line's elite population, which included "not only the names of many high in social circles, but also leaders in finance and

[50] Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad, *Suburban Stations and Rural Homes on the Pennsylvania Railroad*.

[51] William Morrison, *The Main Line: Country Houses of Philadelphia's Storied Suburb, 1870–1930*, (New York: Acanthus, 2002), 45.

officials in control of corporate interests dominating many of the great commercial and transportational interests of the country." Such observations placed the Main Line in social and business networks that had both regional and national significance.[52]

By the early twentieth century, the Pennsylvania Railroad's marketing also advertised the expanded availability of subdivisions for a growing class of professionals intended for year-round residence. While the names and estates of industrialists and business leaders established the Main Line's early prestige, these publications suggested its availability to a broader, though still privileged, professional class.[53] *Thirty Miles around Philadelphia* promoted this change. The guide paired textual descriptions of many Main Line towns with photographs of newly developed housing. For instance, in Wynnewood, which as recently as 1900 consisted largely of estates from twenty-three to one hundred acres, the guide explained that "the onward march of progress and the demand for high class home sites have led to a highly attractive and rapid development here along the most approved lines. The residences are all of a superior class, with sufficient architectural variety to present an artistic and harmonious appearance."[54]

---

[52] Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad, *Thirty Miles around Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1913), 9.

[53] For a discussion of how the "merely comfortable" followed the elite into suburbs that developed along railroad lines, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 89.

[54] Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad, *Thirty Miles around Philadelphia,* 13.

Figure 8. Atlas plate of Wynnewood with 317 Aubrey Road highlighted. Surrounding properties included larger estates as well as more recently subdivided developments. Ellis and Kiser and J. M. Lathrop, *Property Atlas Main Line Pennsylvania from Overbrook to Paoli* (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1913), plate 10.

Figure 9. 317 Aubrey Avenue. Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Thirty Miles around Philadelphia on the Pennsylvania Railroad* (Philadelphia, PA: 1913).

A photograph of 317 Aubrey Road suggested the type of house a buyer could purchase in Wynnewood. The house, owned by manufacturer Raymond Clark Smith and constructed in 1909, was built on a section of land split off from the larger Edward and Robert Toland Estate of Wynnewood for subdivision.[55] Located within easy walking distance of the Wynnewood train station and nestled in a bend of the curving road, the three-story stone colonial fronted an expansive, landscaped lawn with a few trees and

---

[55] Because Smith also appears on the 1910 Census in Haverford, it is not clear whether Smith lived at the house or simply owned it and rented it or intended to sell it speculatively. 1910 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery Lower Merion, district 99, sheet 13B. The developer was likely McIlvain and Company which sold houses and building plots throughout the Main Line in Bala Cynwyd, Wynnewood, Ardmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr. "Real Estate for Sale or Rent, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 14, 1903; Ellis Kiser and J. M. Lathrop, "Plate 10" in *Property Atlas Main Line Pennsylvania R.R. from Overbrook to Paoli Embracing Lower Merion, Haverford and Radnor Townships and Parts of Upper Merion, Easttown and Tredyffrin Townships* (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller), 1913; Montgomery County Property Records, Parcel ID 400002668001/317 Aubrey Ave, accessed February 1, 2010, http://propertyrecords.montcopa.org.

shrubs and a sidewalk that followed the contours of the road. Though other buyers also had built houses of varied styles on other plots on Aubrey Road, the plots adjacent to the 317 remained empty at the time; the photograph framed the solitary house, giving the illusion of a private suburban retreat. Sidewalks invited leisurely strolls, and well-paved roads offered the possibility of recreational drives for automobile owners.

In addition to homeownership, cultivated nature proved central to the railroad's representations of the Main Line as its suburban image took shape. In Overbrook, for instance, *Suburban Homes on the Lines of the Pennsylvania Railroad within a Radios of Thirty Miles* noted "artistic and commodious houses" amid "healthy surroundings" and "densely shaded lanes," while in Bryn Mawr the railroad praised the "elevation of four hundred feet above tide water," "pure spring water supply, magnificent scenery, and drives, fast and numerous trains, and close proximity to the city."[56] The natural amenities the railroad emphasized echoed the undulating hills and gentleman farms of the earlier estates and were easily accessible with modern, convenient train connections.

The elements that appeared in the Pennsylvania Railroad's publications, including the motif of departing the city of Philadelphia by train for the refuge of the suburban Main Line, cultivated nature, the benefits of country (and subsequently suburban) living, and associations with wealth and high society, persisted. The Pennsylvania Railroad thus laid the foundations for an enduring mythology of the Main Line, which others reinforced. The Main Line trope would be reproduced in varied media, including the

---

[56] Pennsylvania Railroad, *Suburban Homes on the Lines of the Pennsylvania Railroad within a Radius of Thirty Miles around Philadelphia, with Useful Information for Summer Home Seekers* (Philadelphia: Passenger Department, 1890), 9–10 and 12.

promotional literature of developers and boosters, newspapers, regional and national magazines, plays, and films. Such portrayals, though incomplete, would prove to be lasting ones, even as the Main Line experienced shifts in its political and social landscape.

However, the geographical area defined as the Main Line was, as this chapter has shown, always more multifaceted than these narratives and representations revealed. Before leading white Philadelphians established their first country houses, the area had been the site of agriculture and industry and home to a heterogeneous population. These landscapes and populations did not disappear with the development of the storied Main Line. As affluent white elites built their houses along curving lanes, industry and commerce (both old and emergent) coexisted with domesticity and a racially and ethnically diverse population grew. African Americans, Italian immigrants, and Irish immigrants concentrated in certain neighborhoods, and new arrivals from the South and from Europe joined them. The growing presence of African Americans in Ardmore contributed to the area's longstanding, even if unacknowledged, diversity, and the next chapter examines the circumstances that supported African American settlement in Ardmore.

Chapter 2: Building Ardmore

Mattie Brown had been born in North Carolina, but at twenty-two she was living in a brick row house on West County Line Road in Ardmore with her husband George Brown and a boarder named Edward Harris, both Virginia natives. Mattie was a laundress who worked from home, and at least two of her neighbors also washed laundry in their homes to earn money. Six mornings a week, George and Edward left the house they shared to go to work as laborers in the Autocar Factory.[1] As they traveled the half-mile journey to the factory on Lancaster Avenue, they might have encountered other African Americans beginning their workdays. Chauffeurs traveled from large estates to pick up domestic staff, and those who worked in Philadelphia made their way to the trolley station that would take them to 69th Street Station and then on to Philadelphia. They also might have caught glimpses of laundry that black women like Mattie had taken in and hung out to dry in rear yards. Near Lancaster Avenue, George and Edward might have heard the sound of the Pennsylvania Railroad commuter train gliding along tracks maintained by African American workers and pulling into the Ardmore Station. Many of those aboard were white male professionals bound for their offices in downtown Philadelphia, and these same men would have left wives and children at home in spacious houses attended to by African American, Italian, and Irish servants.

Mattie, Charles, and Edward were just three of hundreds of African Americans who resided in Ardmore in the early twentieth century. Ardmore's African American

---

[1] US Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920–Population*, population schedules for Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 110, sheet 3A.

population grew almost eightfold in the first three decades of the twentieth century as African Americans came from southern states and from other areas in the Northeast. While the African American population in Ardmore numbered 136 in 1900, it reached 1,040 by 1930; most African Americans settled in the southern sections of Ardmore. This chapter answers the question of why so many African Americans chose Ardmore.

While significant numbers of African Americans did not arrive in Ardmore until the 1910s, Ardmore's status as an early commercial center in the 1870s established the conditions for broad scale black settlement decades later. Because of the density and commercial activity present in central and southern Ardmore, this section of Ardmore was less desirable for the development of housing styles aligned with the Main Line ideal intended for affluent white residents. This created an opening for developers to construct denser, smaller, and cheaper housing for workers who were integral to the Main Line's growth. Parts of Ardmore provided essential functions for the Main Line. This included not only housing for labor but also the provision of services like utilities and retail. Situating Ardmore in a regional context makes clear the interdependencies that existed between central and southern Ardmore and affluent areas. Fully understanding Ardmore's development, however, requires a wider perspective that goes beyond the Philadelphia region and stretches south to Virginia and other states and, though it is not the emphasis of this chapter, across the Atlantic to Ireland and Italy. Migrants came to Ardmore motivated by their own desires, and the conditions present on the Main Line provided avenues to advance these interests. Opportunities for employment along with the availability of housing made Ardmore ripe for the growth of a large African

American population that was diverse in age, gender, and class. Similar circumstances were present in other areas of the Main Line to varying degrees, but their manifestation in Ardmore was amplified.

To tell the story of why large numbers of African Americans moved to Ardmore, I divide this chapter into three primary sections: The first section examines the creation of Ardmore and the interrelated processes of commercial, industrial, and residential development that helped position Ardmore as an desirable place for African Americans to settle. The next two sections look at the social and economic factors that prompted many African Americans to seek possibilities outside the South and the employment opportunities that were crucial to attracting black migrants to Ardmore in the 1910s and 1920s. The final section of this chapter steps back from the experiences of African Americans to consider briefly the ways in which some white people perceived African Americans as a destabilizing presence.

From Athensville to Ardmore

The African Americans who settled in Ardmore came to a town with a history that stretched back to the eighteenth century. First given the name Athensville in 1811 before the Pennsylvania Railroad changed it,[2] Ardmore's early history in many ways mirrored that of other Main Line towns: the area's first European owners were Welsh followed by

---

[2] Jean B. Toll and Michael J. Schwager, eds., *Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years* (Norristown, PA: Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983), 1:309–10

other European immigrants, and farming and milling were common.[3] Yet Ardmore's development also diverged in significant ways that would position it to become a center of commerce, industry, and transit—all features that shaped African American settlement in Ardmore.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Athensville was the largest village in Lower Merion Township and provided key services to surrounding areas. Residents from a three-mile radius came to Athensville for mail services, and they journeyed to Athensville to visit the handful of stores located there.[4] In the early days of the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad, Athensville was also one of only three station stops in Lower Merion Township. As suburbanization on the Main Line advanced, Ardmore emerged as a commercial center that served the Main Line. This concentration of commerce and industry set it apart from other Main Line suburbs. As early as 1875, one of the earliest Pennsylvania Railroad publications described the area surrounding the Ardmore station saying, "This station . . . has for many years been the business centre of a thickly-populated neighborhood."[5] While the railroad suggested that Ardmore offered "comfort and convenience," its image of Ardmore diverged from broader narratives of the Main Line that emphasized retreat in a garden-like setting.

---

[3] Descriptions of Welsh settlement and farming in the eighteenth century do not distinguish Ardmore from other areas of the Welsh Tract. See, for instance, John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America* (London, 1708), 1:177, accessed May 5, 2015, http://archive.org/details/britishemireina00oldm.

[4] John Townsend, *The Old Main Line: Personal Reminiscences of the "Main Line," Principally in the Sixties and Seventies* (2nd ed.; n.p: 1922), 12.

[5] Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad, *Suburban Stations and Rural Homes on the Pennsylvania Railroad* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1874), 19.

Much of Ardmore's commerce clustered around the Pennsylvania Railroad Tracks and Lancaster Avenue, a thoroughfare that shifted from residential to commercial in a twenty-year time span. As late as 1881, Lancaster included primarily residential buildings on lots that ranged from under an acre to 19 acres. Amid these houses one also found a scattering of commercial sites such as a lumberyard, store, and post office.[6] However, over the next three decades Lancaster Avenue became a predominantly commercial and industrial strip. Walking along Lancaster Avenue in 1904, for instance, one could find purveyors of hardware; house furnishings and bicycles; coal and feed; meat and provisions; and ice cream, fancy cakes, and confectioners. Other shops offered services like printing, upholstering, horseshoeing and blacksmithing as well as trades related to building.[7] By 1926, the nearly solid row of storefronts lining the core of Lancaster Avenue would have given passersby little sense of the residential landscape that existed north and south of Lancaster, especially since, as Ardmore's business district expanded, businesses extended into the streets that intersected with Lancaster. Ardmore's status as a retail center intensified with the development of Suburban Square shopping center north of the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks beginning in 1926.[8] Suburban Square

---

[6] Ardmore and Haverford Railroad Stations (plate 5), *Atlas of Bryn Mawr and Vicinity or of Properties along the Pennsylvania R.R. Including 1 1/2 Miles Each Side of the Road and from City Line to Malvern Station*, in *Official Records, Private Plans and Actual Surveys* (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, C.E.), 1881.

[7] Delaware and Atlantic Telegraph and Telephone Company, *Telephone Directory of the Main Line District* (Philadelphia: Delaware and Atlantic Telegraph and Telephone Company, 1904).

[8] Stephanie Dyer, "'Holding the Line against Philadelphia': Business, Suburban Change, and the Main Line's Suburban Square, 1926-1950," *Business and Economic History* 27, no. 2 (1998): 282. Dyer's article includes an account of the tensions that

eventually included the first suburban branch of the Philadelphia-based Strawbridges and Clothier department store and a mix of other stores, services, and offices. The development represented an early example of a suburban shopping center that served multiple communities.[9]

The concentration of retail in Ardmore meant that affluent residents from other areas of the Main Line could travel to central Ardmore for a wider selection of stores. A shopping center in Ardmore's central business district was easily accessible by car or train without disrupting the residential character of wealthier neighborhoods. Local merchants emphasized Ardmore's commercial nature in their portrayals of the area. In 1928 the Ardmore Chamber of Commerce boasted that Ardmore was the "Shopping Center of the Main Line."[10] A business directory also published in 1928 stated Ardmore's significance in even broader terms, identifying it as "The Hub of the Main Line."[11]

---

emerged between the Suburban Square developers, nearby affluent residents, and existing Ardmore merchants. Affluent white residents in North Ardmore expressed concerns about commercial development in close proximity to residential areas. Dyer asserts that South Ardmore merchants in part feared competition from businesses in the North Ardmore development.

[9] While Richard Longstreth suggests that Suburban Square served the Main Line, Dyer argues that Suburban Square functioned as a regional shopping center. Though they disagree on the geographical area the center served, both agree that shopping center drew customers from beyond Ardmore. Longstreth, *From City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920–1950* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), lxv; Dyer, "'Holding the Line against Philadelphia,'" 282n5.

[10] Ardmore Chamber of Commerce, *Ardmore in Pennsylvania: The Capital of Lower Merion Township*, (Ardmore, PA: Ardmore Chamber of Commerce, ca. 1928/1929), 20, folder: Ardmore History (1) to 1980, record no. 5, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

[11] Paschall Directory Service, *Business and Street Directory of Ardmore, Bryn Mawr and Wayne: The Main Line from Overbrook Hills to Strafford, with Highway Map* (Merchantville, NJ: Paschall Directory Service, 1928), 7. Bryn Mawr represented another

As commerce in Ardmore intensified, Ardmore also became an industrial center with the opening of the Autocar factory. Founded in 1897 in Pittsburgh, the Autocar Company relocated to Ardmore in 1899. The company's move garnered local media attention, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on its opening.[12] The company manufactured trucks, first for commercial and private customers and later for commercial and military uses. In contrast to the commercial establishments surrounding the Autocar factory neighbored, the company served a market that reached well beyond the Main Line.[13] The addition of a factory in central Ardmore in 1899—well after the suburban image of the Main Line had solidified—brought the microgeographies of the Main Line into stark relief: Whereas deed restrictions explicitly prohibited industrial enterprises in some sections of the Main Line, the Autocar factory found a place on Ardmore's central corridor.[14] Initially, the factory occupied one site on Lancaster Avenue. However, over time, the plant gradually expanded to occupy a considerable section of Lancaster Avenue

---

commercial center on the Main Line; however, its commercial offerings were not as extensive as Ardmore's. Interestingly, the *Philadelphia Tribune* similarly referred to Ardmore as the "Hub of the Main Line" in an October 25, 1928, article called "Many Fall Weddings." Whereas the *Business and Street Directory* emphasized retail functions, the *Philadelphia Tribune* reference came in the context of an announcement about social activities.

[12] "Ardmore Gets a New Factory," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 17, 1900.

[13] The company's national reach is evident in its "Factory Branches" that offered sales and service. In a 1920, these branches were concentrated in the Northeast but were located in cities across the United States like San Francisco, Atlanta, and Chicago. "The Autocar Sales and Service Organization," *Autocar Messenger* 9, no. 4 (1923), accessed May 5, 2015, https://books.google.com/books?id=lQg9AAAAIAAJ&.

[14] Though the land surrounding streams and creeks of the area had long histories of manufacturing, these entities preceded suburbanization; additionally, such a large industrial presence in this section of Ardmore was unprecedented.

as well as discontinuous parcels on adjacent streets. The expansion of the factory onto neighboring parcels of land brought industrial uses into even closer proximity with residential buildings.[15]

[15] Beyond the factory itself, the Autocar Company shaped Ardmore's built environment in other ways, particularly by increasing demand for workers' housing. Though workers may have lived in other towns, census records show that a substantial number of Autocar employees resided in Ardmore and within walking distance of the factory. By 1920 the company employed over a thousand workers and the company took a role in affordable housing efforts in the 1910s and early 1920s. Vice president and cofounder John S. Clark was a member of the Main Line Housing Association, and during a 1920 directors' meeting another vice president, E. A. Fitts, discussed the possibility of the company purchasing a property adjacent to the factory in order to build housing. (It does not seem that these plans came to fruition.) In addition, an automotive trade magazine reported on the Autocar Company's efforts to pressure Main Line landlords and real estate agents to offer more affordable housing with the threat that the company would construct its own housing for workers. "Membership List of the Main Line Housing Association," URB3/I/199A, Housing Association of Delaware Valley Office Files 1909–16, Main Line Housing Association–Constitution, Minutes, Miscellany, 1911–1912, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA; Minutes of Meeting of Directors, Autocar Papers, 6:278, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; "Autocar Company Fights High Rents, Warns Realty Men It Will House Employees Unless Given Fair Treatment" *Automotive Industries, The Automobile* (February 26, 1920): 579, accessed May 5, 2015, https://books.google.com/books?id=dNc7AQAAMAAJ&.

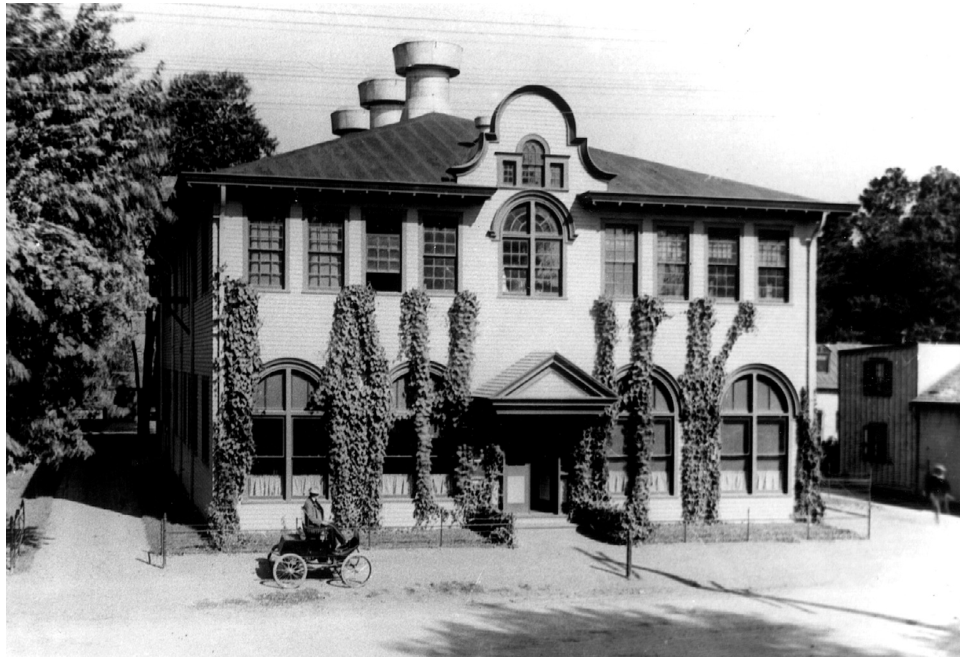

Figure 10. Original Autocar building. ca. 1908. The building's design evoked the country estates of the Main Line. First 300 Photographic Collection, record no. 208, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

Figure 11. Autocar plant building. ca. 1915. The five-story structure dominated this stretch of Lancaster Avenue. First 300 Photographic Collection, record no. 207, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

Figure 12. Autocar plant next to another building on Lancaster Avenue. ca. 1915. This image further highlights the difference in scale between the plant and surrounding buildings. First 300 Photographic Collection, record no. 307, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

The Autocar Company advanced a vision of the Main Line in which industry and domesticity were compatible with one another. The company identified the Main Line as ideally suited to its industrial enterprise, noting in its company minutes, “Its plant is most advantageously situated for shipping and receiving goods; is in the center of the most populous and wealthy suburban residence district in Pennsylvania, thus having a profitable neighborhood market; the labor supply is abundant and of excellent character; the roads are of the best and taxes low.”[16] In addition to valuing the infrastructure, potential customers, and labor supply afforded by its Main Line location, the company also recognized and praised the Main Line as “a region of many hedges, beautiful trees, wide lawns, open spaces and large estates.” The company also referenced idealized

[16] Autocar Company president to Barclay H. Warburton, Autocar Papers, 2:5, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

images of the Main Line's landscape in its recruitment of workers. From the perspective of the Autocar Company, industrial uses were congruous with residential ones.[17]

This commercial and industrial development unfolded in close proximity to Ardmore's residential neighborhoods, which grew as developers constructed new housing for an expanding population that included Italian and Irish immigrants, US-born whites, and African Americans. Subdivision began in the late 1870s, and two distinct residential areas emerged: an area of larger residential properties to the north and a section of smaller residential properties to the south, with the commercial corridor dividing them. The northern section of Ardmore, north of Montgomery Avenue, accorded with the pastoral suburban images for which the Main Line became famous. The railroad tracks and Montgomery Avenue, a thoroughfare, provided a buffer zone that separated commerce and industry from residences. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the Anderson family owned most of the land in northern Ardmore[18] and beginning in the early 1900s they and other landowners began subdividing their estates. This suburban

---

[17] Autocar, "Ardmore, the Home of the Autocar Factory," *Autocar Messenger* 9, no. 4 (July 1923): 2–3.

[18] Physician James Anderson had purchased the property in 1811 at a time when those in the Philadelphia region would have regarded the area as rural. The property's main building initially functioned as an inn that served travelers on the old turnpike; though it was briefly a residence, the building was a tavern at the time James Anderson purchased the property. Positioned just north of Montgomery Avenue, the spacious two-story frame house, known as St. Georges, was easily accessible from rail and road thoroughfares. The transformation of the property from inn in the early eighteenth century to residential estate to subdivided suburban housing exemplified larger changes in the area, as new land uses often subsumed old ones. Lower Merion Historical Society, "Three Tuns/St.George's" in *The First 300: The Amazing and Rich History of Lower Merion* (Darby, PA: Diane, 2000), 55.

development attracted members of some of Philadelphia and Ardmore's leading white families. Such households moved into large houses on curving lanes and drew on the labor of domestic servants.

South Ardmore followed a different trajectory and developed at a faster rate. By 1920, diverse residence types were present in this section of Ardmore, including single-family, twin, and row houses and a limited number of multiunit dwellings. Most of South Ardmore began as a collection of properties that developers subdivided over time and at a pace faster than subdivision in other parts of the Main Line. From the late 1870s (when subdivision began) through to the 1920s (when a house stood on nearly every subdivided lot), a patchwork of developments emerged in South Ardmore. Unlike the winding roads typically associated with the Main Line, streets were laid out on a grid, allowing developers to maximize the number of houses they could construct. The density and the proximity to commerce made the area unsuitable for large Main Line houses, and as housing construction in Ardmore hastened, houses and lots shrank. With uniform setbacks, design, and materials and narrow plots some later houses closely mirrored housing styles found along streetcar lines. Other aspects of Ardmore's residential development recalled suburbs developed around streetcars, too: trolley lines ran through South Ardmore, and in some instances the trolley's right of way ran directly in front of houses. (The next section discusses the development of the trolley lines in greater depth.) Expanded transportation options to Philadelphia and other suburbs, the opening of the Autocar factory, and population increases all impacted demand for housing in Ardmore,

and chapter three will look more specifically at the relationship between housing and African American settlement.

While South Ardmore was primarily residential, there were other types of land uses amid housing. Some of these, such as churches, were typical for a suburban residential neighborhood. Many of Ardmore's religious institutions were located in South Ardmore. By 1921, nine of Ardmore's ten religious institutions were located in or adjacent to South Ardmore. Three of these—Zion Baptist, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME), and Calvary Baptist—were African American churches. This concentration of churches likely reflected the fact that most of Ardmore's earliest suburban residents lived on or south of Lancaster Avenue and the fact that subdivision in North Ardmore took place later. The concentration of churches in residential areas also exemplified a national trend of churches moving to be nearer to domestic environments.[19]

There was also a public school in South Ardmore, which served students of all ages before becoming a primary school in 1910.[20] Living in South Ardmore provided children, including African American children, with access to a public school in their neighborhood. In later years, students who continued beyond primary school traveled north to Montgomery Avenue, where a junior high school and high school that opened in 1924 and 1910, respectively, served the entire township of Lower Merion. Though specific references to discrimination are absent in historical records, there were at least some concerns registered about the equal education of black students. On one occasion in

---

[19] For a discussion of this trend nationally, see Jeanne Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[20] Lower Merion Historical Society, *The First 300*, 138.

1917, the Ardmore Notes column called attention to the low percentage of African American teens attending the high school and the graduation rates of black students.[21]

Businesses were scattered throughout residential sections of South Ardmore. These enterprises may have served the needs of South Ardmore's residents and clientele from other areas. Within the South Ardmore, one could find, among other establishments, grocers, produce dealers, bottlers, a bicycle salesperson, and horseshoers.[22] A number of commercial establishments were located on East and West Spring Avenues. Some businesses were clustered, while others were interspersed between residences.

Duncan William managed one grocery store at 108 West Spring Avenue, and residences flanked the establishment. William's store was an example of a family that combined its residence with its business. The store sat on a parcel at the corner of Ardmore Avenue and West Spring Avenue and was one of three buildings on the property. In addition to the store, there was also a three-story house with a wrap around porch and a third building that served as a shed and a garage. In 1920, Thirty-five-year-old Duncan managed the grocery store while living in the adjacent house with his widowed seventy-seven-year-old mother Ellen and thirty-year-old sister Emily; Ellen was

---

[21] A local organization of African American men also took an interest in the education of black students. The Main Line Negro Business League, an organization that will be discussed in detail in chapter 5, appointed a "committee . . . to make periodic visits to the public schools of Haverford, Radnor, and Lower Merion townships to study general conditions that the League may be intelligent on educational affairs." Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 4, 1920; Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 30, 1917.

[22] I identified all businesses listed in a 1916 directory of the Main Line. *Main Line and Residential and Business Directory* (Ardmore: F. L. M. Hawkins, 1916).

listed as the head of the household, and she owned the property free and clear. At the start of his workday, Duncan would not have had far to walk to get to the store where he worked and where he employed other workers. The Williams' grocery store was one of several on Spring Avenue, and just at the end of the block a forty-three-year-old Italian immigrant operated a grocery store at the front of his residence. South Ardmore consistently blurred the lines between commercial and residential.[23]

Ardmore's commercial and residential growth was situated within a few miles of other suburbs and about nine miles away from downtown Philadelphia; public transportation options connected Ardmore to other parts of the metropolitan region. By the start of the twentieth-century, the Pennsylvania Railroad represented only one of several transportation routes that served Ardmore. Beginning in 1902, competing transportation concerns opened transit lines that had stops in Ardmore, and the introduction of these lines repositioned Ardmore's place in the region in terms of mass transit. The two trolley lines in operation by 1907 provided intersuburban transportation to areas not served by the Pennsylvania Railroad, including Sixty-Ninth Street Station in Upper Darby. From Sixty-Ninth Street, a transportation hub for the Philadelphia region, one could connect not only to other suburban destinations in Delaware and Montgomery Counties but also to the subway line that ran through Philadelphia's downtown. The introduction of bus route along Lancaster Avenue in 1920 added to these transportation options. Ardmore was no longer one of many stops on the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main

---

[23] 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 110, sheet 9b.

Line. Instead, it evolved into a node from which a resident could access Philadelphia and surrounding suburbs by trolley, rail, or bus.[24]

African American Migration to Ardmore

The early twentieth century was a time of significant growth in Ardmore and on the Main Line. In 1900 approximately thirteen thousand people lived on the Main Line and by 1920, almost fifty-five thousand people resided in the area.[25] As builders constructed housing for affluent white families and commerce expanded, increasing numbers of Italians, Irish, and African Americans moved to the area for jobs in service and industry. Ardmore became home to one of the largest black populations on the Main Line. Though a few African Americans had resided on the Main Line and in Ardmore for centuries, their numbers swelled as African Americans sought economic opportunities available in the area in the early twentieth century. The growth of the African American population along the Main Line must be understood within the larger context of the Great Migration. Between 1916 and 1930, hundreds of thousands of African Americans left the South to move northward. A confluence of factors contributed to this. One of the most significant of these was linked to the onset of World War I. As US industries were

---

[24] See, for instance, Toll and Schwager, *Montgomery County*, 333–34; "Suburban Route Built Up by Giving Frequent and Regular Service," *Bus Transportation* 1, no. 10 (1922): 523, accessed May 5, 2015, https://books.google.com/books?id=HFLmAAAAMAAJ&.

[25] Frederick Law Olmsted and Arthur Coleman Comey, *Main Line District City Planning Report to the Main Line Citizens' Association"* [advance draft] (Brookline, MA, 1919), Lower Marion Historical Society. A table named "Main Line District, PA: Increase in Assessed Value of Real Estate and in Population" charted population growth in the Main Line district, which included Lower Merion, Radnor, and Haverford townships, and the borough of Narberth.

increasing war-related production, they could no longer draw on immigrant labor from Europe and instead turned to African American laborers to fill these needs. Added to this, the discrimination that African Americans experienced in the Jim Crow South and the intensified competition with white workers for few jobs and the displacement of agricultural workers due to boll weevil together encouraged African Americans to seek their futures in the North.[26]

Recruited by northern industrial concerns, the first significant waves of African Americans migrated northward in 1916.[27] The Pennsylvania Railroad was among the first companies to insert itself into the migration process by directly recruiting workers in this manner, and the company initially paid costs of migrants' train fares.[28] In the summer of 1916, Walter Atterbury, a Pennsylvania Railroad vice president, deployed James Duckrey, an African American pastor and later president of Cheyney Technical Institute, as the Pennsylvania Railroad's agent and sent him south to recruit black workers.[29] John Emlen, secretary and treasurer of the Armstrong Association of Philadelphia, observed, "The Pennsylvania Railroad Company is employing everyone that can be secured. From July 1916, to January, 1917, they imported at their own expense over 12,000. They say they are not importing any more because it did not pay, but they want all the men they

---

[26] Carol Marks, *Farewell—We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 2–3.

[27] Ibid., 1.

[28] Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration during the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 69.

[29] Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 40.

can get."[30] While the Pennsylvania Railroad offered some opportunities for trained carpenters, Emlen remarked that the railroad primarily sought black men who would work as unskilled laborers.[31] African Americans learned about employment opportunities through other channels, too. For instance, African American newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* that circulated in the South included news about opportunities throughout the north. In addition, the reports of friends and family migrants beckoned African Americans from the South.[32]

Many southern migrants moved to industrial urban centers, and scholarship on the Great Migration has likewise focused on influx to cities. However, African Americans also migrated to suburban locations around major cities. As Andrew Wiese has shown, "the availability of employment, the presence of an earlier African American community,

---

[30] John T. Emlen, "Discussion," National Conference of Social Work Proceedings, 1917, 500–501, University of Michigan Digital Library Text Collection, accessed May 16, 2015, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/ACH8650.1917.001. The Armstrong Association of Philadelphia was founded in 1908 with the aim of researching and publicizing issues significant to the well-being of African Americans and assisting African Americans, particularly in the areas of housing and education. For a more detailed explanation of the Armstrong Association's mission and its context in early twentieth-century Philadelphia. See John T. Emlen, "The Movement for the Betterment of the Negro in Philadelphia," in "The Negro's Progress in Fifty Years," special issue, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49 (September 1913): 81–92. Emmet J. Scott also described the Pennsylvania Railroad's early recruitment efforts and highlighted that other companies engaged in similar practices as they "promiscuously picked up trainloads of negros from Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Pensacola Florida." *Negro Migration During the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 55.

[31] Emlen, "Discussion," 500.

[32] For a discussion of the different factors that encouraged black migration, see Marks, *Farewell—We're Good and Gone*, 20–32. Marks usefully describes these mechanisms that encouraged African Americans to migrate as "Lines of communication [that] set up two-way channels of information between sending and receiving areas of employment, housing, education, climate, and general conditions of social life" (20).

or the lack of land-use controls opened a door to settlement" in towns surrounding cities.[33] These conditions existed on the edges of many of the major cities that were centers of black migration.

The Philadelphia metropolitan region, both the city and surrounding suburbs, was a center of black migration in the 1910s and 1920s, and the area reflected trends in migration nationally. Between 1910 and 1920 the population of black residents in Philadelphia alone grew from 84,459 to 134,229, and by 1930 the black population stood at 219,599.[34] Like their counterparts in other cities, black migrants who came to Philadelphia encountered significant challenges. Residential areas open to African Americans were already limited, and the arrival of southern migrants intensified demand

---

[33] Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 66. For a broader discussion of the relationship between the Great Migration and suburban settlement nationally, see Wiese's chapter "'Who Set You Flowin'?': The Great Migration, Race, and Work in the Suburbs," in *Places of Their Own*, 34–66. For a case study, see Kevin Leonard, "Paternalism and the Rise of the Black Community in Evanston, Illinois, 1870–1910" (master's thesis, Northwestern University, 1982).

[34] US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census*, Negroes in the United States, 1920–32*, prepared by Zellmer Roswell Pettet and Charles Edward Hall, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1935), 55.

for housing and led to overcrowding.[35] As new black residents sought housing, racism precipitated violence in Philadelphia—violence that erupted into riots in 1918.[36]

The Great Migration also impacted African American settlement in areas surrounding Philadelphia. Addressing the significance of black migration in the Philadelphia region, Emmett Scott, special assistant for Negro affairs to the US Secretary of War in 1920, explained, "Here we see another example of a rerouting point, a place where the migration broke bulk, scattering itself into the various industrial communities desiring labor. Among the other cites and towns receiving this population were practically all those within a radius of about one hundred miles of Philadelphia."[37] Though Scott focused on industrial labor, the implications of his statement were in fact broader, and destinations in the region also offered other types of employment

---

[35] Bernard J. Newman, "The Negro Migration to Philadelphia," *Housing Betterment* 12, no. 4 (1923): 408–9, May 16, 2015, http://books.google.com/books?id=DbxNAAAAMAAJ&. For a detailed study of the conditions of migrants, see William D. Fuller, "The Negro Migrant in Philadelphia," 1924, unpublished report, Philadelphia Housing Association, folder 5, URB 31, Negro Migrant Study, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

[36] Vincent P. Franklin, "The Philadelphia Race Riot of 1918," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 3 (1975): 336–50.

[37] Emmett Scott served as special assistant for Negro affairs to the US Secretary of War. Scott's monograph, *Negro Migration During the War*, was part of a series published by the Division of Economics and History at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The series was entitled "Preliminary Economic Studies of the War," and each volume addressed some aspect of the World War I from economic perspectives. Emmett Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 134.

opportunities. The hundred-mile radius that Scott referenced encompassed numerous cities, towns, villages, and suburbs, and Ardmore was one of these.[38]

The first migrants to Ardmore joined a small existing population of African Americans and broadened the regional diversity of black residents. In 1900, the African American population numbered 136, but with increases from the South, the numbers of African Americans in Ardmore grew tremendously over the next decades. By 1930, 1,040 African Americans lived in Ardmore, and migrants to the area came from a range of southern states, including Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland. However, as was true in Pennsylvania as a whole, the majority of African Americans came from Virginia.[39] In addition to southern migrants were new arrivals who came from other points in the Northeast like Delaware and New York and, more specifically, from northern cities, including New York and nearby Philadelphia.

As African Americans settled in Ardmore, they influenced their friends from home to settle there, too. Contemporary Ardmore residents who trace their lineage in Ardmore to the early twentieth century relate that many came from Middlesex County, Virginia.[40] This common place of origin reflected patterns of chain migration: individuals from a southern community would settle in a city or town in the north and friends,

---

[38] Andrew Wiese's survey of black suburbanization in this time period confirms that employment opportunities were an important element driving where African American suburban settlement. See especially Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 43–66.

[39] Simon Kuznets and Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *Population Redistribution and Economic Growth: United States 1870–1950* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1957), 335.

[40] I draw this information from interviews I conducted with Ardmore residents in 2007 and 2008.

relatives, and former neighbors from the south would follow earlier migrants to settle in the same northern communities. Through chain migration, migrants could draw on the local knowledge of friends and relatives who preceded them and maintain longstanding connections as they settled into new places.[41] In the 1910s and 1920s, the number of African Americans in Ardmore grew from a handful of households to a critical mass numbering hundreds of individuals, and the suburb was distinct from other Main Line towns as one of the largest centers of African American life.

Employment Opportunities in Ardmore

Employment opportunities drew most black migrants to Ardmore and to the Main Line.[42] African Americans worked in service, industry, and professional sectors, and the range of workplaces spanned environments from homes to offices to factories in Ardmore and beyond. Labor was required to sustain the Main Line domestic ideal, and initially African Americans worked almost exclusively in domestic service. As the Main Line developed and the African American population grew, the areas in which African Americans worked broadened. Some African Americans, particularly men, worked in fields outside domestic service and beyond the Main Line. African American proprietors also offered services to other African Americans and to white residents. The diversification of employment opportunities beyond domestic service was central to the growth of a large African American population in Ardmore that was balanced in terms of

[41] John S. MacDonald and Leatrice D. MacDonald, "Chain Migration: Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks," *Milibank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1964): 82–97.

[42] Marvin E. Porch, "The Philadelphia Main Line Negro: A Social, Economic and Education Survey" (EdD diss., Temple University, 1938), 21.

gender and varied in class and household structure. These opportunities existed apart from the idealized affluent Main Line.

The experiences of many African Americans redefined Ardmore as a place where work coexisted and was at times intertwined with domesticity and other aspects of life. This was a fundamentally different conception of this suburban space in which a suburb could be a homeplace and a workplace, and where the relationship between home and work could be intra- or intersuburban. At the same time, not all African Americans worked on the Main Line, and some followed the pattern of suburban residence and urban workplace. Ardmore served as a base for people who worked in Ardmore, in other suburbs, and in Philadelphia.

African American labor was critical to the production and maintenance of the fabled Main Line: its spacious houses, sprawling grounds, everyday domestic life, and social events. African Americans, along with white immigrants, worked to maintain the interiors and exteriors of the Main Line homes where elite white families lived. The interiors of houses could include dozens of rooms filled with furnishings that required care, and domestic space was organized to keep service spaces and servants separate from family social and private spaces. Black women served as housekeepers and black men as butlers. Waiters and waitresses attended to meals for families and guests, and women laundered textiles.[43] African American women worked with white immigrants in these positions, and at times experienced unequal treatment. Josephine White, for instance,

---

[43] 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 109 and 110; 1930 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 69 and 70.

related an instance in which a white employer purchased a higher quality of soap for white household staff.[44]

Because cultivated nature was a core component of affluent Main Line houses, attention to the grounds surrounding houses was essential. Many African American men worked as gardeners. But as a landscape gardener, York Nelson was among those who designed these grounds. Nelson's work garnered praise from the *Philadelphia Tribune*, and a profile of Nelson in the newspaper commended him as "one of the ablest landscape gardeners in the country, as is testified, too, by the beautiful lawns and gardens under his care surrounding many of the most palatial mansions."[45]

The Main Line was also a landscape and lifestyle that drew heavily on private transportation, which African American chauffeurs helped to provide. The Pennsylvania Railroad connected the Main Line with Philadelphia, but intrasuburban travel required alternative means of transportation. Households with chauffeurs relied on their chauffeurs for transportation to various destinations: Chauffeurs transported their affluent white employers between the train and their houses, some of which were beyond walking distance and accessible only by carriage ride, and they guided matrons along winding streets to social gatherings with their peers. As chauffeurs drove, passengers could take in the views afforded by the curvilinear streets designed according to principals of

---

[44] Notes from Mary Wood's Interview with Josephine White of Ardmore, Age about 82 in 1982, folder: Black History (1) to 1999, record no. 6, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwd, PA.

[45] An Old Timer, "Suburban Business Men to Build Villages," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 22, 1920.

landscape gardening.[46] Social events provided another occasion for the use of chauffeurs, and the social events reported in society columns required transportation to reach them. For instance, an afternoon luncheon of four leading women could have drawn on the labor of an equal number of coachmen.

The relationship between place of residence and place of employment varied for black domestic workers. For some in Ardmore, employment and residence was coterminous, and they worked in private families in more affluent areas of Ardmore as live-in servants. The majority of these women were single, widowed, or divorced, but for the small percentage of women who were married, their positions separated them from their spouses. Women who worked for private families but did not "live in" worked most often as laundresses or in the area of general housework. Added to this was a scattering of women who worked as nurses and waitresses as well as one dressmaker. In his study of suburbs like Ardmore, Andrew Wiese also found that black women provided services to other African Americans, including laundry and babysitting services.[47] As they tended to the domestic needs of the families for which they worked, these women, like domestic service workers elsewhere, also negotiated obligations in their own homes. Those African Americans who did not live in may have traveled to work in homes elsewhere in Ardmore or on the Main Line, regularly moving between the social and physical diversity of South Ardmore into more homogenous areas where buildings, street plans, and inhabitants differed radically from their own neighborhoods. In interviews I conducted

---

[46] John Archer, "Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no. 4 (1983): 139–56.
[47] Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 55.

with Ardmore residents, some recalled that chauffeurs would pick up some domestics and take them to work.[48] Domestic servants could also have traveled by means of bus, trolley, train, or foot to reach their places of employment. Many African Americans performed domestic service work in their homes, a type of work that the following chapter will explore further.

While both men and women worked in domestic service, women dominated the domestic service field, far exceeding the percentage of African American men who worked in domestic service. For instance, in 1920 nearly 115 of 184 women in the paid Ardmore workforce gave their place of employment as "private families."[49] The concentration of black women in domestic service was consistent with regional trends. Commenting on employment in 1913, John Emlen wrote in the "Betterment of the Negro in Philadelphia" that "women are restricted chiefly to domestic service, and though this restriction is unfortunate and resented by them, they do quite as well economically as white girls of similar efficiency and training."[50] Though Emlen asserted that black women fared as well as white women, African Americans did encounter discrimination in seeking jobs in domestic service. A 1920 listing, for instance, sought a "COOK,

---

[48] This dissertation began with a focus on contemporary Ardmore; between 2007 and 2008, I conducted 22 interviews with community members focusing on family histories and contemporary concerns facing Ardmore. Because of the nature of the interviews, I maintain the confidentiality of the sources. While the dissertation shifted to focus on an earlier time period, some aspects of the interviews remained relevant.

[49] 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 109 and 110; 1930 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 69 and 70.

[50] Emlen was secretary and treasurer of the Philadelphia-based Armstrong Association, which later became the Urban League. Emlen, "Betterment of the Negro in Philadelphia," 89.

chambermaid, waitress: 2 white Protestant girls" in Wynnewood, a suburb adjacent to Ardmore.[51] Black women were already constrained in their employment options, and discriminatory practices added further restrictions.

Outside domestic environments, African Americans, particularly men, worked in an array of fields. Work in domestic spaces employed almost all black women in Ardmore, but nearly all black men worked outside of domestic environments. Some of these positions were found in Ardmore and the Main Line and others were farther afield. The Autocar Factory was the largest employer of African American men in Ardmore. Early on in the factory's tenure in Ardmore, the company's president assessed the company's decision to move from Pittsburgh and noted, "the labor supply is abundant and of excellent character."[52] By 1920, Autocar employed approximately 1,300 workers at its plant, and 49 of these were African American men who resided in Ardmore.[53] Added to these numbers were likely African Americans who lived in other suburban locations and in Philadelphia and commuted to Ardmore by means of train, trolley, or car.[54]

---

[51] "Help Wanted—Female," *Evening Public Ledger*, April 2, 1920.

[52] Autocar president to Barclay H. Warburton, Autocar Company Minutes 2:5, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[53] In 1918, Autocar hired female employees for the first time. This was likely tied to laborer shortages, given that a fifth of its employees were serving in the military; however, no African American women listed their places of work as Autocar. *Production Managers Report*, January 27, 1919, Autocar Company Records, 4:169, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 109 and 110.

[54] I base this assertion on the documentation that African Americans commuted from Philadelphia to work in other suburban locations, including the Pencoyd Iron Works in Lower Merion. The Armstrong Association's *A Study of Living Conditions Among*

At Autocar, African American men worked in a narrow range of positions, likely limited by the color line. Most African American men worked as laborers, though African American workers also included a fireman, a waiter, a driver, and a janitor. White neighbors, both US-born and immigrant, were among their coworkers, and white employees worked not only as laborers but also in such positions as machinists. The wider spectrum of positions held by white employees suggests that not all positions at Autocar were open to African Americans, either because of discrimination at the factory or because of lack of access to the required training.

The activities of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in later decades suggest that racial inequalities were a part of hiring practices at the Autocar. When the Autocar became involved in defense production for World War II, the Bryn Mawr branch of the NAACP campaigned for the company to hire African Americans in skilled positions.[55] A 1942 article published under the headline "14 Given Skilled Jobs at Autocar" received national attention in the *Chicago Defender* and proclaimed, "After more than a year of effort, Negro skilled workers are on the payroll at

---

Colored People in Towns in the Outer Part of Philadelphia and in Other Suburbs Both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey found that men from northwestern sections of Philadelphia worked in Pencoyd Iron Works, a site that bordered Northwest Philadelphia but was located across the city line. In addition, a *Philadelphia Tribune* article about a riot in the manufacturing center and suburb of Chester, PA, asserted that "hundreds" of black men of the thousands of black men who worked in Chester lived in Philadelphia. Armstrong Association, "Wissahickon, Manyunk, and Roxborough" in *A Study of Living Conditions Among Colored People in Towns in the Outer Part of Philadelphia and in Other Suburbs Both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey* (Philadelphia, 1915), 55. "All Night Battle between Colored and White Men," *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 28, 1917.

[55] "Cramp's Shipyard Wants Second Generation Whites—Color Line at Autocar," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 29, 1941.

the Autocar Company in Ardmore."[56] Evidence of discriminatory hiring practices was also present in the Autocar's failure to hire black women early on. Though Autocar began hiring women in 1919, census records from 1920 and 1930 do not show that black women were among those hired 1930.[57]

There were also other employment opportunities for black men on the Main Line. African American labor was integral to meeting the needs of Main Line residents across socioeconomic lines. While the narrative of the Main Line centered the individual household, each suburban household required goods and services that merchants began to offer locally. The growth in the number of suburban residents also generated the expansion of institutions, which similarly required goods and services. African American men worked as drivers for coal yards, express companies, and grocery stores. They also worked in service roles as janitors at schools and churches. Other African American men were tradespeople—plumbers and carpenters, for example—who supported the construction and maintenance of the Main Line's physical environment, and a handful of black men held professional positions in Ardmore. These were high-status occupations there, and these men were often leading participants in Ardmore's religious, social, and political activities.

The Pennsylvania Railroad was also an important source of employment for African American men in Ardmore. For some, the railroad was a core component of suburban life, allowing residents to travel back and forth between Philadelphia and their

---

[56] "14 Given Skilled Jobs at Autocar," *Chicago Defender,* July 4, 1942.

[57] Copy of *Production Manager's Report*, January 27, 1919, Autocar Papers 4:169, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

homes for purposes of work and socializing. Supporting the railroad's infrastructure required maintenance, and a sizable portion of African American men in Ardmore (26 of them) worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad as laborers and as trackmen who maintained, repaired, and laid track. Their places of employment might have been as near as the Ardmore train station or farther away in the interstate network of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Thus, for one segment of the Main Line, the railroad was solely a source of transportation; for another, the train offered both a source of transportation and employment that supported individuals and households.

A segment of Ardmore's African American men used the train to travel to work in Philadelphia. In some ways, this mirrored the commuting patterns of the affluent white males who lived on the Main Line and worked in Philadelphia. However, African American men traveled to a wider array of workplaces that ranged from shipyards to offices. As a place of employment, Philadelphia could mean many things for black Ardmorites. Many of the jobs African Americans held in Philadelphia were in areas of industry. In 1920, four African Americans who lived in Ardmore commuted to Philadelphia's Navy Yard on League Island, which they could have reached by trolley, subway, or bus. At the Navy Yard, these men supported the defense industry as cooks and laborers. Though the census does not capture it, at the height of World War I and the peak of the war production effort, there were likely increased numbers of African Americans working at the Navy Yard. A few African Americans in Ardmore held professional positions in Philadelphia. Robert Hayes, an insurance collector, was one such person. Hayes worked at 1414 Lombard Street in Philadelphia as a manager of the

Philadelphia Branch of the National Benefit Life Insurance Company, an African American-owned insurance company based in Washington, DC. Located in the midst of Philadelphia's African American community, Hayes's office provided services to Philadelphia's growing black population, and as chapter five will show, Hayes's work in with National Benefit also translated to status in Ardmore.[58]

Race and Danger

Living in Ardmore allowed African Americans access to economic and social opportunities. At the same time, however, some white residents regarded the presence of African Americans on the Main Line as troubling. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as growing numbers of African Americans settled in Ardmore and the Main Line, Philadelphia's majority newspapers linked African Americans in Ardmore with criminal behavior. To read the pages of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, one of Philadelphia's major dailies, during this time would have left a reader with the impression that all African Americans in Ardmore were criminal. Would-be black criminals could strike at their places of employment (including private residences), in the homes of strangers, in small businesses, as well as on streets and walkways. Home robberies received the most attention, but the potential for crime committed by African Americans seemed ever-present in all realms of life for white residents.[59] An

[58] Photograph of Robert A. Hayes and National Benefit staff, *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 19, 1921.

[59] For articles that discussed home robberies, see, for instance, "French Paper May Betray Thief," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 15, 1905; "Bullets Whiz When Burglar Is Caught," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 11, 1904; "Burglar's Hunger Leads to Arrest: Witness Says Negro Forgot Silver and Went to Sleep over Choice Meat and Drink,"

overwhelming focus on crimes committed by African American males gendered black crime.[60] This emphasis on criminality cast African Americans, particularly African American men, as forces disruptive of suburban tranquility so central to the image of the Main Line and other suburbs like it. This matched with stereotypes of African Americans as innately criminal that were circulating in this time period.[61]

In the pages of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, African Americans in Ardmore directed violence and criminality not only toward white residents but also toward other African Americans. Headlines like "Murder in Ardmore: Negro Killed in Fight in Slum Section of the Borough" and "Ardmore Negro Held after Death of Woman Cook" followed with stories about women who fought over a man with a pitchfork and stones, men fatally wounded by gun shots in fights, and a young woman killed by a fire deliberately set by a

---

Philadelphia Inquirer, June 5, 1909. Regarding small businesses, see "Negro Thief's Game Foiled by Upper-Cut: Ardmore Oil Station Keeper Smashes Attacker and Saves Cash Drawer," October 9, 1921; on streets: "Negro Slashes Wife of Main Line Policeman: Mrs. Herbert Albany, Ardmore, Sustained Razor Stroke Across Chest and Was Robbed," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 15, 1915; "Ardmore Girl's Escort Robbed," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 18, 1916.

[60] *The Inquirer* did report cases of African American women who committed crimes in other Main Line towns. These instances of robbery occurred most frequently in the homes and private institutions where they worked as domestics. "Wiggling Toes Led to Arrest of Negress: Woman, Suspected of Bryn Mawr Robbery, Caught by Policeman," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 16, 1916; "Confesses College Thefts: Negro Girl Admits Taking Bryn Mawr Clothing," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* May 6, 1904.

[61] See, for instance, Frederick Ludwig Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1896), 217–35, accessed May 31, 2015, https://archive.org/details/racetraitstenden00hoff; Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2010.

male admirer.[62] These representations offered a picture of African Americans incapable of civil interaction with one another and suggested that where African American men gathered, violent confrontation could follow. In newspapers, African Americans could threaten not only well-to-do white Main Line residents but also other African Americans. Reports of crime, violence, and disorder perpetrated by African Americans recalled the supposed dangers of the metropolis from which the Main Line was meant to provide sanctuary for white residents. By repeatedly linking African Americans with crime, such articles implied that African Americans did not belong on the Main Line. Though the events on which these articles may indeed have happened the way in which newspapers reported them were likely disruptive forces to African Americans' attempts to establish themselves in Ardmore.

In at least one instance, white residents responded to Ardmore's social diversity with direct acts of violence. In 1924, the Ku Klux Klan held a rally in Ardmore, and in 1927 police suspected the Ku Klux Klan of a cross burning.[63] That stark symbol of racialized terror occurred on Holland Avenue, a street on which a number of African

---

[62] "Murder in Ardmore: Negro Killed in Fight in Slum Section of the Borough," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 11, 1916; "Suspected of Murder: Ardmore Negro Held after Death of Woman Cook," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 15, 1920; "Negro Fights May End Up Fatally: One Man Probably Fatally Shot in Saturday Night Troubles at Ardmore," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* September 14, 1914.

[63] Historian Philip Jenkins contends that while the Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania directed its animosity toward African Americans it the 1920s, the group focused more on anti-Catholicism. Thus, Jenkins explains that a Ku Klux Klan rally that took place in Ardmore in 1924 was part of a series of rallies organized statewide in opposition to the possible nomination of a Catholic for the Democratic ticket for president. "The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania, 1920–1940," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 69, no. 2 (1986): 128–30.

Americans lived. The outcome of the night was the murder of a Lower Merion police officer. An African American custodian was convicted of the crime only to be pardoned later.[64] Black Ardmore resident Loretta Long Loudermilt recalled the fear of waiting for her mother to return from a Philadelphia shopping trip the night of the cross burning: "My brothers called the neighbors and walked to the trolley line to look for our folks. They were afraid they'd get shot and killed. They finally got home after the Klan had burnt the cross and two people were killed over there on Holland Avenue."[65] While such instances appear to have been infrequent occurrences, the presence of social diversity in Ardmore did on at least one occasion provoke a violent response.

Conclusions

Regional, national, and international trends converged in Ardmore to make it into a place marked by diversity of population, physical form, and function. Ardmore's black population grew significantly in the first three decades of the twentieth century. An advertisement encouraging African Americans to move to Ardmore in 1920 might have included references to positions available in domestic and institutional service, industry, and commerce as well as the availability of housing for such workers. Ardmore's relationship to the larger Main Line and its history as a commercial center strongly influenced these factors. The offerings available in Ardmore aligned with interests of the African Americans who chose Ardmore over other destinations. Work was significant in attracting African Americans to Ardmore, but it was only one aspect of black life:

---

[64] "Man Held for Murder Asks for Parole," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 19, 1928.
[65] Loretta Long Loudermilt, Oral History Project, folder: Loudermilt, Loretta Long, record no. 1, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

African Americans established themselves in other ways, too. While this chapter has examined the developments that contributed to the rise of Ardmore's African American population, the next two chapters delve deeper into experiences of black suburbanization in Ardmore and focus on home and community—two understudied dimensions of black life in early twentieth-century Ardmore.

Chapter 3: Home

In 1920, Delaware Webb, a twenty-one-year-old who did general work in private families, was one of seven people who lived at 156 Simpson Road. Webb and two other men who also worked as domestic servants lodged with the Jackson family. Ida and Allen Jackson rented the two-story, brick twin house at 156 Simpson Road, and having lodgers allowed them to supplement Allen's wages as a chauffeur for an express company with additional income. While Ida did not engage in paid labor, the responsibilities of tending to two children, a six-year-old son and a twelve-year-old daughter, as well as any housekeeping responsibilities that came with having lodgers, surely kept her busy.[1]

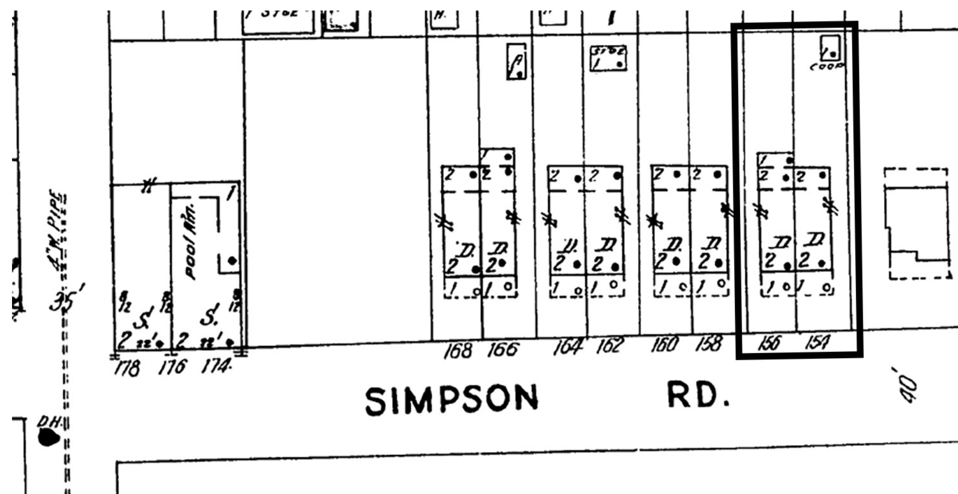

Figure 13. 156 Simpson Road and its twin, 154 Simpson Road, are highlighted on the map. Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Montgomery County*, Pennsylvania (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1926), 1:49.

By 1925, the Jackson family and their three lodgers had moved out of 156 Simpson Road, and a new household, the Johnson family, had taken up residence there. The Johnsons enjoyed entertaining, and within the first two weeks of January 1925, they

---

[1] 1920 Census, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 109, sheet 11B.

hosted at least two parties. On the first occasion, Susanna and Elmer Johnson gave their two daughters a party shortly after Christmas; a description of the event in the *Philadelphia Tribune* noted, "The house was beautifully decorated with the holiday trimmings and each one seemed to be filled with the Christmas spirit." Two weeks later, the Johnsons celebrated Susanna with a surprise birthday party. Approximately twenty guests from Ardmore, Berwyn, Haverford, and Philadelphia gathered in the house and enjoyed a lavish menu of "chicken salad with quesa and galletas, punch, icecream and cake and candies and nuts."[2]

The Jackson and Johnson families inhabited the spaces of 156 Simpson Road in varied ways. For both households, it was a place of residence. For Ida and Allen Jackson, the house was a means to earn money in exchange for having unrelated individuals live with them. For the Johnsons, the house provided an opportunity to host guests in spaces they had styled for celebratory occasions. This chapter examines how African Americans like Ida Jackson and Susanna Johnson utilized and shaped the spaces in which they lived. My methodological approach, which works both at the macro level of the neighborhood and the micro level of the household, is central to this endeavor. The census indicates where people lived and whether they worked at home, photos and maps show the physical dimensions of dwellings, and newspapers and studies provide accounts of practices. Grounding my analysis in specific households, I integrate these materials in order to link particular material conditions with particular social ones. This approach

---

[2] Main Line News, *Philadelphia Tribune,* January 10 and 31, 1925. Berwyn and Haverford are both Main Line suburbs. Haverford is adjacent to Ardmore, while Berwyn is approximately eleven miles southwest of Ardmore.

illuminates the ways in which African Americans shaped and utilized the spaces of their homes to different ends.

In order to contextualize African American home life, I first examine ideas about domesticity that circulated locally and national in the early twentieth century. I then look at the places where African Americans lived in Ardmore and the types of housing available to them before looking at the ways African Americans obtained housing and constituted their households. The final section of the chapter considers two activities that were dimensions of household life and entwined with race, gender, and class: work and sociability. Across this chapter, I go beyond looking at the buildings where African Americans lived to grapple with how African Americans inhabited the interiors and exteriors of their homes and the significance of these practices, which enabled to black suburbanites to sustain themselves economically, form social bonds, and position themselves within Ardmore's social hierarchy.

Domestic Ideals

The experiences of African American households in early twentieth-century Ardmore took place within a national and local conversation about ideal behaviors and practices that should occur in the home. A plethora of books and magazines prescribed ideals for relationships between family members, interior and exterior housing design, and homekeeping that converged to form what historians have termed a "cult of domesticity." The private sphere of the home was to be the place of the (nuclear) family and leisure (and the responsibility of women), while the public sphere outside the home

was the place of commerce and work (and the charge of men).[3] These dominant concepts were given material form in the built environment, both in plan books and in completed housing. Given the focus on privacy and the individual family, advice books identified the detached dwelling as the most suitable form of housing. The interior layout of the house reflected the divisions between public and private by designating private spaces for the family and public spaces to welcome visitors.[4] The physical form of the house was especially significant for housing reformers who connected the physical environment to the character and values of the people who lived there.[5] With calls for women not to work for pay and for residence in a detached single-family house, these ideals were entwined with class since enacting them required financial resources.

Leading African American thinkers and African American publications advanced ideals that converged with standards espoused in prescriptive literature on domesticity written by white writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on writings by prominent African American intellectuals like Frederick Douglas and W. E. B. Du Bois as well as newspapers and magazines, art historian Barbara Mooney takes up

---

[3] See, for instance, John Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia: From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690–2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 200–202.

[4] See, for instance, Mary Corbin Sies, "'God's Very Kingdom on the Earth': The Design Program for the American Suburban Home, 1877–1917," in *Modern Architecture in America: Visions and Revisions*, ed. Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991), 2–31; Clifford Edward Clark Jr., *The American Family Home, 1800–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 29–33; Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 108–12.

[5] On the emergence of the connection between housing and values, see, for instance, Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, 180–82; Clark, *The American Family Home, 1800–1960*, 22–28.

the question of how African American intellectuals and popular magazines discussed home and family life in the early twentieth century.[6] Mooney finds that women were expected to take responsibility for the moral education of children, maintain an immaculately clean home, and engage in genteel activities, while men were to provide for the material needs of the family by working outside the home. The single-family home was also idealized as best suited for this enterprise because, as Mooney writes, it "[provided] places for an almost ritual reenactment of the social activities that occurred in the idealized dwelling."[7]

While there was significant overlap with the standards espoused in prescriptive literature on domesticity written by white writers, African American domestic ideals were laden with additional significance that had inter- and intraracial implications. For some African American thinkers, the attainment of this domestic ideal symbolized black racial progress and would in turn serve to counter negative stereotypes of African Americans in white popular culture and sentiment. "Appropriate" domestic practices and behaviors in the home would translate to racial gains as white Americans observed the capacity of African Americans to follow domestic norms.[8] In some instances, middle-class African American women reformers sought to teach their working-class counterparts appropriate domestic practices through training programs as part of a project of specifically female

---

[6] Barbara Burlison Mooney, "The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no 1 (2002): 49–59.

[7] Ibid., 55.

[8] Ibid. 49–59; Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 78.

uplift. Educating black women about domestic work was to provide job training and prepare women to attend to their own families.[9] This endeavor was not without critique. Mooney notes that while W. E. B. Du Bois was initially a proponent of the domestic expectations that existed for women, he later recognized the sexism inherent in them. Since few women could afford to focus on their own homes and instead worked as domestics in others' homes, Du Bois also associated the focus on black women and domesticity with histories of servitude and sexual violence.[10]

Locally in Ardmore, implicit and explicit discussions about the activities that took place in the home surfaced in the Ardmore Notes columns of the *Philadelphia Tribune*. The columns lavished attention on genteel practices of luncheons, teas, dinners, parties, and other social visits with women usually fulfilling the role of host. This coverage elevated entertaining and social connection as one of the primary purposes of the home environment. In addition, one Ardmore Notes column linked homeownership with practices that took place in the home, describing how African Americans were "purchasing and making beautiful and comfortable homes."[11] The realities of household life in Ardmore, as in other communities in this time, were more complex and varied than the images presented in the columns of the *Philadelphia Tribune* or the ideals espoused

---

[9] Mooney, "The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage," 55; Victoria Walcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 18.

[10] For an additional critique of the ideals promoted for black homes and families, see also Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 169–71. Mooney, "The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage," 64.

[11] Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 15, 1916.

by tastemakers.[12] Some African Americans inhabited their homes following all or some of these conventions. But there were also other, more expansive understandings of gender roles and household practices that existed simultaneously and helped African Americans establish and sustain themselves in Ardmore.

Sources

This chapter knits together a range of primary sources to examine the domestic lives of Africans Americans in social and physical dimensions. Real estate atlases and fire insurance maps provide detailed surveys of the built environment at the house and neighborhood levels. Sources like newspapers and housing reformers produced competing narratives of black suburban domestic experiences for varied audiences. Depending on the source, the homes of African Americans might have emerged as breeding grounds for immorality and disease or as sites of refined social gatherings. Read against and in relationship to one another, they provide nuanced perspectives on the homes created and inhabited by African Americans in early twentieth century Ardmore.

A number of organizations regarded Ardmore (and other neighborhoods where African Americans lived) as an example of poor housing and planning practices and

---

[12] This was true even in affluent suburban neighborhoods that, with their spacious houses and lawns, coincided aesthetically with the suburban ideal. For instance, in looking at the affluent suburbs of Short Hills, New Jersey; St. Martin's in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Kenilworth, Illinois; and Lake of the Isles in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Mary Corbin Sies has identified the presence of boarders, extended family members, adult children, and adult women wage earners in households. Sies's findings are especially relevant given that Short Hills, St. Martin's, and Kenilworth were examples of suburbs that, like the Main Line, developed along with commuter rail service. Mary Corbin Sies, "North American Suburbs, 1880–1950 Cultural and Social Reconsiderations," *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 3 (2001): 323–26.

carried out studies to demonstrate their findings and propose solutions. Ardmore became the subject of two housing-reform studies, in 1912 and 1919, that examined Ardmore as part of larger studies of the neighborhoods where African Americans, Italians, and Irish residents lived throughout the Main Line.[13] For these white housing reformers, African Americans, along with their immigrant and US-born neighbors, represented a necessary class of workers who sustained more affluent white Main Line households and enabled affluent residence in the suburbs. Writing for an audience that lived outside of the areas they surveyed, reformers characterized the neighborhoods where African Americans lived as concealed or out of the way. Housing reformers judged African Americans and Italian occupants of Ardmore and of other Main Line communities against an idealized suburban standard. This ideal privileged the household unit of the nuclear family, the form of the detached-single family house, and homeownership.

Both the 1912 Main Line Housing Association report and the 1919 Main Line Citizens' Association Report organized the majority of their analyses by street. Bosworth focused on parts of West Spring and Chestnut Avenues, and these were both racially mixed.[14] Seven years later the Citizens' Association report examined sections of West Spring Avenue and Shea Terrace as Bosworth's study had and added blocks on County

---

[13] Louise Marion Bosworth, *Housing Conditions in Main Line Towns: An Investigation Made under the Direction of the Committee on Investigation, Main Line Housing Association*, ca. 1913; Frederick Law Olmsted and Arthur Coleman Comey, *Main Line District City Planning Report to the Main Line Citizens' Association"* [advance draft] (Brookline, MA, 1919), Lower Marion Historical Society.

[14] The report also included an image from Kittering Avenue (later Shea Terrace), though Bosworth did not extensively address the streets' inhabitants in her text. Additional images in the report were not identified by street.

Line, Greenfield Avenue, Simpson Road, and Sheldon Lane to its study. The 1919 study found African Americans living with Italian households West Spring Street and Simpson Road, while Greenfield Avenue, Sheldon Lane, and County Line were overwhelmingly or all African American.[15] Both reports included race and nationality markers in their assessments of each street for at least two reasons: first, to provide demographic information about the make up of a particular street, and second (and more subjectively) to link particular attitudes and practices on a street or in a dwelling on that street with particular racial or ethnic groups.

Consistent with intellectual currents circulating at the time, reformers identified an interrelationship between domestic environments and physical, moral, and spiritual well-being. They hoped to achieve improved housing conditions through legislation at the municipal and state levels and often shared their findings with township officials working in areas of planning and public health. Thus, the streets on which reformers chose to focus were likely those that best supported their claims, an approach that left absent several streets on which African Americans lived. Though housing reformers were selective in their geographical scope and guided by their biases, their work captured household- and street-level details about the interior and exterior physical environment, household composition, rental costs, and ways of living. The textual and visual elements of these studies also provide cues to the residential experiences of early black suburbanites unavailable elsewhere.

---

[15] No African Americans were reported on Shea Terrace, which was primarily a mix of US-born white and Irish households.

Other studies examined housing in Ardmore from specifically African American perspectives, and they are also integral to this chapter. In 1915, the Armstrong Association considered Ardmore part of a larger study of black suburbanization in the Philadelphia region. The Armstrong Association was the forerunner to the Philadelphia branch of the Urban League, and the study was a natural extension of its work researching housing and education and its advocacy on behalf of African Americans in these areas; the Association aimed its "Study of Living Conditions" at black Philadelphians considering a move to the suburbs. The overcrowding of urban black neighborhoods precipitated by black migration northward made the question of housing options in the metropolitan region an especially salient one. In contrast to the works of housing reformers, the Armstrong Association struck a more positive tone in its assessment of Ardmore and African American housing conditions on the Main Line.

Ardmore's Residential Landscape

Ardmore's African American population grew almost eightfold in the first three decades of the twentieth century as African Americans came from southern states and from other areas in the Northeast. While the African American population in Ardmore numbered 136 in 1900, it reached 1,040 by 1930. Surveying South Ardmore in the teens and twenties, a newly arrived African American migrant would have found a residential landscape marked by physical diversity. Dwelling styles included row, twin, and detached houses as well as apartments and could change from street to street or even block to block.

Developers constructed many of the houses in which African Americans (and others) would live throughout South Ardmore. With uniform setbacks, design, and materials, houses often matched housing styles found in other streetcar suburbs. At the same time, houses consistently included yards and frame-construction porches—features they shared with nearly every Main Line house, whether constructed with working-class or elite households in mind.

The father-and-son partnership of Walter and Henry Bevan was among the developers working in South Ardmore, and the Bevans developed several blocks of housing in the 1890s that ranged in house and plot size.[16] The Bevans' work included houses in the 200 block of Maple Avenue (later changed to Simpson Road), which became one street where high numbers of African Americans would reside. On the west side of Maple Avenue, the Bevans built four detached houses and four pairs of twin houses on narrow but deep plots that exemplified patterns found in the houses where African Americans lived throughout Ardmore. The houses were set back from the street, providing for a small front yard and a larger back yard. All of the houses were frame in their construction and had two stories with pitched roofs.

[16] A notice in an 1891 edition of the periodical *Sanitary News* announced the following: "A number of small dwelling will be built at Ardmore, by Henry & Walter Bevan." The mention in *Sanitary News*, a periodical focused on "the construction of healthy homes and the philosophy of healthy living," suggested that the Bevans may have interested themselves in the relationship between health and domestic environments.

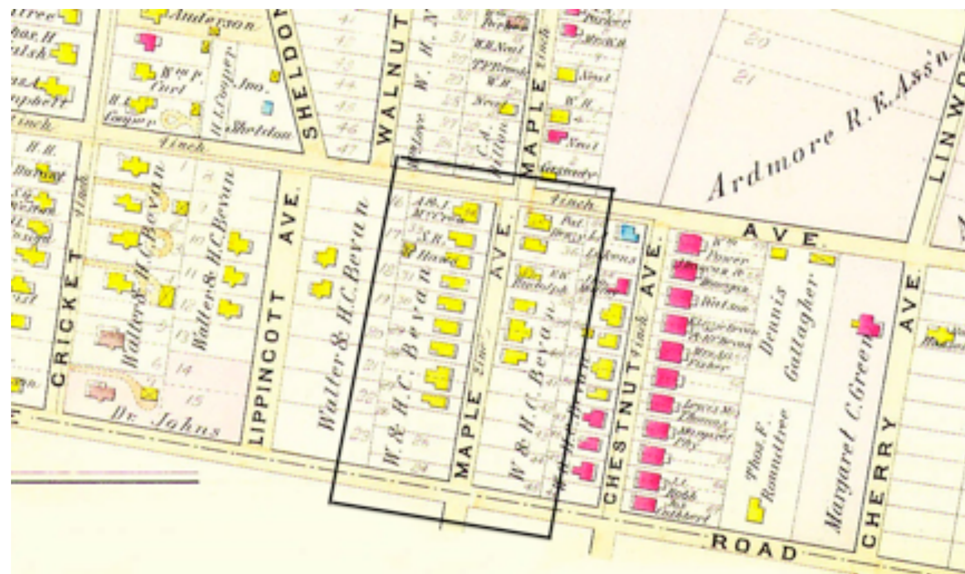

Figure 14. Bevan properties on Maple Avenue highlighted. Ellis Kiser and C. A. Potts, *Atlas of Lower Merion, Montgomery County Including Part of Delaware County and Overbrook Farms*, Wynnefield & Overbrook *Farms, Wynnefield & Overbrook Impr. Co.* (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1896), plate 6.

Row houses, which developers also built in Ardmore, drew sharp criticism from housing reformers. For housing reformers, the presence of comparatively higher density row houses recalled an urban built environment unacceptable in the suburban Main Line context. A photograph included in the 1912 Main Line Housing Association study included the caption "A City Type of Houses erected in the suburban towns along the Main Line. Acres of Unoccupied land all around." Writing nearly a decade later, the study conducted by the Philadelphia Housing Authority on behalf of the Main Line Citizen's Association was similarly critical: "It resembles a street from the city slums set down between open fields, large estates and the small houses and gardens occupied by higher waged and more fortunate workers than those occupying these unattractive blocks."[17] A sense that row houses were out of place recurs across both assessments: row houses, with their comparatively higher density and limited open space, represented the failed potential of country living for the working class and reproduced negative patterns of urban life at intensified levels. For many African Americans, however, they would provide much-needed places of shelter and a means through which African Americans would articulate their identities.

---

[17] "Survey for Main Line Citizens' Association, 1919," Housing Association of Delaware Valley, 1909–, Executive Secretary's Files, 1917–20, URB 3/II/7, Ardmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

Figure 15. 300 block of West Spring Avenue. Louise Marion Bosworth, *Housing Conditions in Main Line Towns: An Investigation Made under the Direction of the Committee on Investigation* (Main Line Housing Association, N.p., 1913).

There were also housing options in South Ardmore where African Americans did not live. This included South Ardmore's oldest houses, along Ardmore and Cricket Avenues. Some of these houses dated from the 1870s, a time that marked the earliest stages of suburbanization on the Main Line. These houses were among South Ardmore's largest houses and properties, and white households inhabited them. The plans of these houses varied significantly, suggesting that homeowners purchased lots and built their homes individually; small-scale builders may also have constructed some houses.

Figure 16. Detached, single-family house on Cricket Avenue. Photograph by author.

Though African Americans arrivals would not secure housing in apartments as residents or live-in servants, apartments were significant features of Ardmore's built environment. Like other Main Line suburbs, Ardmore had several apartment buildings, and there was a cluster of apartments near the intersection of Walnut and Athens. Apartments in Ardmore housed white residents at different life stages. For instance, the Philadelphia *Evening Public Ledger* reported on a newly wed couple beginning their married lives together in the Bellevue Apartments,[18] a complex that consisted of three three-story brick buildings. Opposite the Bellevue, the Athens Apartments were noted on

[18] On a real estate atlas from 1926, the name is spelled "Bellevue." On the Sanborn Map from the same time period the name is spelled "Belview." George Bromley and Walter Bromley, *Atlas of Properties on Main Line From Overbrook to Paoli From Actual Surveys and Official Plans* (Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley and Company, 1926), plate 11. Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1926), 1:51.

the society page as the residence of a divorcee who later remarried her husband. In the latter instance, the woman's membership in the prestigious Merion Cricket Club pointed toward her affluence. The Athens Apartment was a three-story frame building that included furnished one- and two-room suites with baths and kitchenettes.[19]

[19] Apartments in Ardmore seemed to have housed individuals at different life stages. The Philadelphia *Evening Public Ledger* reported on a newly wed couple beginning their married lives together in the Bellevue Apartments. Also in Ardmore, the Athens Apartments were also noted as the residence of a divorcee who later remarried her husband. In the latter instance, the woman's membership inn the prestigious Merion Cricket Club pointed toward her affluence. (The building could have included people of different class backgrounds or just affluent households.) "Divorced Last Fall, Frederick H. Mehl Remarries Ex-Wife: Reconciliation Complete Surprise to Friends of Socially Prominent Ardmore Couple," *Evening Public Ledger*, April 8, 1919; "Social and Personal," *Evening Public Ledger*, February 13, 1915; "The Athens," advertisement, *Evening Public Ledger*, March 22, 1916.

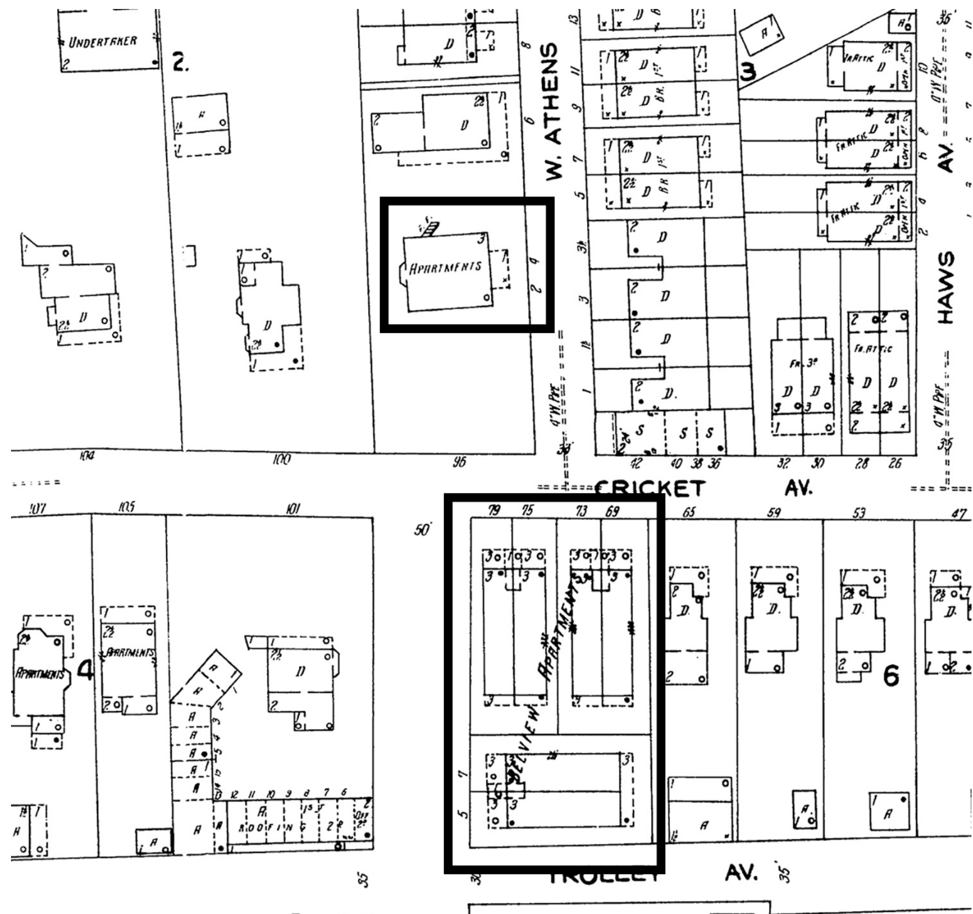

Figure 17. Map highlighting Athens and Bellevue Apartments. Athens Apartments (above) and Bellevue Apartments (below). Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1926), 1:51.

Figure 18. Athens Apartments. Photograph by author.

Figure 19. Bellevue Apartments. Photography by author.

Tenancy and Household Composition

African Americans rented and owned their residences in Ardmore. Ownership, for the purposes of the census, included those who owned their houses outright and those who had mortgages on their houses. Nearly every street on which sizable number of African Americans lived included, in varying proportions, renters and owners; dwellings of all types were available for rent and for purchase. Within each dwelling, one of the most salient aspects of domestic life was the makeup of a household—the individuals who lived there and the relationships among those people. These factors not only shaped patterns of daily life but also reflected and defined class hierarchies.

Within Ardmore's broader residential landscape, African Americans concentrated on particular streets. In 1900, African American–headed households lived primarily on Lippincott Avenue and Maple Avenue (later renamed Simpson Road), two streets adjacent to one another. Over time the streets where African Americans lived expanded; by 1915, the Armstrong Association described the population of approximately five hundred African Americans as "scattered" across several streets and noted their residence on particular blocks.[20] As their numbers grew, most African Americans found housing in existing areas of African American settlement. This intensified the spatial concentration of African American households on particular blocks and streets. By 1920 the African American population centered on Holland, Greenfield, and Chestnut Avenues as well as

[20] Armstrong Association of Philadelphia, *A Study of Living Conditions Among Colored People in Towns in the Outer Part of Philadelphia and in Other Suburbs Both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey* (Philadelphia: 1915), 10.

on Simpson Road and West Spring Avenue, a pattern that continued through the 1920s.[21] Historical records do not indicate what factors—for instance, discrimination or a desire to maintain networks—contributed to these housing choices. The only clue regarding how race impacted residential segregation came in the 1912 Bosworth housing reform study. In describing the inhabitants of West Spring Avenue, she wrote, "The population of this section is almost entirely Italian and Negroes . . . The few Irish still left here are vanishing as circumstances permit and are now only a scattered two or three."[22] However, the causal relationships are unclear. For instance, did Irish residents become upwardly mobile and seek better quality housing, or did they move in response to growing numbers of black and Italian neighbors?

In 1920, the greatest numbers of African Americans lived in the 300 block of West Spring Avenue, a street located at Ardmore's southwestern edge. From other points in Ardmore, one could have approached the 300 block of West Spring Avenue by following any number of streets. Whatever the path, it would have led past varied housing styles and households that characterized Ardmore in this period. Given its location, West Spring Avenue was less likely a thoroughfare and more likely a destination, drawing primarily residents and visitors who had business there.

---

[21] Analysis of census manuscripts provided data about the streets on which African Americans resided. 1910 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 216; U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 109 and 110.

[22] Bosworth, *Housing Conditions in Main Line Towns*, 13.

The two sides of the street differed dramatically from one another: a string of continuous brick row houses defined the streetscape on the south side of the street, a mix of detached and twin houses sat on the northern side, and the end of the block abutted the edges of Haverford College faculty housing. The seven-member Herling, Jones, and Johnson household resided at 362 West Spring Avenue in a two-story row house near the western end of the block. Their rented brick house was one in a row of thirty-two, with six nearly identical houses to their left and twenty-five others to their right and was one of the same houses that housing reformers had critiqued so sharply. A series of flat, rectangular yards fronted a row of twenty-five nearly identical brick two-story houses, which defined the streetscape of this stretch of West Spring Avenue (see fig. 9). From their frame front porch the residents of 362 West Spring Avenue looked out at properties across the street that, while still modest, were twice the size of the one they inhabited. The small backyard at the rear of the house opened onto a field that was part of the Haverford College grounds, abutting an alternative form of Main Line suburban development.

The residents of 362 West Spring Avenue shared a number of qualities with other African American households. The Herlings rented their house for fifteen dollars per month, and, similarly, the majority of African Americans in Ardmore consistently rented—a reality that contrasted from the popular imagery of the Main Line as a place of homeownership.[23] While some African Americans, like the Herlings, rented houses,

---

[23] Overall, scholars of suburban history have given limited attention to the practice of suburban renters. Most often, suburban historians position suburban homeownership as

African Americans had several other weekly and monthly rental options available to them. Boarding was perhaps the most tentative point of entry into Ardmore's rental market, and approximately 8 percent of African Americans boarded with another household in 1920. Those who desired or needed more space could rent rooms in houses or apartments in subdivided houses, two situations that created multifamily living situations in dwellings constructed for single families.[24]

---

an alternative to urban renting. Discussions of industrial suburbs are exceptions to this. In suburban company towns, for instance, some companies retained ownership of housing and rented it to employees. Pullman, Illinois, provides one example of this model. See, for instance, Gwendolyn Wright, "Welfare Capitalism and the Company Town" in *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 177–92. James Borchert has examined how renting and ownership existed in different parts of a Cleveland suburb between 1890 and 1930. Borchert's visual analysis of this suburb considers the ways renting was visible in the built environment and the significance of renting in the lives of residents different socioeconomic status. "Visual Landscapes of a Streetcar Suburb" in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Paul Growth and Todd W. Bressi (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 25–43.

[24] The presence of individuals beyond the family unit diverged from the dominant ideal of the nuclear family living in a single-family home, an ideal advanced by prescriptive literature aimed at white and black audiences in this time. Locally, housing reformers who studied Ardmore regarded the presence of boarders as a matter of morality and, to a lesser extent, health (due to what they identified as overcrowded conditions). A Philadelphia Housing Authority report entreated, "The lodger evil is one of the most prevalent and one of the most baffling housing problems. Once a family has permitted its privacy to be invaded by outsiders the temptation is constant to increase revenue by increasing the number of lodgers." The report went on to cite the "moral hazard" present when boarders were present in households with young children. A household that included boarders threatened the nuclear family unit and eroded the privacy prized by these housing reformers. Philadelphia Housing Association, *Housing Conditions in Ardmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr,* survey report by the Philadelphia Housing Association to the Main Line Citizens' Association, 1919, 21, Housing Association of Delaware Valley Records, Subseries 1.2: Executive Secretary's Files, 1917–20, URB 3/II/7, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

Though renting was common, African Americans faced a challenging rental market. In 1915, the Armstrong Association's *Study of Living Conditions* found that rents in Ardmore were high in comparison to other suburban areas where African Americans resided.[25] The Association also reported that it was difficult to find a house to rent in Ardmore unless one intended to purchase the house eventually.[26] In addition, published advertisements for housing were rare. While the *Philadelphia Tribune* advertised scores of rental opportunities in Philadelphia, advertisements for rentals in Ardmore were conspicuously absent. Listings, such as one in 1931 that advertised "ROOMS to rent, man and wife or gentlemen. 152 Walnut avenue, Ardmore, PA or phone Ardmore 2076,"[27] were rare in consulted editions of the *Philadelphia Tribune* from the 1910s to 1930s. Given the scarcity of such listings, it is possible that many housing opportunities flowed through other networks, like family, friendship, work, and church connections, or through real estate offices that did not advertise availabilities in print publications.

Like many African American households, the Herling household included extended family members. Charles and Eliza Herling lived with Eliza's mother, brother, sister-in-law, and their six-month-old daughter as well as an eight-year-old niece. They had arrived in Ardmore having followed varied paths. Charles hailed from New Jersey, while Eliza and her family came from Virginia. Eliza's mother Alice, aged 66 in 1920, may have been born a slave. Other African American households in Ardmore included

---

[25] The Armstrong Association's investigation *A Study of Living Conditions Among Colored People* listed rental prices in each of the 41 areas it surveyed, and the costs in Ardmore were among the highest.

[26] Armstrong Association, *A Study of Living Conditions*, 6.

[27] *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 16, 1931.

varied constellations of children, stepchildren, nieces, nephews, grandparents, mothers, fathers, in-laws, brothers and sisters.[28] Whether they rented or owned their places of residence, African Americans throughout Ardmore often shared their living spaces not only with extended family members (as was the case with the Herling family) but also with friends and unrelated boarders. Shared dwellings provided individuals with opportunities to pool resources, earn additional income, and offer mutual support.[29]

Chestnut Avenue, a three-quarter mile walk from West Spring Avenue, represented another area of concentration for African American households. Robert and Nora Hayes lived with their two sons Cecil and Chapman in the 200 block of Chestnut Avenue. Both Robert and Nora were born in Virginia in 1877 and 1871, respectively, while their seventeen- and eighteen-year-old sons were born in Pennsylvania. Residing at 228 Chestnut Avenue in a two-story brick house with pitched roof, the Hayes family lived on a street that represented some of Ardmore's physical and social diversity. While the stretch of twin houses the Hayeses faced across the street was of uniform brick construction, the spectrum of architectural styles on their own side of the street reflected greater variety. Twin houses were interspersed with detached ones, and brick houses were interspersed with frame and stone structures. Chestnut Avenue also reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of Ardmore, and the Hayeses' neighbors were a mix of white

[28] Added to this were likely unmarried domestic partners who would have gone unrecognized by Census categories that relied on conventional understandings of family of the time.

[29] Andrew Wiese, "Black Housing, White Finance: African American Housing and Home Ownership in Evanston, Illinois, before 1940," *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 2 (1999), 436.

households and black households. Individuals who had been born in Ireland or whose parents had been born there headed most of the fifteen white households who lived on the 200 block of Chestnut Avenue.

Given the many African American households that included extended family members or unrelated boarders, the absence of such living arrangements was often noteworthy and could signal a family with financial means to afford a house without the additional income provided by boarders. The Hayes family, for instance, shared an approximately 1500 square foot house. The house's three bedrooms meant that Nora and Robert as well as their two children could each have had private bedrooms in the house. Robert worked as the superintendent of the Philadelphia Branch of the National Benefit Life Insurance Company.[30] The Hayeses' older son also held a position of high status as a

---

[30] Founded in 1898, National Benefit Life Insurance was an African American insurance company. By 1928, it was the largest of such insurance companies, and historian Carter G. Woodson described it as the "largest Negro business enterprise" in the 1929 article "Insurance Businesses among Negroes." Michael A. Plater, "African-American Insurance Enterprises: An Early Vehicle for Economic and Social Development," *Journal of Management History* 3, no. 1 (1997): 55; Carter G. Woodson, " Insurance Businesses among Negroes," *Journal of Negro History* 14, no. 2 (1929): 214–15; 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 109, sheet 16A. A 1921 political advertisement in the *Philadelphia Tribune* listed Hayes's position as "superintendent" and referenced that he managed a staff. "Main Line Representative Citizens Supporting William G. Frakenfield for Treasurer," *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 19, 1921. Details on the size of the house and number of bedrooms are drawn from Montgomery County's current property records; images of the house and the written records suggest that the house has maintained its original structure. Montgomery County Pennsylvania Property Records, accessed August 3, 2013, http://propertyrecords.montcopa.org. Montgomery County Property Records, parcel ID 400010496003/228 Chestnut Avenue, accessed August 3, 2013, http://propertyrecords.montcopa.org.

clerk at the post office. Only a minority of black households, like the Hayeses, had household composition that included only parents and children.[31]

On Chestnut Avenue, the Hayes family was part of a cluster of black homeowners, and the street constituted a center of black homeownership. Approximately a quarter of African Americans in Ardmore owned their homes, but on Chestnut Avenue two-thirds of black households, including the Hayeses, owned their houses. Over time, more African Americans joined the Hayes family in the ranks of homeownership, and Ardmore emerged as a center of African American homeownership. In its high rate of homeownership, Ardmore was similar to suburban districts like the Main Line in other areas of the United States.[32] In 1914, the Armstrong Association found forty owners amid

---

[31] St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's study of Chicago found that African Americans considered postal workers to have high-status positions for several reasons, including the positions' regular pay and literacy requirement. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1945), 510. Mary Corbin Sies has noted that in both working-class and affluent suburbs alike, adult male children lived with their parents into adulthood as a means to establish themselves financially before beginning their own households. Mary Corbin Sies, "North American Suburbs, 1880–1950 Cultural and Social Reconsiderations," *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 3 (2001): 326.

[32] The Armstrong Association noted an especially high concentration of homeownership on the Main Line in 1915, and Marvin Porch confirmed these findings later in 1938. In his study of the Main Line, Marvin porch found that 50 percent of black households owned their places of residence. By comparison, in 1920, 15.5 percent of African American households in Pennsylvania were homeowners and in 1930 18.9 percent were homeowners. Armstrong Association of Philadelphia, *A Study of Living Conditions Among Colored People in Towns in the Outer Part of Philadelphia and in Other Suburbs Both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey* (1915), 6; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States, 1920–32*, prepared by Zellmer Roswell Pettet and Charles Edward Hall, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1935), 264; Marvin E. Porch, "The Philadelphia Main Line Negro: A Social, Economic and Education Survey" (EdD diss., Temple University, 1938), 32. In situating his study of homeownership in Evanston Illinois, Andrew Wiese found a pattern

a population of 500 African Americans in Ardmore. By 1920, the rate of African American homeownership had grown from a little under 10 percent in 1914 to approximately 33 percent. In 1930, the last year for which comprehensive data are available, 86 of 186 households owned their place of residence, and the rate of homeownership approached 50 percent. These high rates of homeownership also garnered press attention, and the *Philadelphia Tribune* described them as a reflection of how "well . . . these colored men and women husbanded their resources."[33] Homeownership was thus part of a narrative of individual *and* collective black success and moral behavior in Ardmore and on the Main Line. Such sentiments were consistent with the connections that national African American leaders forged between domesticity and racial progress.[34]

Those contemplating the purchase of a home in Ardmore might have turned to a real estate agent, and agents based in Philadelphia and in Ardmore offered their services to prospective buyers. As early as 1915, there were two black real estate agents operating in Ardmore, and at the time Ardmore was one of few suburban communities that had any black real estate agents.[35] Prospective homebuyers might also have utilized the services of

---

of comparatively higher rates of homeownerships in suburbs like the Main Line throughout the United States. Wiese, "Black Housing, White Finance," 431.

[33] An Old Timer, "The Suburban Business Men to Build Villages," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 22, 1920.

[34] According to Andrew Wiese, similar celebrations of homeownership as markers of individual and collective success were found in other African American newspapers. Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 84.

[35] The presence of two black real estate agents in Ardmore was distinctive. The Armstrong Association found that fifteen of the forty-one suburban areas in its study had

area white real estate agents. In addition, large real estate companies based in Philadelphia occasionally listed properties in Ardmore in their weekly advertisements. These agents provided an infrastructure for the marketing and selling of Main Line houses within in the price ranges of African American buyers interested in living in South Ardmore.

In Ardmore, Herbert Nelson was one African American real estate agents who might have helped potential buyers find their new homes.[36] Nelson ran advertisements in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, which reached readers throughout the Philadelphia region, and he marketed the houses he sold as specifically *suburban* ones. In his advertisements, Nelson sold the advantages of Main Line living to an audience that did not reside in the area and one that was presumably unfamiliar with the benefits he identified. One advertisement read, “New Houses All Conveniences, 25 Minutes from City Hall, Fresh Air, Green Grass, Pure Water, Sale”;[37] another advertisement noted the “Beauty of the

---

black real estate agents, though many more had white real estate agents. Armstrong Association, *Study of Living Conditions*, 11.

[36]As a purveyor of homeownership, Nelson was well regarded by many African Americans. The *Philadelphia Tribune* listed among his credentials attendance at the University of Pennsylvania, Howard Law School, and Temple University. He was listed in the Main Line *Who Is Who* directory of notable black Main Line residents. He directed his own business, which employed others, and his work enabled others to become homeowners, a status that would be highly valued among many African Americans in Ardmore. His brother, Russell Nelson also achieved professional success as a medical doctor. “Young Business Man Makes Good on the Main Line,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 14, 1928. Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 31, 1920. George Benjamin Goode and Charles Brown Plant, *Who Is Who: The Afro-American Social Directory* (Ardmore: Ardmore Printing Company, 1922), 46.

[37] Herbert C. Nelson, “SALE: 18 Modern Homes,” advertisement, *Philadelphia Tribune,* June 30, 1927.

Country" with the "Conveniences of the City."[38] In advertising the benefits of suburban life, Nelson drew on a vocabulary familiar to suburban developers on the Main Line and elsewhere. This included references to natural purity (evidenced by air, grass, and water), the balance of city and country life, and proximity and accessibility to the central city. References to nature might have attracted city dwellers interested in less crowded surroundings or suggested to residents of rural areas that they would find elements of country life in this suburban area. The twenty-five-minute commute to Philadelphia might have attracted someone working or living in the city, a resident of a more outlying town, or Southerners considering a journey northward. Proximity to Philadelphia allowed for employment in the city as well as the maintenance of urban social ties.

Nelson also advertised the financial benefits of homeownership. His marketing characterized homeownership as a pathway to self-sufficiency, financial independence, and self-worth: "When a man owns his own home, he is SOME-BODY. Until he DOES own his house, he is only somebody else's TENANT, a useful cash producing personage, but a different being from a man who OWNS his own home. You can buy a house. You have proved that, because if you are renting you are buying a house this very minute—for somebody else. Why not BUY IT FOR YOURSELF?"[39] Nelson's description cast the financial significance of homeownership in terms of the individual. This approach contrasted with images of affluent homeownership that depicted a house almost exclusively as a

[38] Herbert C. Nelson, "Look at This!," advertisement, *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 21, 1927.

[39] Herbert C. Nelson, "Home Buyers," advertisement, Real Estate for Rent and for Sale—Mortgages—Etc., *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 10, 1924.

reflection of wealth and status, a marker measured in relation to others. This distinction suggested how narratives surrounding homeownership on the Main Line could vary by class.[40]

Lured by Nelson's advertisement, a prospective buyer might have found his way to Nelson's Ardmore office at 20 Ardmore Avenue, a building he had purchased to accommodate his growing business. The building was located in the heart of Ardmore's central business district, and a glowing article written in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, described the new space as "a modern brick building . . . equipped with spacious offices, attractive furniture and the latest devices for carrying on the real estate business." Inside the office, an African American buyer might have encountered another member of Nelson's staff, which included two stenographers and two salesmen, as well as other clients, who reportedly included African Americans and whites.[41]

---

[40] The use of such language was emblematic of national trends. For instance, Delores Hayden discusses similar rhetoric employed by Samuel Eberly Gross and other developers in the early twentieth century as part of "Why pay rent?" campaigns. At times this rhetoric overstated benefits and minimize financial risks to buyers. "Streetcar Buildouts," in *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 71–96, 103–104.

[41] In a 1919 advertisement, Nelson listed his address in Bryn Mawr in an advertisement, but by 1923 he moved his business to 2 Ardmore Avenue. Nelson relocated again when he purchased 20 Ardmore Avenue. Herbert C. Nelson, "Cut This Coupon Out," advertisement, Real Estate for Sale, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 21, 1919. "Young Business Man Makes Good on the Main Line," *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 14, 1928.

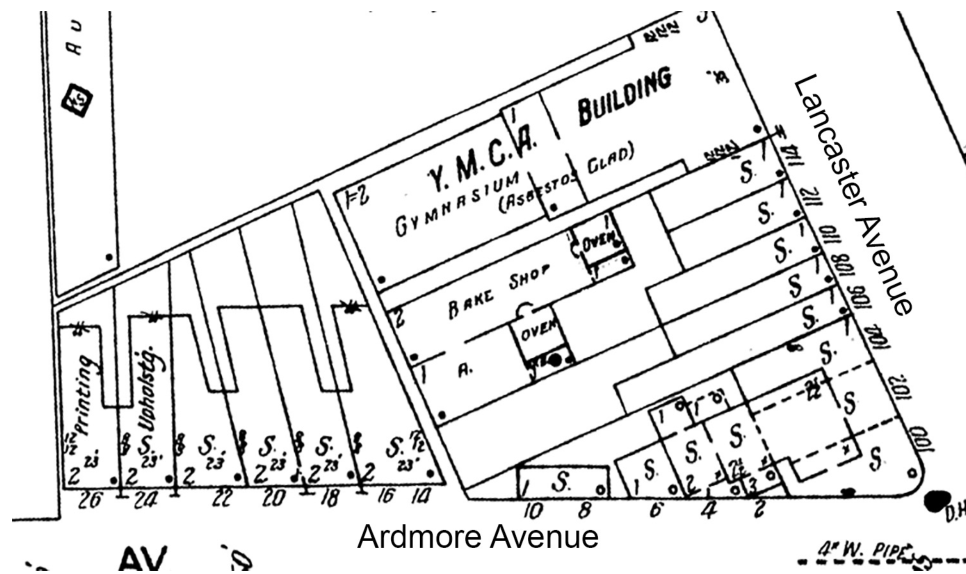

Figure 20. Real estate agent Herbert Nelson's storefront at 20 Ardmore Avenue was situated in a row of other businesses. Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1926), 1:55.

African Americans who wished to purchase a house in Ardmore had to consider not only finding a house that met their needs but also financing it. In this time period, mortgages would typically have been offered for no more than seven years after which the balance of the payment would have been due.[42] While some African Americans may have had the means to purchase a house under these terms, this was, given the trades and professions of most African Americans, unlikely the case for the majority of African Americans residing in Ardmore or moving there.

Trinity Building and Loan Association, which served African Americans, provided an alternative pathway to purchasing a house by allowing members to pay for their houses over a period of time that went beyond five years. Members of Trinity Saving and Loan bought shares that they paid for in monthly installments and that

---

[42] Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 199.

allowed them to take loans. Recalling her experiences as a member of Trinity, Josephine White explained that one could purchase a house by paying five-dollar monthly for shares over fifteen years: "They belonged to the 'Trinity Building Loan Co. and by paying $5/month (buying shares) in 15 yrs. They could buy property and the Trinity . . . would hold the mortgage."[43] Trinity was one of many savings and loans in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, and savings and loan associations had a long history in Philadelphia; indeed, the city was a center of such organizations for African Americans.[44] Trinity Building and Loan Association supported the individual pursuit of homeownership through collective means.

Renting sometimes served as a route to homeownership, with a seller allowing a potential buyer to make a down payment and continue payments as rent.[45] For instance, a September 1920 advertisement in the *Evening Ledger* advertised a house for sale for "$1000 and the balance as rent." Similar practices existed throughout the United States

---

[43] Notes from Mary Wood's Interview with Josephine White of Ardmore, Age about 82 in 1982, folder: Black History (1) to 1999, record no. 6, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwd, PA.

[44]For a general history of savings and loan associations, see, for instance, David Lawrence, *From Buildings and Loans to Bail-Outs: A History of the American Savings and Loan Industry, 1831–1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On African American savings and loan organizations, see, for instance, Isadore Maximillian Martin, *Negro Managed Building and Loan Associations in Philadelphia: Their History and Present Status* (Philadelphia: Associated Real Estate Brokers of Philadelphia, 1936); David L. Mason, "Homeownership Is Colorblind: The Role of African American Savings and Loans in Home Finance, 1880–1980," *Business and Economic History Online* 8 (2010): 1–8.

[45] The Armstrong Association's 1915 study mentions the practice of people renting homes with the intention to buy them. The 1920 advertisement confirms the continuation of this practice into the 1920s; however, it is unclear for how long the practice persisted. Armstrong Association, *A Study of Living Conditions*, 6.

and provided paths to homeownership for those who might not otherwise have been able to afford it. However, there were also potential drawbacks to these arrangements for African American homebuyers, as the 1932 "Report on the Committee of Negro Housing" found.[46] Without the transparency of a mortgage, the buyer had limited protections, and the seller could increase costs or rather easily claim a buyer had defaulted on a house. The Armstrong Association reported that this option of renting to own impacted Ardmore's rental markets and made it difficult to find rentals for those who did not have the desire or means to purchase a house.[47]

Some African Americans also became homeowners with the financial support of their employers. In their reflections on Ardmore's history, current African American residents Ardmore recall that wealthy white families for whom black Ardmorites worked would sometimes purchase houses for their servants. In such instances, African Americans secured homeownership without financial debt; however, such a significant investment likely signaled an employer's expectation of continuing commitment to the position on the part of the employee.

---

[46] The committee was convened as part of the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership. The volume on "Negro housing" was one of eleven volumes that consider housing issues in the United States and the group charged with preparing *Negro Housing* included African Americans from the fields of social work, real estate, business, higher education, and community organizations. Nannie Burroughs, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*, ed. John Cries and James Ford, prepared for the committee by Charles Johnson, The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, 1932, 96–97, accessed April 27, 2015, archive.org/details/negrohousingrepo00presrich.

[47] Armstrong Association, *A Study of Living Conditions*, 6.

Work at Home

In some instances, the home was not only a place of residence for African American households but also a site of economic activity. Many African Americans, primarily women, worked at home for income, and work was an important dimension of domestic life. African Americans in Ardmore shared these practices with their contemporaries, and Andy Weise has found similar conditions in other black suburbs.[48] By working at home, African Americans adapted spaces intended for the singular purpose of housing and used them for alternative ends.

While labor was an important element of home life for many African Americans, this contrasted with dominant ideal of domesticity that rested on the division of home and work. Prior to the early nineteenth century, work and home were close to each other for most people in the United States. However, "The beginnings of the factory system, the creation of large-scale business enterprises such as railroads, and the growth of public education and the professions changed the nature of production and increasingly separated the place of work from the home."[49] The separation of the supposedly female private sphere of the home from the supposedly male public sphere of paid work and commerce emerged as a tenet of the dominant domestic ideal. As the experiences of African Americans in Ardmore show, however, this separation of paid work from home was never universal.

---

[48] Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 85–87.
[49] Clark, *The American Family Home, 1800–1960*, 16.

African American women constituted the majority of African Americans who worked at home, and they often performed domestic service work in their own homes. Over 40 percent of all black women worked "at home" as laundresses in 1920.[50] As they used their homes to earn money, these women transformed their homes into places that served simultaneously as sites of residence and of economic productivity. At the same time, they used the spaces of their homes to enable the domestic lives of others.[51] In Ardmore's African American neighborhoods, the work of laundering was visible and public, spilling out into the exterior surroundings of the houses. On Simpson Road, for instance, fifteen women described their employment as "laundress," "at home"; women might have washed clothing in a bath, sink, or basin before taking it outside to dry.[52]

A 1919 image included in a planning report captured the rear yards of houses on Simpson Road where women had hung out laundry to dry. The backyards were unfenced and households seem to have used the space in common. A clothesline, for instance, stretched the length of several houses. The dirt yard with limited vegetation allowed for ease of movement and work and the high density of objects suggested a space where an individual would have come to accomplish a specific task rather than for leisure. The rear

---

[50] "At home" is the descriptor recorded in the census manuscripts.

[51] 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 109 and 110.

[52] Housing reformers who surveyed thirty-three houses on Simpson Road found that sixteen houses had a bath and sink; nine had only a sink; five had a bath; and two had a bath, basin, sink and stationary tub. Philadelphia Housing Association, *Housing Conditions in Ardmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr,* survey report by the Philadelphia Housing Association to the Main Line Citizens' Association, 1919, 19, Housing Association of Delaware Valley Records, Subseries 1.2: Executive Secretary's Files, 1917–20, URB 3/II/7, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

of the yard provided space to hang laundry, an activity that might have been both a household task and a source of income. It also provided space to store tools and objects like buckets. The planners described the scene pejoratively as "obstructing rear yard" and "A prospective slum and fire hazard."[53] Planners saw obstruction and hazard, but the laundry that African American women hung out in rear yards contributed to their household incomes. While their counterparts who worked as laundresses in affluent houses might have worked in designated laundry areas, black women who did laundry at home adapted spaces available to them to the task of doing laundry for income.

---

[53] The image is taken from a report produced by the landscape architectural firm of Frederick Olmsted for the Main Line Citizens' Association. This image, along with others, was included at the end of the report as visual evidence of the issues discussed. The photographs appeared at the end of the report. Frederick Law Olmsted and Arthur Coleman Comey, *Main Line District City Planning Report to the Main Line Citizens' Association"* [advance draft] (Brookline, MA: 1919). The captions used to describe some of the images in the report also drew on a vocabulary of disease and contagion so common in assessments of poor neighborhoods of marginalized populations across historical time periods. The description "a prospective slum" reflected a sentiment of fear that the housing conditions that the plan found problematic might spread, and elsewhere in the report, the authors noted that crowded housing conditions "tend to multiply and break out in new spots as the population of the District grows" (10). In view of such worst-practices, the planners advocated for zoning ordinances and building codes (44). A suggestion of the land uses the photographer might have found more acceptable was found within the lanternslide of the image, which was tinted to include color. While the barren branches of the trees indicate a fall or winter landscape, the person preparing the image added areas of green vegetation, likely out of season—perhaps projecting a fantasy of the green, cultivated nature that he may have viewed as a more appropriate land use for a Main Line backyard.

Figure 21. Rear of Simpson Road, Frederick Law Olmsted and Arthur Coleman Comey. *Main Line District City Planning Report*, ca. 1919. From the Library of Congress Images of America: Lantern Slide Collection, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, accessed May 5, 2015, http://memory.loc.gov/award/mhsdalad/310000//310047v.jpg. Courtesy of Frances L. Loeb Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

As African Americans branched into other fields, houses became places of work for jobs outside domestic service. This work shaped the patterns of household and neighborhood life in its own ways. Work at home provided opportunities for a handful of women to work as sole proprietors in crafts. In 1920, for instance, four women worked as seamstresses or dressmakers and one woman worked a hairdresser.[54] These women were married to men who worked in high-prestige positions, including carpentry, clergy, and medicine; two families owned the houses in which they lived; and their households were often comparatively smaller in size. Their ability to work at home in positions outside

[54] 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration districts 109 and 110.

domestic service appears to have reflected a greater sense of flexibility that accompanied greater financial stability.

Henrietta Billingslia was one of the women who worked as a dressmaker, and a 1934 article described her as a businesswoman.[55] As we will see in chapter 4, Henrietta was a leading citizen among African Americans in Ardmore, and she had significant time to pursue social and philanthropic pursuits through her leadership of a local women's organization. Though Henrietta likely took charge of the care of her son and her household, her son did attended school; this provided Henrietta time during the day to perform paid dressmaking and unpaid household tasks without concerns for childcare. Another woman, A. M. Johnson, worked as a hairdresser. Johnson advertised her services in the *Philadelphia Tribune* along with her training as a "Graduate of Madame Russell's School." She invited women to her place of business (and her home) at 152 Simpson Road for services that included hair straightening, scalp treatments, braids, manicures, and electric massages.[56] Johnson's house stood out from others on the block: while most other houses on the block were narrow, brick twin houses, 152 Simpson Road was a detached frame dwelling situated on a comparatively larger lot. Returning customers would have quickly distinguished the building's asymmetrical design from its surroundings. The most common clients for black hairdressers in the early twentieth

[55] "Odd Fellows Hold Annual Service at Ardmore Church," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 17, 1934.
[56] *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 2, 1916.

century were women who worked as domestics.[57] Customers climbed stairs to a front or rear porch and most likely entered the service provider's house seeking to have their hair shampooed and straightened, a process that could take one to two hours.[58] Though I cannot identify where Johnson conducted her work, the services she provided would have required a way to heat implements and access water, both of which could have been found in the kitchen. Many black hairdressers worked from their homes, and Johnson's customers moved through spaces in which Johnson and other residents of 152 Simpson Road also conducted their home lives. Black hairdressers commonly had long hours to accommodate the times when domestic workers did not work, sometimes staying open

---

[57] Ethel Erickson, *Employment Conditions in Beauty Shops: A Study of Four Cities*, Bulletin of the Women's Bureau (US Department of Labor) 133 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1935), 37, 42, accessed January 16, 2015, http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HBS.BAKER:455431; Vivian Morris, "Harlem Beauty Shops," US Work Projects Administration, Federal Writers' Project, Folklore Project, Life Histories (April 19, 1939), accessed January 16, 2015, www.loc.gov/item/wpalh001481.

[58] In her 1935 study of women who worked in beauty shops, Ethel Erickson dedicated a section to "Negro Beauty Shops." She found that more than half of the women she surveyed conducted their business from their homes, and, while beauty workers offered a range of services like the ones offered by Johnson, shampooing and hair pressing were the most common services rendered. Erickson, *Employment Conditions in Beauty Shops* (1935), 38–39. The date of the advertisement in 1916 falls between census years, and the census does not have information about Johnson's time living at 152 Simpson Road or the people with whom she might have lived. Based on data available for the 1910 and 1930 census years that show multiple households living in the house, Johnson could have lived and conducted her business in a house with people unrelated to her by family or kinship. In 1910, one family lived at 152 Simpson Road with three boarders. For the 1920 census, one household was documented as living at 152 Simpson Road; in 1920 a husband and wife rented rooms to four people listed as "roomers." 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 109, sheet 11B; 1910 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 95, sheet 5A; 1930 Census, Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 70, sheet 20B.

late into the night. If Johnson followed similar practices, her business would have brought traffic to the street and to the house as her neighbors and other residents of the house were preparing for bed or sleeping.

Figure 22. 152 Simpson Road. Photograph by author.

Johnson's trade, hairdressing, was physically demanding. In interviews conducted with women who worked in beauty shops in Harlem in the 1930s, the women identified continuities between their work and domestic service, the area in which the greatest number of black women worked at the time. One woman reflected, "We learned beauty culture to get away from sweating and scrubbing other peoples floor and ran into something just as bad—scrubbing peoples scalps, straightening, and curling their hair with a hot iron all day and smelling frying hair." The woman's coworker also found the work as strenuous as domestic service and noted, "you sweat just as much or a damn

sight more." Even with such challenges, however, the women regarded their work as hairdressers as preferable to domestic service, because "it's cleaner and you don't have no white folks goin' around behind you trying to find a spec of dirt." Like domestic service, the work was hard, but it came with the benefit of autonomy from white control in the realm of employment. In working as a sole proprietor in her own home, Johnson had added levels of independence.[59]

Women were not alone in establishing home-based businesses. William Giles, for instance, provided a diversity of real estate and insurance services from his home at 228 Simpson Road, and he worked in partnership with another African American, Carl J. Whitaker, whose home at 38 Warner Avenue in Bryn Mawr was listed as a "Branch Office."[60] The 1920 census had listed Giles as a stationary engineer at Philadelphia's navy yard,[61] but by 1921 Giles advertised, "Army and Navy Claims prosecuted, Properties bought, sold and exchanged. City and suburban rents collected, Auto and Fire insurance placed in all companies."[62] Giles might have conducted his insurance and real estate work as a second job, or he might have transitioned into this new area of financial services.

---

[59] Morris, "Harlem Beauty Shops."

[60] *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 25, 1921, 1920 Census*,* Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 113, sheet 6A.

[61] 1920 Census*,* Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 109, sheet 27A. As a stationary engineer, Giles duties would have included the operation of electrical and heating systems.

[62] WM. E. Giles and Carl J. Whitaker, advertisement, Real Estate and Insurance Brokers, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 25, 1921.

Work at home afforded African Americans greater degrees of independence and flexibility in their time when compared to their counterparts who worked in businesses, factories, or private families. For women in particular, this opened additional possibilities (and potentially challenges) for how they might negotiate professional and familial responsibilities. For instance, working from home would have allowed a woman to interweave household tasks or childcare with washing laundry for income. At the same time, as Jacqueline Jones describes, balancing these competing demands could also be challenging in crowded conditions, and the work was physically difficult, requiring that women transport water.[63]

Work at home also shaped the interior of the home and impacted the patterns of street life. Individuals like Johnson and Giles had to convert portions of their homes typically shielded from the outside world, into public spaces where they conducted business with clients. This impacted not only the business owner, but also other members of the household. When one person worked at home, an entire household was likely to encounter this work in some form. For instance, a woman might fold or press laundry in her house, and other members of the household might encounter her work in the form of laundry waiting to be washed or finished, and inclement weather required that women hang laundry to dry indoors.[64] In situations when customers entered the home, African

---

[63] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (2nd ed.; New York: Basic Books, 2009), 152.

[64] Ibid. The practice of doing laundry would also have impacted the visual and aural experiences of those in a household. In a memoir by Anita Reynolds, she described the "smell of hot starch" and the "sounds of flat irons slapping on the side of the coal stove" in the laundry her grandmother operated in her home in the 1900s. Anita Reynolds

Americans had to resolve questions about the areas of the home into which they would allow customers. In combining their sites of work with their places of residence, African Americans negotiated boundaries of public and private within the home itself and with other members of their households. Home-based businesses may also have shaped the rhythms of street life: a street that appeared to be exclusively residential became, to some extent, a mixed-use street that drew additional visitors during business hours. While the dominant narrative of the Main Line positioned the house a retreat from work, for some African Americans the home served simultaneously as home and workplace.

The hegemonic vision of the Main Line promoted the suburban house as a private space away from the world and away from paid labor. Similarly, the aspirations voiced by African American thinkers and writers placed work outside the home and laid the responsibility for paid employment with men. Yet few African American households in Ardmore matched this ideal. This transformed the home into a site of economic productivity and blurred assumptions about the divisions between work and domesticity in suburban settings.

Sociability in the Home

Situated as they were in neighborhoods and communities, dwellings provided spaces for socializing with others. Some of these connections were certainly spontaneous or informal (for instance, talking with a neighbor, greeting a passerby, or calling on a friend). However, other types of connections that took place in the home were more

---

with Howard Miller, *American Cocktail: A "Colored Girl" in the World*, ed. George Hutchinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 66.

intentional and formal. The social affairs African Americans planned in their homes included luncheons, teas, dinners, and parties for their guests. At one end of the spectrum were simple dinners for couples or a few friends, while at the other end of the spectrum, were more elaborate gatherings with extensive guests lists, sprawling menus, and carefully fashioned décor. Women were often the hosts of such events, performing roles as the arbiters of social life that took place inside the home. This section looks at these organized forms of sociability to understand how individuals used these domestic practices both to position themselves in Ardmore's social hierarchy and to give new meanings to the spaces of their homes.

Social gatherings in homes were popular items in the weekly community columns of the *Philadelphia Tribune* where they were often vividly described. All listings provided the names of the hosts, the guests in attendance, and their places of residence; for some gatherings, the reader also learned additional details about of the event such as the menu, decorations, and activities. While these listing provide the main sources of analysis here, they also present challenges. Representations of domestic social events existed in other communities beyond Philadelphia, and Willard Gatewood's discussion of the black press in *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* illuminates some of the challenges around these source materials specific to this section. According to Gatewood, African American newspapers had a tendency to describe social events in dramatic terms. Gatewood notes that the most elite African Americans frowned on ostentatious descriptions of social events, and they were skeptical of those whom newspapers elevated to elite status (preferring themselves not to appear in the social

pages of the black press).[65] While Ardmore lacked the sort of old, aristocratic black families whom Gatewood describes, his work does highlight some of the questions surrounding the representations of social events in Ardmore's community notes columns. It is impossible to say, for instance, whether hosts always submitted events for publication or whether someone else did so without their consent. Similarly, the correlation between appearance in the community notes columns and status within the African American population can be difficult to establish with certainty. The census reveals class markers such as homeownership, household composition, and employment, but it fails to capture status that individuals may have attained by other means like familial connections.

One listing in the *Philadelphia Tribune*[66] reported on a party hosted by Pauline Smith in honor of two guests visiting from Lawnside, New Jersey, a majority-black rural community approximately eighteen miles from Ardmore.[67] The occasion suggested one of the ways individuals used their houses to maintain connections with other black suburbanites in the region. Pauline lived at 118 Holland Avenue with her husband

---

[65] Willard Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 197–99.

[66] Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune,* November 20, 1920.

[67] The Armstrong Association profiled Lawnside as part of its 1915 report *A Study of Living Conditions among Colored People in Towns in the Outer Parts of Philadelphia and in Other Suburbs Both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey*. With the exception of eight households, all of Lawnside's residents were black, and a total of two thousand African Americans resided there in 1915. Many were engaged in farming, and the community was notable for the high number of African Americans who owned farms. This large African American community supported an African American YWCA and three black-owned provisions stores. Armstrong Association, 1915 report *A Study of Living Conditions,* Philadelphia (1915), 37–38.

William and her widowed mother-in-law Ellen. In addition, the Smith household included one person listed as a boarder in the Census, a married fifty-two-year-old man who worked as a messenger for the railroad. While Pauline did not work outside the home, William owned a hauling company, and his business was significant enough that he employed others.

For the party on November 20, 1920, Pauline invited thirty-five guests to her two-story detached-frame home that the family owned free and clear. She had taken care to decorate her house with chrysanthemums, carnations and roses, and, with the assistance of three women guests, served coffee, tea, and punchbowl as refreshments. Pauline also provided entertainment, and the listing noted, "The music furnished was beautiful, but the only objection that people had was that there was no chance for waltzing." The column praised the event as "one of the most enjoyable affairs that has been given in Ardmore for some time." The readers, including those who had not been among the invitees, could imagine the scene from the text of the newspaper—the chatter of guests socializing, the smell and sight of the colorful flowers, and the sound of the music. Moreover, the floral decorations and the scope of the invitation list, a tea for thirty-five, suggested a family flush with financial resources that extended beyond the provision of basic needs.

Pauline and her household represented an atypical 1920 black household in Ardmore in at least two respects: First, Pauline did not have paid employment, while two-thirds of black women sixteen or older worked for money in some capacity. Second, the Williams owned their house at a time when only one-third of black households in Ardmore did so. The events described in the Ardmore columns of the *Philadelphia*

Tribune may have overrepresented more affluent Ardmore residents like the Williams household. For instance, of the five social events hosted by women or couples that appeared in the *Philadelphia Tribune* in 1920, four of five households were homeowners. It is unclear whether this means that the events hosted and attended by African Americans with greater financial resources indeed hosted a disproportionate number of formal social events or whether the events they planned simply received greater attention.

While Pauline Williams did not engage in paid employment, most women in Ardmore did, and they worked the area of domestic service. For those black women who performed paid domestic work from home, primarily doing laundry, social events gave new meanings to household spaces. When women did laundry at home for payment, the residence doubled as a place of economic productivity. The social affairs these same women held in their homes transformed these spaces yet again as they planned activities, assembled menus, fashioned their homes, and welcomed guests. For instance, Lavena Johnson, who did laundry from home, hosted fifteen friends for dinner on Sunday, January 11, 1920. Lavena was one part of a three-income household, along with her husband, who worked as a laborer at the Autocar factory, and her twenty-one-year-old son, who worked as a clerk at a meat shop. The Williams family shared a two-story frame house at 218 Greenfield Avenue. The Ardmore Notes column described Lavena's dinner gathering by noting that she had "entertained . . . a few of her friends at a repast." And then, "After enjoying a delicious menu prepared by the hostess, they repaired to the

parlor and were entertained with sacred music and reading."[68] Notably, this description highlighted that Lavena's home indeed included a parlor, a formal social space associated with middle-class refinement.[69] For Lavena Johnson, and other women like her, the dwelling was a malleable space: it functioned not only as a place of shelter and work place but also as a space that they could shape to welcome guests for formal social events.

Like suburban dwellers elsewhere, the grounds surrounding the home also provided sites for genteel practices and interactions among social peers. In addition to the teas, luncheons, and dinners that took place in parlors and dining rooms, African Americans hosted parties and sports on their lawns. In June of 1915, for instance, York Nelson invited guests to a lawn fete at his home at the intersection of Spring and Holland Avenues. The brief description in the *Philadelphia Tribune* noted, "The following persons motored out to Ardmore on last Thursday where they attended a Lawn Fete held on the beautiful lawn of Mr. and Mrs. York Nelson." The use of a lawn as a site of leisure necessitated suitably trimmed and maintained lawns. As a landscape gardener, York may have taken particular care in the styling of his yard. Recall that in another article, the *Philadelphia Tribune* had described York glowingly as "one of the ablest landscape gardeners in the country, as is testified, too, by the beautiful lawns and gardens under his care surrounding many of the most palatial mansions." York had professional experience in lawn care, but anyone hosting lawn parties likely devoted some time to caring for the

[68] Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 24, 1920.
[69] Clark, *The American Family Home*, 116–20.

lawn, perhaps engaging in another suburban past time, lawn mowing. On lawns and through the lawn itself, status was on display both for one's company and for neighbors and passersby of all races and ethnicities.

Some African Americans also invited guests to their homes to engage in more active pursuits. Beginning in 1915, the popularity of croquet in Ardmore blossomed, and African Americans hosted games on their lawns. Playing croquet on one's lawn was necessarily bound up in class. By the early twentieth century in the United States, croquet was a sport linked to suburban life and to gentility, and African Americans in Ardmore also linked croquet with gentility.[70] Reflecting on the rise of croquet's popularity among African Americans on the Main Line, the *Philadelphia Tribune* wrote, "Some three years ago, or in antebellum days, the holiday and early evening sport of the people of a certain circle was the quiet little game of croquet. So popular did this become that clubs were organized in Wayne, Bryn Mawr, and Ardmore and real championship contests were held. The ladies came in their dashing apparel and the men looked their best and really the general appearance suggested something of the Bryn Mawr Horse Show variety."[71] With references to "people of a certain circle" and the Bryn Mawr Horse Show, the article explicitly linked the sport to status and gentility. The games African Americans played on their front lawns were an extension of croquet from its club form into the domestic setting. In addition to its cultural associations with gentility, it was also a sport

---

[70] Virginia Scott Jenkins, "'Fairway Living': Lawncare and Lifestyle from Croquet to the Golf Course," in *The American Lawn*, ed. Georges Teyssot (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 117–18.

[71] Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 5, 1920.

that required means to play given the cost of the equipment; African Americans who played croquet on their lawns declared the availability of disposable income.

The use of the yard as a place for leisurely parties and lawn games was notable for the absence of other activities. If some households used their lawns for parties and croquet games, others used their front yards to more economically productive ends, like raising chickens.[72] Indeed, Andy Wiese argues that for some migrants the space to raise livestock and to garden in ways that echoed their southern roots was an especially desirable suburban quality.[73] In Ardmore, yards had yet other functions as sites for toilets, ashes, tins, and manure.[74] The columns of the Ardmore Notes, however, ignored these utilitarian uses in favor of highlighting cultivated yards that served as sites for leisure.

Conclusions

As African Americans settled in Ardmore, they moved into twin, row, and detached dwellings, and as early as 1915 clear patterns emerged where black residents lived. Understanding where African Americans lived is significant in making sense of early twentieth-century black suburbanization, but this alone misses the experiential dimension of household life. Thus, this chapter has examined not only *where* African Americans lived but also *how* they lived. For African Americans, houses served as

---

[72] Philadelphia Housing Association, *Housing Conditions in Ardmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr,* survey report by the Philadelphia Housing Association to the Main Line Citizens' Association, 1919, Housing Association of Delaware Valley Records, Subseries 1.2: Executive Secretary's Files, 1917–20, URB 3/II/7, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

[73] See for instance Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 88.

[74] See for instance Bosworth, *Housing Conditions in Main Line Towns,* 8; Philadelphia Housing Association, *Housing Conditions in Ardmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr*, 7 and 10.

instruments for the articulation of family, work, social relationships, and status. In houses and apartments intended for single families, African Americans constructed households that included adult children and extended family members, sometimes requiring that they inhabit space in creative ways. Prescriptive literature regarded the house as a place exclusively for the family. However, those families who took in boarders defined their own boundaries of who belonged in a residence, inviting unrelated individuals into their homes to live and eat in exchange for money and making their homes into sites where they provided services to others. Work was often part of household life in other ways, too, as many African Americans repurposed residential settings for commercial uses. In doing so, they crafted an entrepreneurial opportunity that granted greater levels of autonomy and, in the case of women, provided ways to navigate household and childrearing responsibilities while earning income. African Americans also utilized the spaces of their homes to create connections with other African Americans locally and regionally by hosting various functions. Moreover, through the guests they invited and the ways in which they entertained, hosts also made status claims to those present and to those who would read about their affairs in the pages of the *Philadelphia Tribune*. While this chapter has focused on the individual and the household, the following chapter will shift to address organizations that brought African Americans together to achieve shared goals.

Chapter 4: Associations

As the spring of 1920 approached, meetings dotted the calendars of many African Americans in Ardmore the week of March 7. On Friday, Henrietta Billingslia hosted the monthly meeting of the Main Line Relief Association, an organization of black women dedicated to supporting a nearby agricultural and industrial school. The women met in the two-story brick home of their president, and their meeting came the month after one of the organization's signature events, an annual benefit concert. Part philanthropy, part social event, the diverse program had drawn African Americans from across the Main Line and included literary recitations and vocal solos and duets. Their efforts had raised eighty-four dollars, and they would contribute this sum to the domestic and industrial education of black youth.[1]

The week was also a busy one for Ardmore's African American churches: Sunday schools and congregations were preparing for upcoming Easter festivities, and some churches were dealing with leadership transitions. At Zion Baptist Church, J. T. Rumsey took charge of the church's Baptist Young People's Union with hopes to reinvigorate its programming. Mt. Calvary Baptist Church had recently elected a new board of trustees, and, to mark the occasion, the board collected the congregation's offering during that Sunday's church services.

The Main Line Negro Business League was looking forward to its next big event. A special committee of the League met to discuss preparations for the branch's upcoming

[1] Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 28, 1920 and March 20, 1920; Montgomery County Property Records, parcel ID 400025992005/120 Holland Avenue, accessed July 15, 2010, http://propertyrecords.montcopa.org.

celebration of Booker T. Washington, the founder of the National Negro Business League. One of the speakers at the year's event would be prominent Philadelphia physician Dr. T. Spotuas Burwell. This annual event supported the Main Line Negro Business League's commitments to the economic and political advancement of African Americans.

These events represented only a sampling of the many organizations in which African Americans in Ardmore participated. Women also formed clubs that emphasized social gatherings, philanthropy, and crafts associated with homemaking, while men established their own social clubs and local chapters of national fraternal organizations. Nearby, the Bryn Mawr branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People also addressed political issues and drew some of its membership from Ardmore.

A subset of the organizations that African Americans in Ardmore created focused on the betterment of African Americans in Ardmore and, in some cases, in the region and nation. The Main Line Relief Association; Zion, Mt. Calvary, and Bethel churches; and the Main Line Negro Business League were examples of such organizations, and they serve as case studies for this chapter.[2] The Main Line Relief Association, the churches,

---

[2] The Bryn Mawr Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, established in November 1930, would become another prominent organization that addressed social and political issues relevant to African Americans. While the branch was based initially in Bryn Mawr, the group drew some of its members from Ardmore. The organization petitioned the national organization in 1954 to change its name from the Bryn Mawr Branch to the Main Line Branch to reflect its Main Line–wide membership. Letter to Mr. William W. Hines, 725 Haverford Road, Bryn Mawr, PA, November 28, 1930, Records of the National Association for the Advancement of

and the Main Line Negro Business League advanced a spectrum of aims that included self-sufficiency and learnedness. As African Americans in these organizations worked to improve the lives of African Americans locally and regionally, they collectively took control of and defined specific spaces to serve their needs. These efforts laid the groundwork for activism that would develop more fully in the postwar era.

At the center of this chapter is an analysis of how buildings and spaces were instrumental in advancing the goals of these organizations to improve the lives of African Americans. While scholars of African American history have examined the roles of similar organizations in other communities, the spaces connected with these efforts have remained understudied. The activities of the Main Line Relief Association, black churches, and the Main Line Negro Business League took place in varied physical and social settings, including private, secular, and religious spaces. Members' residences often served as meeting places for burgeoning community organizations. From there, organizations expanded into other environments, investing heavily in the creation and support of African American-owned spaces and exercising greater levels of power through shaping the built environment. These organizations and institutions nurtured intersuburban connections, either drawing their members from across the Main Line or bringing Ardmorites into contact with African Americans from the Main Line and from the Philadelphia region. The connections that African Americans forged positioned them

---

Colored People, Branch Files, box G-179, folder: Bryn Mawr, PA, 1930, Library of Congress Manuscript Division; Anne M. Hines to Gloster Current, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, March 1, 1954, Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, box C165, folder: Main Line, PA, 1946–1959, folder 2, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

in metropolitan and national networks and demonstrated the significance of inter- and intrasuburban connections that transcended the traditional city-suburban dichotomy.

Organizations advanced individual status along with collective aims. Participants in these organizations, particularly those who held leadership positions, garnered favorable attention in the columns of the *Philadelphia Tribune*. In addition, *The Afro-American Social Directory* of 1922 suggested that membership in these organizations were markers of social respectability in Ardmore. In Ardmore, like in other black communities in this time, one could attain social status without money, and organizations provided avenues for individuals to position themselves within Ardmore's social hierarchy. While attending to questions surrounding individual status, this chapter foregrounds collective life.

Main Line Relief Association

The Main Line Relief Association (MLRA) brought African American women in Ardmore together with other Main Line women to support the Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School. The sprawling rural campus of the Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School was located at the edge of the Main Line approximately twenty-five miles west of Ardmore. By educating black students in trades, the boarding school aimed to counter racial inequalities, to guard against the perceived ills of urban vice, and to broaden the opportunities available to African Americans entering the workforce. The MLRA raised funds to help sustain the operation and development of this African American institution. The organization's support of the Downingtown School enmeshed

the organization's members in larger debates about black racial advancement and the best ways to achieve this advancement.

The MLRA was an intersuburban effort, both in name and in membership. The origins of the MLRA went back at least to 1912, and the group drew members not only from Ardmore but also from Haverford and Bryn Mawr. As a relief association, the MLRA recalled long-established traditions of other groups committed to the education of African Americans. In Pennsylvania, for instance, the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association began in 1862 to support the education of freed African Americans and to provide material needs like clothing and food.[3] The MLRA focused its attentions on the education of black youth by supporting Downingtown Industrial School.

The MLRA linked black women in Ardmore with a network of black women in the Northeast who supported the Downingtown School through donations.[4] Groups similar to the MLRA, such as the Fanny Coppin Relief Association for the Downingtown School, sponsored their own fundraisers on behalf of the school.[5] These groups and the MLRA were regional manifestations of a national movement of women's organizations.

---

[3] "What's the Use?" *Pennsylvania Freedmen's Bulletin*, February 1865, 9–12; Luther P. Jackson, "The Educational Efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau and Freedmen's Aid Societies in South Carolina, 1862–1872," *Journal of Negro History* 8, no. 1 (1923): 1–40. In the early twentieth century, the term *relief association* was also used to describe organizations that focused less on education and more on the provision of benefits in times of hardship. In Philadelphia, for instance, the Cosmopolitan Relief Association advertised that it paid "immediate sick, accident and funeral benefits." Advertisement, *Christian Banner*, January 12, 1900.

[4] Named for a famous black educator, the Fanny Coppin Relief Association was based in Philadelphia. See for instances "Flashes and Sparks," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 11, 1916.

[5] "Downingtown's Real Financial Agent," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 28, 1914.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, black women across the United States created clubs to address the social needs that African Americans faced.[6] Women opened kindergartens, libraries, and settlement houses; organized discussions, lectures, and readings; and supported schools, hospitals and orphanages. State and national federations, such as the Pennsylvania State Federation of Women's Clubs in which the MLRA participated, connected these groups.[7] Through their support of the Downingtown School, black women in Ardmore invested in a notion of collective racial progress that went beyond their immediate communities.

Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School

John S. Trower, a successful black caterer, and William A. Creditt, pastor of Philadelphia's First African Baptist Church, founded the Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School in 1905. As an institution devoted to the industrial and agricultural education of black youth, the Downingtown School was at the center of ideological

---

[6] The earlier efforts of white women who formed civic and reform clubs influenced early leaders in the black club movement—though, as historian Stephanie Shaw highlights, traditions of organizing and self-help within African American communities predated women's clubs run by white women. Stephanie J. Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible": A Reader in Black Women's History*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, Linda Reed (New York: Carlson, 1995), 433–47.

[7] The Pennsylvania State Federation of Women's Clubs began in 1903, and it linked women's clubs engaged in activism across Pennsylvania. The MLRA first sent a member to the meeting of the State Federation of Women's Clubs in 1917 in Wilkesbarre, PA. Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 25, 1917. Similar entities existed in other states, and the National Association of Colored Women functioned at the national level. For more information on the NACW, see, for instance, Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women." For a discussion of the range of work undertaken by club women see, for instance, Gerda Lerner, "Early Community Work of Black Club Women," *Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (1974): 158–167.

debates surrounding the future of African Americans in the United States. The Downingtown School was part of a larger movement of industrial and agricultural education pioneered by institutions like Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. Industrial education, rather than political activism or liberal arts education, they reasoned, would provide the path to racial advancement.[8] To this pursuit, Downingtown brought particular ideas about the physical environments best suited to this endeavor.

Located on the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, but beyond the suburban district popularly known as the "Main Line," the Downingtown School lay thirty-two miles outside of Philadelphia and approximately twenty-five miles from Ardmore following Lancaster Avenue. Downingtown was at the margins of the Pennsylvania Railroad's passenger service between Philadelphia and its suburbs, and the railroad typically listed Downingtown as the western terminus of its commuter service. Trower purchased a 110-acre farm approximately two miles north of central Downingtown as the site for the school.[9] By 1915, the school had grown to include six stone structures and two frame buildings. The campus's collection of dormitories, classrooms, offices, and shops

---

[8] See, for instance, Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[9] Central Downingtown had a small African American population. In 1915, approximately two hundred African Americans lived in Downingtown, and the majority of black residents rented their homes. The brick manufactory was the largest source of employment for African American men, while most black women worked as domestics. Armstrong Association, *A Study of Living Conditions among Colored People in the Outer Part of Philadelphia and in Other Suburbs Both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey*, 23–24.

as well as a farm served as many as 140 primary and secondary school–age students, though enrollment numbers fluctuated.[10]

The Downingtown School targeted boys and girls in its recruitment efforts and advertised locally and nationally. Advertisements in the *Philadelphia Tribune* invited prospective pupils to "An Academic course, the trades, Agriculture, Domestic Science, Dress Making, Millinery, Music, Stenography, Typewriting, etc."[11] In addition to training for skilled industrial and domestic positions, the school also emphasized farming. Students could attend the school starting at age 13.[12] Beyond age and gender demographics, the school was interested in recruiting a particular type of student. For William Creditt, the school's long-time principal, Downingtown provided an opportunity for vocational training to a vulnerable population. Whereas racial discrimination barred many "overlooked or neglected colored youth" from attaining entry-level jobs, the streets lured others toward vice. Creditt further asserted that these issues were compounded by

---

[10] For instance, Principal William Creditt reported that 144 student attended the school in 1912, while a Federal Bureau of Education study in 1915 found 86 students studying at the institution. William Creditt, "The Neglected or Overlooked Negro Youth in the North," in *A Child Welfare Symposium: Twenty-five Special Papers Contributed by Leading Pennsylvanians*, ed. W. H. Slingerland (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1915), 45, accessed May 18, 2015, http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100332095; US Bureau of Education, *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*, 689, accessed May 18, 2015, https://archive.org/details/negroeducation00fundgoog.

[11] While advertisements in the *Philadelphia Tribune* appeared regularly, the school advertised occasionally in *The Crisis*, the nationally circulated magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

[12] Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School, advertisement, *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 21, 1912. The specific ages indicated in advertisement fluctuated over the years. For instance, a 1933 add in *The Crisis* wrote that children over the age of eleven. Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School, advertisement, *The Crisis*, September 1933.

the reality that families with limited financial resources could not provide for their children's education. The Downingtown School, Creditt argued, provided pathways to gainful work through education.[13]

For the Downingtown School's administrators, the school's rural location was integral to achieving its goals. The *Philadelphia Tribune* glowingly described the school's location as "the unmatchable Chester Valley" and noted that the campus "[took] up one hundred and ten acres, two thirds rolling and the rest flat land, and all of the best soil for cultivation."[14] One hundred of the school's acres were used as the school's farm, while the remaining ten acres housed a collection of nine buildings. In keeping with the school's motto of "self help through self work," students maintained the campuses' buildings and operated the farm.[15]

The Downingtown School promoted the idea that separation from the city would support students' development, and advertisements for the school in *The Crisis* in the 1930s referred to the campus's "healthy climate outside of city."[16] These statements aligned with dominant narratives about cities and their rural surroundings and linked the schools location to its mission. The school's location on the rural edges of the Philadelphia metropolitan area distanced students from the supposed temptations of vice more readily accessible in urban centers. A 1914 commentary in the *Philadelphia*

---

[13] Creditt, "The Neglected or Overlooked Negro Youth in the North," 43–46.

[14] "Downingtown Industrial School," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 28, 1914.

[15] US Bureau of Education, *Negro Education*, 689; "The Downingtown School," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 28, 1914, and March 7, 1914; Creditt, "The Neglected or Overlooked Negro Youth in the North," 45.

[16] Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School, advertisement, *The Crisis*, February 1934, 28.

Tribune observed, "The school is situated just far enough from the city to insure [*sic*] its students from coming in contact with the many traps that are laid to ensnare our youths. If its able [president's] plans do not miscarry the lounging of our youths on corners, in pool rooms and grog shops will be a thing of the past."[17] The writer's comments vilified urban spaces like street corners and poolrooms. Both the article and the editorial connected the rural environment with virtue in ways that developers and boosters had embedded in the Main Line story since its construction.

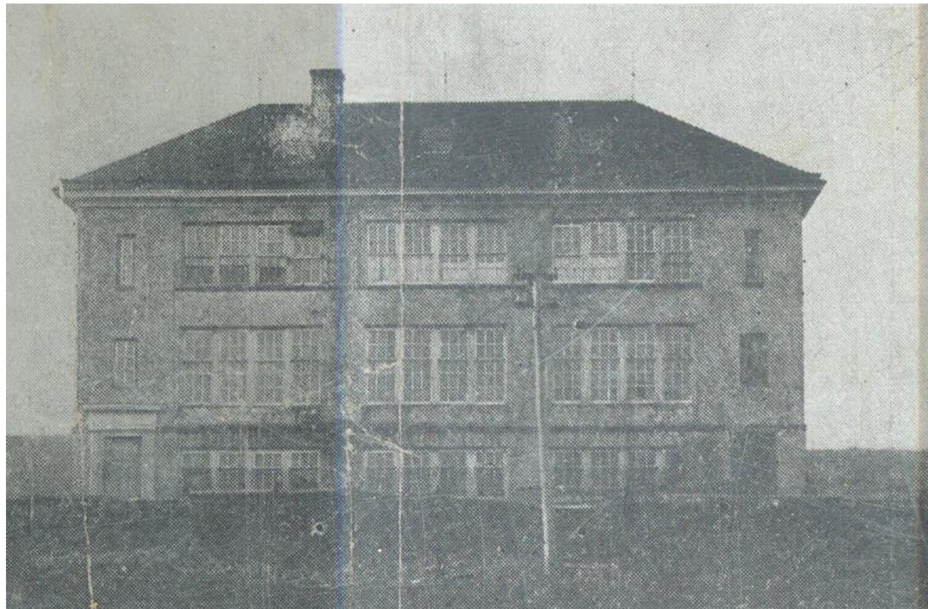

Figure 23. Downingtown Pennsylvania Hall. Promotional literature, ca. 1928, Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School Records (Accession # MS005DI), box 5, folder 7, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA.

[17] "The Downingtown School," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 7, 1914.

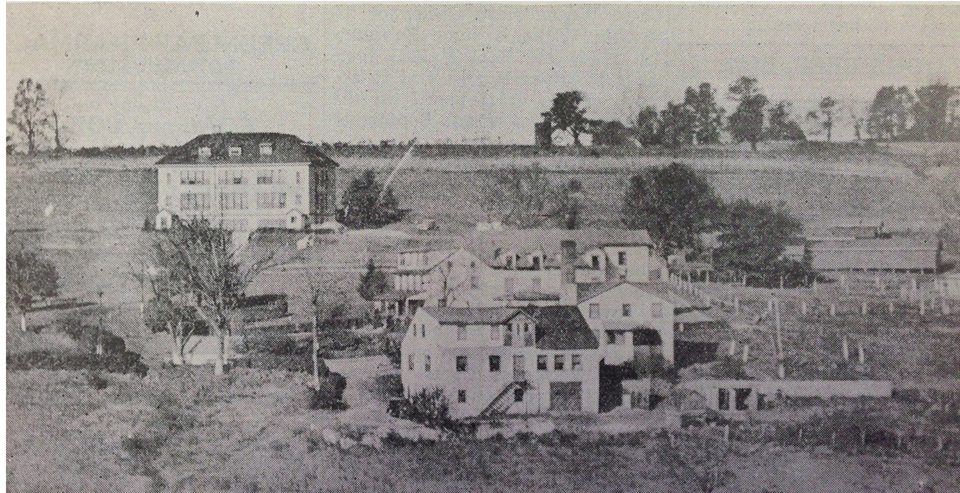

Figure 24. Downingtown campus. Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School Records (Accession # MS005DI), box 4, folder 2, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA.

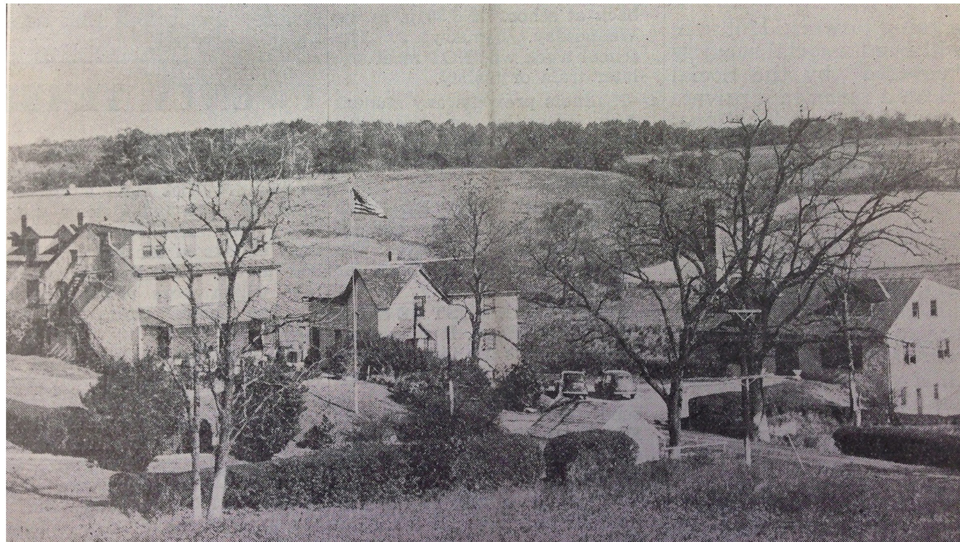

Figure 25. Downingtown lower campus. Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School Records (Accession # MS005DI), box 4, folder 2, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA.

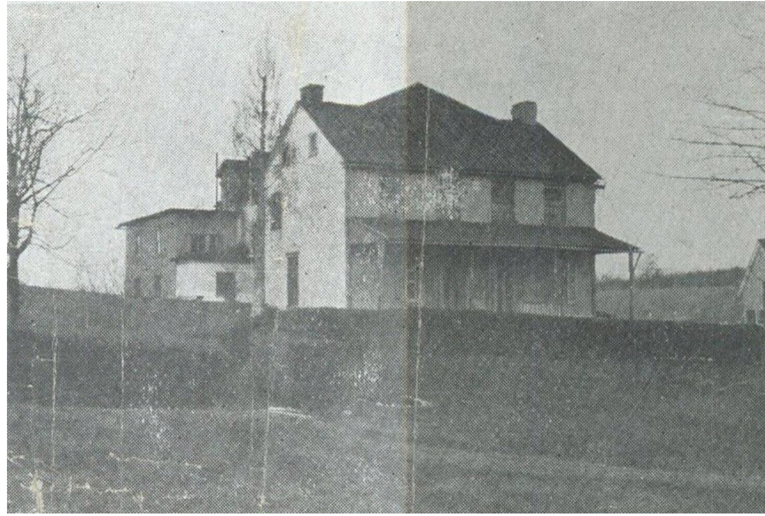

Figure 26. Downingtown administration building and girls' dormitory. Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School Records (Accession # MS005DI), box 5, folder 7, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA.

Perhaps the most prominent building at the Downingtown School was Pennsylvania Hall, and the building expressed many of the school's values. With large grouped windows, similar to other schools from the time period, and a prominent hipped roof, Pennsylvania was, unlike other buildings on the campus, monumental in its design.[18] African American Architect William J. Robinson is credited as being part of the team that erected the hall, and Downingtown's students also helped with the construction, a practice common at African American industrial schools. The fact that African Americans built Pennsylvania Hall became central in how the school's supporters discussed the building, and articles about the Downingtown School frequently mentioned the role of African Americans in the building's construction. An article in the journal *The Peacemaker* observed, for instance, "The Pennsylvania Hall of the Downingtown School

[18] The original Pennsylvania Hall experienced a fire in 1916. The analysis of the physical features of Pennsylvania Hall is based on the rebuilt hall; it shared a number of characteristics with the original including the location, footprint, and roofing style.

was built by negro mechanics and student helpers." The building thus served as a physical example for students, visitors, and distant supporters of what African Americans could achieve in the building trades (and, by extension, in other trades) taught at Downingtown School.[19] Pennsylvania Hall also served an important ceremonial function as the place into which the school welcomed crowds each May for its graduation.[20]

Pennsylvania Hall was a center of instruction, and each school day girls and boys entered the trades rooms to learn the skills that the school's founders and leaders believed would lead to pupils' success. In 1916, the building housed many of the schools areas of study, including carpentry and mattress-making for boys and domestic science and dressmaking for girls. The four-story building had instructional spaces and office and served as the boys' dormitory.[21] Pennsylvania Hall was situated at a higher elevation than the rest of the campus. Its position allowed those inside to survey the lower campus, where most of the school's buildings were located, and to have unencumbered views of the school's farmlands, where students developed and practiced agricultural skills.

Other campus buildings were located on the lower campus. An undated newspaper clipping showed a cluster of buildings that all turned inward onto a central

---

[19] *The Peacemaker* was a publication of the Philadelphia-based organization the Universal Peace Union, which opposed all forms of violence and war.

"The Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School for Colored Youth," *The Peacemaker* 31, nos. 7–8 (1912): 156; Lauren Jacobi, "William J. Robinson" in *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865–1945*, ed. Dreck Spurlock Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2004), 502. It is unclear as to whether Robinson worked on the first or second iteration of Pennsylvania Hall.

[20] See, for instance, "Large Class Graduates from Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 31, 1913.

[21] "Appeal for the Colored School," *Friends Intelligencer* 73, no. 8 (1916), 125.

area. A US flag flew from a pole at the center, perhaps indicative of the hope that industrial and agricultural education would support a pathway to full US citizenship for African Americans. Farmland and undeveloped areas surrounded the buildings, and grouping the structures highlighted the areas rurality, which the school's leaders identified as integral to their mission. One of the buildings on the lower campus was the administration building and girls' dormitory. The building had a large front porch, and its design suggested a house rather than an institutional structure. Since all girls at Downingtown took courses in domestic science, housing female students in a building that looked like a house extended the connection between girls (and the women they would grow up to be) and domesticity.[22]

For Booker T. Washington, a leading national proponent of industrial education for African Americans, domesticity and education were inherently linked. Discussing a "country school," Washington wrote, "There is no reason why a country school should not have both the appearance and the character of a model country home."[23] In Barbara Mooney's words, "So closely associated were the domestic ideal and the educational ideal in Washington's mind that they became conflated in his program of race

---

[22] Creditt, "The Neglected or Overlooked Negro Youth in the North," 45. While girls were required to study a trade and domestic science, boys were only required to select either a trade or farming practices.

[23] In a short article entitled "Educational Engineers," Washington called for educational engineers who would visit and study the schools before making suggestions for improvements based on ideals that Washington outlined. Washington's prescriptions for schools touched on building design, curriculum, and school-community relationships. Booker T. Washington, "Educational Engineers," *New Outlook*, June 4, 1920, 266–67.

improvement."[24] Buildings like the girls' dormitory fulfilled Washington's ideals in its architecture.

The Downingtown School relied on state support, fundraising, and donations to sustain itself.[25] The state of Pennsylvania appropriated funds for the school's operating costs that ranged from ten thousand to fifteen thousand dollars annually.[26] The school also had a financial agent who traveled throughout Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey to solicit contributions and worked with others to organize benefit events.[27] Additional monies came from the efforts of independent associations like the MLRA. While state and private financial contributions suggested that broad support existed for the school's

---

[24] Barbara Burlison Mooney, "The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 1 (2002): 54.

[25] The balance between state and voluntary contributions is unclear. A 1912 study by educator Richard Wright stated that the majority of the school's funding came from donations. Richard Wright Jr., "The Negro in Pennsylvania: A Study in Economic History" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1912), 139. By contrast, a study by the Bureau of Education based on a 1915 visit to the school showed that the majority of the school's funding came from a state appropriation of $10,000 and $2,666 in donations, $892 charged for music fees, and a $600 loan supplemented the state's allocation. US Bureau of Education, *Negro Education*, 688–90.

[26]In several instances, this appropriation was not fully funded and reduced. For instance, in 1909, the governor of Pennsylvania vetoed an appropriation of $20,000 because "the state revenue [did] not justify the appropriation at this time." Vetoes by the Governor, of Bills Passed by the Legislature, Session of 1909, (Harrisburg, PA: Harrisburg Publishing Co., State Printer, 1909), 97:126–27. For examples of other appropriations made by legislators, see, for instance, act 450, *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Session of 1907* (Harrisburg, PA: Harrisburg Publishing Co., State Printer, 1907), 601; *Appropriation Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth Pennsylvania Passed at the Session of 1917 in the One Hundred and Forty-First Year of Independence* (Harrisburg, PA: Stanley Ray, State Printer, 1917), 331A:239.

[27] "Downingtown's Real Financial Agent," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 28, 1914.

mission, some observers did question the ways the school deployed the funding it received. In 1915, an editorial in the *Philadelphia Tribune* raised serious questions about the administration of the Downingtown School, bluntly asking, "What is the matter with the Downingtown School?" The editorial cited concerns about the ratio of the school's revenues to the number of students served and about the resignations of six staff members in one year. Echoing the findings of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a study completed by the federal Bureau of Education in 1916 concluded, "The educational activities are not commensurate with the income and plant."[28] In spite of such criticisms, however, the MLRA, the state of Pennsylvania, and others continued their financial support of the school.

Activities of the Main Line Relief Association

As it worked to support the Downingtown Industrial School, the Main Line Relief Association's endeavors connected the environments of home, church, and secular public sites through philanthropy. The home was an anchor in the organization's work: The MLRA conducted its regular monthly meetings as well as a number of special events in the homes of its members in Bryn Mawr, Ardmore, and Haverford. For instance, an annual Valentine's Tea featured vocal and instrumental selections, readings, and speakers

---

[28] The study assessed private and public schools in the North and the South that served black students at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels and offered recommendations. The 724-page volume devoted individual chapters to each Southern state and one 24-page chapter to all Northern states. The question of school financing was central given that one of the motivations for the study cited by its authors was a rise in Southerners' fraudulently raising funds from northern donors to support black schools in the South. US Bureau of Education, *Negro Education*, 688.

in a member's house.[29] Through the activities of the MLRA, women made their dwellings into sites for organizing and sociability. There were parallels between these events and women who hosted groups of friends at home, but the MLRA brought a philanthropic agenda to their gatherings.

The Main Line Relief Association tied its philanthropic work in education to the church, another institution in Ardmore that invested in African Americans. The MLRA, like the school it supported, had religious affiliations and was an interdenominational undertaking.[30] While the MLRA conducted its work outside the formal framework of churches, the organization maintained religious connections through annual "installation ceremonies" held in local black churches. These installation ceremonies announced the organization's leadership for the coming year, and they were open to the public. The location of the ceremonies moved between churches in Ardmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr and encompassed Baptist and AME churches, the two major denominations of black Main Liners. When the event was held at a church where a woman regularly worshiped, she entered a familiar setting, while in other instances she found herself in a potentially unfamiliar environment as a guest. Pastors served as masters of ceremony and delivered sermons that rooted the women's work in religious teachings.

---

[29] "Bryn Mawr Briefs," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 23, 1928.

[30] Working toward a shared cause reportedly provided an opportunity to bridge denominational and church divides. The Ardmore News column of the *Philadelphia Tribune* editorialized, "[The MLRA] claims membership in the five churches of Ardmore and Bryn Mawr, and is one of the few organization in which churches and denominational differences do not effect [*sic*] the spirit of the work" (June 2, 1917).

The shift from homes to churches carried a change in women's positions and their interactions with each other. Within their homes, traditional gender roles assigned women responsibilities for the everyday managing and maintaining their households and raising children, and in hosting MLRA events women fashioned their homes to receive guests and engage in different activities. In greeting a visitor at the door, offering or receiving tea, and in reading or listening to an essay, the women engaged with one another directly. The relationships between the members of the MLRA and the women's authority shifted within a church. At church, it was the male preacher, rather than the female president, who held the highest authority and who delivered the keynote in the form of a sermon to the women. Spatial relationships between women also shifted in churches, as the women became audience members seated in rows of wooden pews. This sort of interaction differed from the diverse forms of engagement women had in their home-based meetings.

Fundraising represented the core of MLRA's work, and the group organized events to benefit the Downingtown School in African American owned spaces on the Main Line. These fundraisers included fairs, concerts, and lectures in venues like African American churches or at the Main Line Negro Business League's hall (sites that later sections of this chapter will discuss further). The MLRA thus utilized local African American–controlled spaces to support the development of another African American institution, the Downingtown School.

One of the MLRA's events was its annual concert and lecture. Both a philanthropic and social event, the evening typically included musical performances and readings by Main Line residents and, occasionally, presentations by guests from other

states. In addition, the director of the Downingtown School often delivered a talk on the school's work. Other speakers addressed topics related to African American history and culture like the "ancient history of the original Negro."[31] Such lectures allowed African Americans to learn about the Downingtown School, current developments related to African American education, and more general interest subjects. The MLRA's benefits also enabled African Americans from across the Main Line to gather and to harness their resources to contribute to the Downingtown School. The organization's annual contribution of one hundred dollars paid for the campus's electricity.[32] The MLRA thus supported one component of a larger set of systems that kept the campus's physical plant operating. The link between their contribution and a specific expense allowed the women to recognize the tangible outcomes of their efforts.

MLRA support for the Downingtown School was largely removed from the physical campus. However, Downingtown's annual commencement exercises provided an occasion for members of the MLRA to travel to the school and to see firsthand the campus and students who benefited from their efforts. The Downingtown School advertised the commencement widely in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, and visitors came from Philadelphia and the region to attend. Some MLRA members traveled to the celebration by car. In 1917, the Ardmore Notes column described the anticipation of the approaching commencement, noting, "At this writing the Main Line Negro owners of

---

[31] Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 15, 1917. For examples of other events, see, for instance, Haverford Briefs, *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 9, 1914; Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 4, 1918.

[32] Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 2, 1917, and June 8, 1918.

automobiles are oiling up their machinery preparatory to hauling the annual visitors to the commencement exercises at Downingtown."[33] Those who could travel to Downingtown by car declared their financial status and privilege to travel at their own pace rather than have their plans be dictated by train schedules.[34] Pennsylvania Hall, the site for commencement, was larger than any African American owned building in Ardmore. During the commencement, the auditorium of Pennsylvania Hall was the site for musical performances and comments from students, staff, and prominent African American and white guests.[35] This annual pilgrimage to the Downingtown School connected MLRA members with others regionally and nationally who supported the efforts of the school, and it positioned black Ardmorites as part of a larger network of African Americans invested in education.

Churches

By the early twentieth century, Ardmore was home to three black churches: Zion Baptist Church, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, and Bethel AME Church, established in 1894, 1906, and 1894, respectively. These two Protestant traditions, Baptist and AME,

---

[33] Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 2, 1917.

[34] The Census Bureau estimates that the US population numbered 103,268,00 in 1917, while a publication of the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce identified 4,657,340 registered cars in 1917. Population Estimates Program, Population Division, US Census Bureau, "Historical National Population Estimates: July 1, 1900 to July 1, 1999," last modified June 28, 2000, https://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/popclockest.txt; National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, *Facts and Figures of the Automobile Industry* (New York, 1927), 7, accessed May 16, 2015, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/amrlg.lg45.

[35] See, for instance, "Downingtown Commencement," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 25, 1912; "Large Class Graduates from Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 31, 1913.

were the most common denominations to which black suburban residents throughout the Philadelphia area belonged.[36] Through churches, African Americans gained greater levels of agency in shaping the built environment to serve not only their spiritual but also their social and educational needs. Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham captures the diverse roles of black churches in her description of "the black church as public sphere." Speaking of a time when African Americans were limited in their use of many public spaces, Higginbotham writes:

> In time the black church—open to both secular and religious groups in the community—came to signify public space. It housed a diversity of programs . . . all catering to a population much broader than the membership of individual churches . . . It was the one space truly accessible to the black community, and it was this characteristic that led W. E. B. Du Bois, long before E. Franklin Frazier, to identify the black church as a multiple site—at once being a place of worship, theater, publishing house, school, and lodge.[37]

In Ardmore, the spaces of churches served social, religious, artistic, and educational purposes. The range of events held in churches required those who attended such events and those who organized them to regard churches as flexible spaces. A member of a church might come to church to listen to a sermon on the prodigal son on a

---

[36] These two denominations, Baptist and AME (African Methodist Episcopal), were the most common to which black suburban residents throughout the Philadelphia area belonged. Armstrong Association, *A Study of Living Conditions*, 8.

[37] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church: 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 7.

Sunday and attend lecture on gardening on a Tuesday, enjoy the performance of a quartet on Saturday, and appreciate the sacred music of the church choir on Thursday. At the same time, lecturers and performers had to take control of spaces intended for religious purposes and create appropriate performance spaces. In addition, by drawing congregants from other areas, churches provided avenues for Ardmore residents to connect with people in other towns. In this way they served as nodes that connected African Americans in Ardmore to local, regional, and networks.[38]

By focusing on Ardmore's three churches, this section will look at how congregations shaped the churches themselves and the types of activities the buildings supported. Here I start with a brief history of each church and then identify shared aspects in their development. Zion and Calvary were Ardmore's first two African American churches, and their origin stories are rooted in questions about access to and control of space. Through 1894 African American Baptists in Ardmore worshiped with white Baptists at what became the First Baptist Church of Ardmore. According to a history of Zion Baptist Church authored by the church in 1958, African Americans decided to establish their own church as their numbers grew.[39] Carol Merrill's history of her Ardmore family, some of whom were founding members of Zion, suggested a less amicable parting. Merrill's work, which drew on oral histories and memories of her multigenerational extended family and was written in 1983, recounted that Zion was

---

[38] Live-in domestic servants who worked in other parts of the Main Line were one group who traveled to Ardmore to attend church. Notes from Mary Wood's Interview with Josephine White of Ardmore, Age about 82 in 1982, folder: Black History (1) to 1999, record no. 6, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwd, PA.

[39] Lower Merion Historical Society, *The First 300*, 186.

founded after white members of the Baptist church told African Americans that a new church building would have “separate, segregated church facilities.”[40] According to Merrill, this came after African Americans had contributed financially to the construction of the new church. Rather than worship in a segregated environment, Merrill explained, these individuals opted to leave First Baptist and mobilized to meet their religious needs. Eleven years after African Americans founded Zion Baptist Church, a group of congregants from Zion broke away to begin a second predominantly black Baptist church in Ardmore: Mt. Calvary. A history of Mt. Calvary published on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary recounted that in 1905 a dispute concerning finances and property ownership emerged within the congregation of Zion Baptist, and this conflict led to the founding of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church.[41]

Bethel AME Church was Ardmore’s third African American church, and it grew in parallel with the development of Ardmore’s Baptist churches.[42] A founding member of Bethel, Rhoda Welburn, wrote an account of the church’s history that was reprinted in the local *Main Line Times* newspaper.[43] In the 1890s, Bethel AME began as a mission in a blacksmith shop in the primarily agricultural Newtown Square area. According to

---

[40] Carol Merrill, *The Strother Family: Charlottesville to Ardmore* (n.p.: C. R. Merrill, 1983), 6.

[41] E. Luther Cunningham, “Historical Sketch of the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church” in *Silver Jubiliee* (Ardmore, PA, ca. 1931), 15, folder: Churches–Baptist–Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

[42] Because a fire destroyed the church in 1973, some historical records of the church’s history have been lost.

[43] Betty McManus, “Around Lower Merion: Ardmore’s Bethel A.M.E. Church,” *Main Line Times*, August 22, 1991, folder: Churches–African Methodist Episcopal, Bethel AME Church, record no. 4, Lower Merion Historical Society.

Welburn, a group of African Americans established the mission in response to a lack of African American churches in the area and the difficulty in traveling to churches farther away. (The closest church was in Bryn Mawr, a distance of approximately five miles.) The mission church relocated to Ardmore in the early 1900. Whereas the members of Zion and Mt. Calvary came to Ardmore and then established churches there, the members of Bethel AME intentionally settled in Ardmore as members of a preexisting religious community.

Zion Baptist Church, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, and Bethel AME began in environments that members adapted to serve their religious needs. They first brought their communal religious lives into their homes by meeting there for prayer. The first meeting of Zion, for example, was held in the home of Caroline Strothers, a woman who had followed her daughter to Ardmore from Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1892.[44] The congregation eventually purchased a former ice cream shop and paid to relocate the building from Lancaster Avenue, a thoroughfare, to a lot they purchased at the intersection at Greenfield and West Spring Avenues.[45]

All three congregations chose lots that were part of residential neighborhoods. Zion Baptist selected a plot at the intersection of Greenfield and West Spring Avenues, a site bordered by houses on three sides but within sight of the Autocar Companies road-testing, paint, and repair buildings. While the land was first the site for the ice cream shop

---

[44] Merrill, *The Strother Family*, 5–6.

[45] Mt. Calvary also began in the home of one of its members, Flora Woodson, before congregants looked to construct their own church. Cunningham, "Historical Sketch of the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church," 10.

the congregation relocated, it was eventually home to a newly constructed church building. Mt. Calvary and Bethel AME were located on opposite sides of Walnut Street, an entirely residential street lined with identical brick twin houses with small setbacks. Rhoda Welburn's history of Bethel AME notes that Walnut Street had a number of qualities desirable for the congregants relocating from Newtown Square to Ardmore. She writes, "One day Reverend Oliver [the group's minister at the time] came and said 'I have found six lots, handy to a trolley line and handy for a church.'" Oliver's assessment of the land in Ardmore considered not only the availability of space for a church but also opportunities for housing and access to transportation that could connect residents to other suburban districts and to Philadelphia. Indeed, several members of the church, including Welburn, purchased houses on Walnut Avenue.[46]

The churches' decisions about where to build implied that the proper place of a church was within a residential area. The connections between home and church had practical and theological significance. With churches located within a short distance of their homes, congregants could easily walk to church for religious services, meetings, or special events. They could also participate in church life within a neighborhood context where African Americans were a sizable part of the population and exercised greater levels of agency than in other geographic areas of the Main Line. The locations of churches on residential streets where African Americans lived also followed a broader tradition, developed in the late nineteenth century, of integrating churches into the

[46] 1920 Census*,* Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, Lower Merion Township, enumeration district 109, sheet 12A.

suburban residential landscape.[47] There were also theological connections between church and home: while churches increasingly addressed families, religious thinkers also elevated the family and the home as a central site of Christian development.[48]

Increasing financial resources allowed churches to transition into permanent spaces dedicated to worship. Given the financial resources required and the restricted availability of mortgages in this time period, a completed church was a significant financial accomplishment for Zion, Mt. Calvary, and Bethel churches. A church had to raise monies for a variety of expenses that included land, labor, building supplies, furnishings, and (in some cases) architects' fees; church members financed these expenses through their contributions and offerings. At Mt. Calvary, the full repayment of the church's mortgage was cause for celebration, and "in January 1922 [the mortgage] was burned amidst thanksgiving and joy."[49] At Mt. Calvary as well as at Zion and Bethel, the result was a building purchased collectively that would serve the religious and secular needs of current and future African Americans in Ardmore and beyond.

---

[47] Jeanne Kilde, "Spiritual Armories on the New Suburban Landscape," in *When Church Became Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84–111, especially 86–87. Kilde notes that churches increasingly decided to build in suburban residential areas starting in the late 1800s. The congregations on which Kilde focuses relocated from cities to suburban areas following their parishioners. The integration of churches into residential areas established a trend that African Americans in Ardmore, who already lived in suburbs at the time they established churches, built upon. While Kilde's analysis is focused on parishioners who depart cities for suburbs, this case study of Ardmore focuses on African American suburbanites who established suburban churches.

[48] Jeanne Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 148–49.

[49] Cunningham, "Historical Sketch of the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church," 15.

Churches provided expanded opportunities for African Americans to shape and control the physical environment to serve their communal needs. All three African American churches in Ardmore were constructed specifically for the African American congregants who would utilize the church. Church leaders and members made decisions about how the church would be oriented on the lot, what the exterior and interior would look like, how many the church would accommodate, and what types spaces they wanted to include. In other areas of life, African Americans had limited chances to shape the layout and design of the spaces they utilized: many African Americans rented spaces that others owned, and those who purchased often bought houses designed and built by developers. With a church, however, African Americans collectively conceived of and constructed a shared physical space. From the start, they made decisions about the design of the buildings in which they would worship and fellowship, and they witnessed the materialization of this vision. At a time when architects designed only a small portion of buildings in the United States and many churches were built from mail-order plans, Zion Baptist Church commissioned the Philadelphia-based firm of Baily and Truscott to design the new church. Baily and Truscott were active on the Main Line and designed at least thirty residential, secular, and religious buildings in the area, including the Church of the Good Shepherd in Rosemont and the Haverford Quaker Meeting.[50] By engaging the services of Baily and Truscott, Zion asserted that they had the collective financial means to commission architects and connected their church with the firm's prestige. This

[50] "Baily and Truscott (fl. 1890–1940) Architects," The Anatheum of Philadelphia, accessed December 3, 2013, http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm?ArchitectId=A0039.

set the church apart from many buildings in South Ardmore where architect-designed buildings were less common than in wealthier sections of the Main Line.

The completed church was constructed of brick, a building material common in South Ardmore's housing stock but used in the church at a larger scale. Masonry was also a material that was visibly more expensive and prestigious than wood. Decorative stained-glass windows signified the building's religious purpose and distinguished it from the dwellings that surrounded it. The highest point of the church, the pitched roof, towered over the rooflines of surrounding houses, suggesting the prestige of religious life over secular life. The new facility also included a chapel, the frame structure and former ice cream shop that had once served as the church.[51]

Mt. Calvary and Bethel were constructed of stone, the most expensive building material congregants could have chosen. The choice of stone set the buildings apart from the brick houses on the street and the dwellings in which African Americans elsewhere in Ardmore lived. While larger houses in Ardmore where white residents lived and houses and mansions elsewhere on the Main Line regularly employed stone as a building material, African American-headed households in South Ardmore rarely lived in houses constructed of stone. Pooling their resources allowed African Americans to purchase building materials and build in a style that few afforded individually. The use of stone suggested not only wealth but also strength and permanence.[52]

---

[51] Merrill, *The Strother Family*, 6.
[52] Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 107.

Figure 27. Front view of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church. n.d. First 300 Photographic Collection, record no. 584, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

Figure 28. Mt. Calvary Baptist Church main entrance. This portrait provides a sense of the scale of the building. 1956. First 300 Photographic Collection, record no. 585, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

Figure 29. An interior view of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church highlighting the pulpit, organ, and choral seating. 1937. First 300 Photographic Collection, record no. 587, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

Mt. Calvary's design was an imposing presence on Walnut Street. The building's height and width were massive, particularly in comparison to the surrounding two-story houses, and the decision to excavate the basement only partially increased Mt. Calvary's height. Some elements of the church's design projected a militant feeling: embattlements topped the tower and buttresses, and the corners of the entrance made it also seem tower-like. These elements may have been in response to the external animosity early church members perceived. Reflecting on the occasion of the church's twenty-fifth anniversary, the pastor asserted, "No church on the Main Line has had to come up under such unsympathetic attitudes and hostile environments as has Mt. Calvary, and none has enjoyed such a season of prolonged peace within its walls and prosperity within its

palaces."[53] Both the pastor's words and the building itself drew clear distinctions between outside and inside, and the building's forceful design shielded those within its walls.

Parishioners and guests could enter Mt. Calvary's sanctuary by way of stairs that led to an arched doorway, leaving the realm of the street behind and entering for worship and other activities. The church interior featured a raised pulpit framed by an arch, and the pulpits prominence signaled the importance of the pastor and preaching. In addition, a sizeable portion of the church was devoted to music and the church was organized for the visible performance of music. A metal railing marked off elevated seating for the choir, and an organ spanned almost half of the front wall commanded attention. The pipe organ, which was installed in 1925, after significant fundraising, was an incredible display of wealth. Curved pews reflected trends in auditorium like churches, and the wide (rather than long and deep) shape of the sanctuary brought parishioners closer to the pastor.[54]

There were also a basement space at Mt. Calvary, which was likely the site of Sunday school, fellowship, and special events. One of the ways the basement was

---

[53] Cunningham, "Historical Sketch of the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church," 17.

[54] As Jeanne Kilde has documented, Christian churches across denominations began to incorporate Gothic architectural references beginning in the mid-1800s; the result, Kilde argues, was the emergence of interdenominational understandings of appropriate church architecture. Kilde finds that musical performances gained increasing importance in the late nineteenth century and church design evolved in response to this and she discusses the changing relationships between sermons, musical performances, and church spaces. However, because of the role of spirituals in black experiences of enslavement, there are some particularities concerning the role of music in black churches. Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 34, 72, 75, 124, and 132–40. On the role of music in black churches, see, for instance, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, "The Performed Word: Music and the Black Church," in *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 346–81; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971).

reached was through a second exterior door, and this entrance, while lacking the ornamentation of the main entrance, was prominent and accessible to both regular churchgoers and to guests who might come for a one-time event. Over time, congregants continued to renovate and shape church spaces to meet their needs and to respond to changing circumstances. At Mt. Calvary, the spaces of the church facilitated the expanding role of the church as a site of Christian education for children and adults. Boasting about the additions financed by members, a church history wrote, "By 1919 the church had been fitted up with most of the equipment, including kindergarten rooms and every convenience necessary for church and Sunday school work."[55] Insofar as the financial contributions of congregants supported reshaping the building, they incorporated spaces beyond the sanctuary to support religious education.

Church Life

Churches were the sites of frequent activity, and religious life on the Main Line took diverse forms. Church services on Thursdays and Sundays, the days domestic servants did not work, included visits from and to other congregations and full days of religious activities. Live-in domestic servants who worked in households outside of Ardmore were among those who traveled to Ardmore for church. For instance, Josephine White worked and lived with a family in adjacent Wynnewood, but she was a member of Zion Church in Ardmore. She had Sundays following lunch off, and she utilized this time

[55] Cunningham, "Historical Sketch of the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church," 13.

to attend church in Ardmore on Sunday evenings.[56] Organizations for youth, women, and men furthered the religious education of participants and supported church services.

In addition to their religious functions, African American churches in Ardmore served as sites for cultural and political exchange. Local and visiting speakers gave lectures on education, culture, and politics that informed and musicians entertained audiences with performances; people traveled from various places to attend. Sample events at Mt. Calvary included a comedy-drama staged by a troupe called the Mr. Lincoln Harris Players, a performance by the Main Line Symphony Orchestra, and an anti-lynching meeting where the main speaker was Rev. Marshall L. Shepard, the influential and politically engaged pastor of Mt. Olivet Tabernacle Church of Philadelphia.[57] Many of the events staged at churches connected African Americans to broader intellectual currents in the region, the United States, and the world. In addition, though churches were not formal educational institutions, these events also transformed churches into centers for adult education. Churches were constructed for religious purposes, but African Americans repurposed the spaces of their churches and used them in flexible ways.

---

[56] Notes from Mary Wood's Interview with Josephine White of Ardmore, Age about 82 in 1982, folder: Black History (1) to 1999, record no. 6, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwd, PA.

[57] "Bryn Mawr and West Chester Talent at Ardmore Churches," *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 2, 1930; J. Elmer Addison, "Anti-Lynching Meeting Held at Ardmore," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 22, 1934; Ardmore Briefs, *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 13, 1928; Karl Ellis Johnson, "'Trouble Won't Last': Black Church Activism in Postwar Philadelphia," in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 256.

Some presentations focused on travel and educated African Americans about countries in Europe and the Middle East using words and images. While many African Americans had migrated within the United States, few would have had chances to travel abroad. Such lectures provided opportunities to experience foreign countries through the perspectives of African Americans who had traveled there. In 1912, W. G. Parks gave a lecture at Zion entitled "What I Saw and Heard While Abroad," and his presentation was likely to have taken place in Zion's chapel, the frame structure that had previously served as the sanctuary. Parks was a distinguished visitor: he served as pastor of Union Baptist Church in Philadelphia, and he held leadership positions in the National Baptist Convention and on the board of the Downingtown Industrial School.[58]

In addition to discussing his travels in Rome, London, and Paris, Parks also discussed his travels in the Holy Land. Parks garnered national attention for his travels to the Middle East, because he was reportedly one of only nine black Baptist preachers who had traveled to the Middle East by 1911.[59] Through his lecture, Parks offered a vision of the Holy Land as a living, rather than historical, place. Speaking of his evening at Zion Baptist, the Tribune noted, "he went on to tell in marvelous descriptive language how he felt inspired a new when he stood in the River Jordan where Christ was baptized." Parks's audience may have previously heard or read the Bible verses describing this

---

[58] "Churches and Their Pastors, Zion Baptist Church, Ardmore," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 10, 1912.

[59] N. H. Pius, *An Outline of Baptist History: A Splendid Reference Work for Busy Workers: A Record of the Struggles and Triumphs of Baptist Pioneers and Builders* (Nashville, TN: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1911), 103, Documenting the American South, accessed May 26, 2015, http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/pius/pius.html.

scene,[60] but Parks's talk animated sites like the Jordan River that formed the settings of sermons and biblical readings. The *Philadelphia Tribune* reported that the talk was well received: Parks "held his audience spell-bound for one hour and a half, and they shouted 'Talk on! Talk on!' as he took his seat." Though they were there for a lecture, audience members engaged Parks from their seats in ways reminiscent of how congregants might have engaged their minister during formal church services.

Other travel lectures departed from religious themes, and in February of 1932 Wilma Lucas discussed her travels throughout Europe, which included England, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, and France.[61] Lucas's was a multimedia presentation that integrated projection technology and instrumentation. Local residents Richard Nelson and Girard Nelson participated in staging the event while a mistress of ceremonies provided order to the program. While Nelson operated a projection device called a radioptican, Girard "accompanied with incidental music on the program." The presentation transformed the Zion into a theater-like setting: a mistress of ceremonies who guided the program, images projected onto a wall or a screen, and dimmed lights to enhance the viewing of the illustrations. Lucas's use of words, images, and sounds evoked the places to which she had traveled for audience members who were unlikely ever to experience these sites firsthand. Those in attendance at such a lecture might have seen this as an opportunity to demonstrate their engagement in issues beyond Ardmore and the United States, deepen their knowledge of

---

[60] Matthew 3:13–17.

[61] "Gives Travelogue at Ardmore Church," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 18, 1932.

the world, socialize with peers, or "be seen" at an event with a prominent guest in an effort to establish or maintain class standing.

Zion, Mt. Calvary, and Bethel also hosted debates that allowed participants to engage in exchange about social, political, and intellectual topics. Literary and debate societies organized programs in churches that included musical performances, recitations, and debates. Other black communities in the United States had similar organizations, and their activities were intended to promote not only reading but also rhetorical and oratorical skills and critical thinking.[62] In her study of African American literary societies, Elizabeth McHenry argues that African Americans saw these organizations as ways to "[prepare] for the demands of citizenship and the particular challenges of the twentieth century," "cultivate a new form of cultural and political literacy," and counter racist perceptions that African Americans were unfit for citizenship.[63] While the literary societies on which McHenry focuses emphasized intraracial politics, the Ardmore Literary and Debating Society generally focused on broader political and social questions.[64]

---

[62] For a discussion of the skills of post–Civil War black literary societies that sought to develop in their members, see Elizabeth McHenry, "Literary Coalitions in the Age of Washington," in *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: NC, Duke University Press, 2002), 141–86.

[63] Ibid.., 141–42.

[64] African American literacy societies date back to the early 1800s, and Philadelphia was an early center of such organizations. Eight African American literary societies were formed in Philadelphia between 1837 and 1841. Dorothy Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828–1846," *Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 4 (1936): 557.

Debates rotated through different African American churches on the Main Line. Like churches, these debates facilitated connections on multiple levels. Residents connected with others who lived in Ardmore as they prepared for debates, the debates themselves brought together African Americans living in different sections of the Main Line, and African Americans engaged with national and global issues. Each Main Line town had its own debating groups, and debaters from different towns would meet in the evenings to debate a particular question before audiences. In Ardmore, these meeting places were churches. At Zion, the chapel annex might have provided space for debates, while at Mt. Calvary attendees might have gathered in the basement fellowship space. The topics of the debates spanned a range of concerns. Some issues, such as "Which is the most Benefit to the Country, Minister, Doctor, or Statesman?," were more general, while others grappled specifically with current events. One set of debates in 1915, for instance considered whether the United States should remain neutral in World War I and another pondered whether "the disarmament of a nation would be the better means toward peace."[65] The debates, which fostered cross-denominational and regional relationships, provided opportunities for black residents to engage with national and global issues at a time when racial discrimination limited pathways for participation in formal politics. The debates also underscored the churches' roles in supporting political and cultural exchange. Debates also had significance for individuals and were a reflection on the class status of those who participated. Success required a broad knowledge base

[65] Wayne, PA News, Philadelphia Tribune, August 7, 1915, and Bryn Mawr Items, *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 21, 1915.

that encompassed current events and foreign policy, strong oral communication skills, and, very likely, the ability to read given that the organization was called the Ardmore *Literary* and Debating Society. To be a debater signaled that one was educated, whether formally or informally.

Main Line Negro Business League

In 1915, a group of men gathered in the home of James Beasley to found the Main Line Negro Business League (MLNBL), a local chapter of a national network of black business leagues. While founded in Ardmore, the league was open to African American residents throughout the Main Line.[66] The economic advancement of members in their professions and careers served as the organization's founding premise. Yet like many organizations and institutions in Ardmore, the group's endeavors quickly broadened beyond its original intentions. In addition to supporting economic advancement for its members, the organization also created opportunities for intellectual, political, and cultural engagement among African Americans in Ardmore and on the Main Line. The League Hall, a former schoolhouse purchased by the organization, served as a venue for many of these events. In the same manner that African Americans in Ardmore transformed the churches where they worshiped into sites of civic engagement, the Main Line Negro Business League made a former schoolhouse into a hub that connected African Americans in the region.

---

[66] R. A. Hayes, "How We Popularized Our Local League," in Report of National Negro Business League: Nineteenth Annual Meeting, Atlantic City, New Jersey, August 21–23, 1918, Records of the National Negro Business League, microfilm, part 1, reel 3, frame 577:269.

Booker T. Washington founded the National Negro Business League in 1900 "for the purpose of bringing our business men together for mutual help and encouragement."[67] Though the national organization emphasized entrepreneurship, the membership of the MLNBL included not only entrepreneurs but also wage earners. In his address to the national conference of Negro Business Leagues, Hayes explained, "The [word] 'business' in our title may be considered a misnomer and may be misleading." The organization instead drew its membership from across sectors, and in Ardmore it divided its membership into four classes. It gave the following breakdown of its membership in 1918:

> CLASS A—Architects, 2; Accountants, 1; Clergymen, 1; Music Teacher, 1; Physicians, 2; P.O. Clerk, 1; Salesman, 1; Produce Merchant, 1; Grocer, 1; Junk Dealer, 1; Total 13.
>
> CLASS B—Barbers, 2; Carpenters, 3; Cigar M. 1; Cooks, 2; Painters, 2; Plumbers, 1; Printer, 1; Photog., 1; Total 13.
>
> CLASS C—Auto Car Trucks, etc., 9, Landscape Gardener, Cont., 4; Ash and rubbish, 6; Total 19.

---

[67] Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business* (Boston and Chicago: Hertel, Jenkins, and Company, 1907), 2.

CLASS D—Chauffeurs, 11; Gardeners, 15; Butlers, 5; Launderers, 1; Watchman, 1; Porter, 15; Auto lab., 4; Janitors, 20; Farm Lab. 2; Fireman, 2; Laborers 15; total 91.[68]

With professional occupations like architect and doctor in Class A and service and manual labor positions like laborer and chauffeur in Class D, the division of its membership into separate "classes" produced hierarchies within the organization. Yet whether a person worked as a sole proprietor or as a chauffer, he could find a place in the league.

The goals of the MLNBL reflected the organization's occupationally diverse membership. Like the national league, the Main Line branch supported the advancement of black-owned businesses.[69] However, the goals of the MLNBL extended beyond promoting entrepreneurship to addressing the needs of a membership that included both businessmen and wage earners. For instance, to avoid "one man undercutting another," the League aimed "to set a wage scale for the men in their different occupations." The organization thus concerned itself both with the relationships between members and their employers or clients as well as the relationships among members.

If the Main Line League was inclusive with regard to occupational diversity, it was less so with regard to gender, and women participated only in narrow ways in the activities of the Main Line Negro Business League. The league's leadership did not include women, and it is unlikely that women held any of the positions listed in the

[68] Hayes, "How We Popularized Our Local League," 270.

[69] Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 4, 1917; "A Resume of the Main Line Negro Business League," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 12, 1927.

organization's so-called classes. Nationally, Booker T. Washington had issued his invitation to the first meeting of the National Negro Business League to both businessmen and businesswomen, and while women participated in significantly smaller numbers than men, women were active members of other chapters of the organization.[70] On the Main Line, women were engaged in business enterprises primarily as independent laundresses but also as seamstresses, hairdressers, and in other trades. However, the men of the MLNBL seem to have excluded women from formal membership in the

---

[70] The chair of the local committee for the conference, S. E. Courtney, opened the meeting by reading Washington's conference call. National Negro Business League, "First Day, First Session," in *Proceedings of the National Negro Business League: Its First Meeting, Held in Boston, Massachusetts, August 23 and 24, 1900* (Boston: J. R. Hamm, 1901), 7–8, accessed May 19, 2015, https://archive.org/details/proceedingsofnat00nati_0. Alberta Moore-Smith of Chicago, the only woman to hold an executive position at the league's founding, served as a vice president. During the first meeting, she gave a talk entitled "Women's Development in Business," and during the second meeting she presented "Negro Women's Business Clubs: A Factor in the Solution of the Vexed Problem." Alberta Moore-Smith, "Women's Development in Business," in *Proceedings of the National Negro Business League: Its First Meeting, Held in Boston, Massachusetts, August 23 and 24, 1900* (Boston: J. R. Hamm, 1901), 131–141, accessed May 19, 2015, https://archive.org/details/proceedingsofnat00nati_0; "Negro Women's Business Clubs: A Factor in the Solution of the Vexed Problem" in *Report of the Second Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League* (Chicago: R. S. Abbot Publishing Company, 1901), 60–64, accessed May 31, 2015, https://books.google.com/books?id=ubo6AQAAMAAJ&. For a discussion of Moore-Smith's comments, see Tiffany Melissa Gill, "'I Had My Own Business . . . So I Didn't Have to Worry': Beauty Salons, Beauty Culturists, and the Politics of African American Female Entrepreneurship," in *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender and Culture in Modern America*, ed. Phillip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 170–71. At the conference Robert Hayes attended in 1918, men constituted the majority of those in attendance, but Hayes and others from the Main Line chapter also encountered a handful of women from other states and local chapters. For instance, out of a total of fifty-one participants from Pennsylvania listed in the meeting attendance rolls, eight were women. National Negro Business League, Report of National Negro Business League: Nineteenth Annual Meeting, Atlantic City, New Jersey, August 21–23, 1918, microfilm, part 1, reel 3, frame 615–16.

organization, and women participated in the league only as guest speakers and as audience members at public events. This suggests that the members of the MLNBL did not regard women's work as "business," that women should focus their attention on domestic tasks, or that they regarded the MLNBL as an organization that should focus specifically on the concerns of men.[71] Whatever the motivation, the result was the same: the MLNBL excluded women, concentrating on racial rather than on racial and gender advancement.

In addition to focusing on matters of employment, the MLNBL also tackled social and civic issues relevant to African Americans more broadly. Its leadership participated in political processes at the local and state levels. For instance, a league member traveled to the state legislature in Harrisburg to voice the league's support of the Asbury Bill, a civil rights bill introduced by black state legislators Andrew Stevens, Jr., and John Asbury.[72] The Asbury Bill, which was ultimately defeated, was highly contested, and lobbyists and trade associations, individuals, and organizations voiced their objections or support to state legislators.[73] The members of the MLNBL supported African American

---

[71] For a discussion of the ways the National Negro Business League and African American leaders linked black masculinity and entrepreneurship and the rise of organizations for black businesswomen, see Tiffany M. Gill, "Beauty Pioneers: Racial Uplift and Gender in the Creation of a Black Business Community," in *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 12–18.

[72] "A Resume of Main Line Business League," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 12, 1927.

[73] A civil rights law passed in Pennsylvania in 1887 had serious limitations: it restricted damages to one hundred dollars and the provisions of the law made discrimination difficult to prove. Prior to the introduction of the 1921 Asbury Bill, white and black legislators had made unsuccessful attempts to pass meaningful civil rights

advancement through actions that would impact their own lives and the lives of other African Americans.

In 1917, the league purchased a building where it could hold regular meetings and special events, and the building was instrumental in supporting the organization's goals of African American development. Though the organization considered sites in Ardmore, it eventually purchased a building in adjacent Haverford that had been constructed in 1876 as "Haverford Public School No. 5."[74] The building, which became known as the League Hall, provided a visible, secular space where African Americans could gather and where they exercised control. It quickly developed into a site that served African Americans beyond the league's membership. The league utilized its hall to bring African Americans together to examine political and social issues relevant to its members *and* to the larger African American population.

An individual coming from Ardmore to attend an event at the League Hall could have followed Haverford or Lancaster Avenues to Buck Avenue and might have traveled the one-and-a-half-mile journey by car, foot, or public transportation.[75] Once on Buck

---

legislation in the state legislature. Eric Ledell Smith, "'Asking for Justice and Fair Play': African American State Legislators and Civil Rights in Early Twentieth-Century Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History* 63 (1996): 169–203.

[74] A stone found in the building indicates the date of construction and the building's name. For a discussion of the league's process of acquiring the building, see "A Resume of the Main Line Business League," *Philadelphia Tribune,* February 12, 1927.

[75] The two most direct forms of public transportation between Ardmore and Haverford were the high-speed trolley line that ran parallel to Haverford Avenue and, from 1920 onward, the buses that ran along Lancaster Avenue. The Philadelphia and Western Railroad Company ran the trolley, while Frank Carlin and later the Montgomery Bus Company operated the bus line. Jean Barth Toll and Michael J. Schager,

Avenue, he would have traversed a street that straddled distinct suburban forms. The west side of the street opposite the League Hall recalled the sections of Ardmore where African Americans lived: a row of frame, detached, and twin houses on narrow plots lined this side of the street, and these dwellings marked the edge of the Preston neighborhood populated by African American, Irish, and Italian residents. The east side of Buck Lane contained a series of undeveloped building plots, three sets of twin houses (slightly larger than those they faced), and the League Hall building. Standing in front of the League Hall property, a league member would have observed a one-story brick building with stone foundation and gabled roof of wooden shingles; the L-shaped building was set back from the street in the middle of a one-acre property and surrounded by what League secretary Hayes had referred to as "green carpeted soil."[76] In addition, the League Hall abutted the rear yards of several properties, which would have added to the feeling of spaciousness that surrounded the League Hall.

Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years (Norristown, PA: Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983), 1:333-334.

[76] When board members from the National Negro Business League visited the League Hall, Hayes invited guests to "review the architecture and liberal appointments of our building—move with ease and freedom and inspect every nook and corner and if you crave a change of air and scenery go without and loiter about our acre of green carpeted soil . . ." "Main Liners Entertain Board of National Negro Business League," *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 28, 1920.

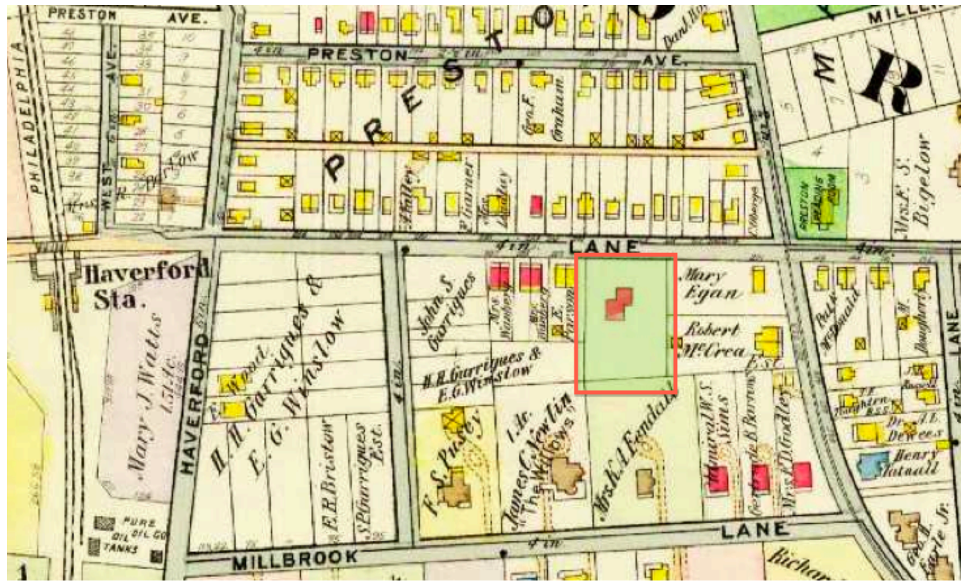

Figure 30. Main Line Negro Business League hall site. The league hall, highlighted, was situated in a residential neighborhood in Haverford, a suburb adjacent to Ardmore. Ellis Kiser, J. M. Lathrop, and Milton R. Yerkes, *Atlas of Properties on Main Line Pennsylvania Railroad from Overbrook to Paoli* (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1920), plate 13.

League members and guests might have attended a function in any one of the hall's three spaces: Outside the 234-square-foot veranda provided space for receptions. Inside the building, the League used a smaller 1,044-square-foot room as another space for receptions and utilized a larger 1,239 square-foot room as an auditorium.[77] Artifacts significant to the business league and to members' identities as African Americans adorned the walls. A portrait of founder Booker T. Washington and the league's charter linked the Main Line branch to the National Negro Business League, while images of poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar and abolitionist Frederick Douglas underscored larger connections to African American culture and history.[78]

---

[77] Hayes, "How We Popularized Our Local League," 270–71.
[78] "Main Liners Entertain Board of National Negro Business League," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 28, 1920.

Ownership of the League Hall was a point of pride for members and offered a tangible symbol of economic progress by African Americans, a tenet of the organization. At the time of its establishment, no other league branch possessed a similar space, and the national organization's general secretary praised this achievement when he presented the organization with its charter.[79] The Ardmore Notes column encouraged African Americans to hold events in this black-owned venue, and Robert Hayes, secretary of the Main Line branch, proudly cited its fifteen-thousand-dollar value in an accounting of "Negro wealth of the Main Line."[80] The League Hall demonstrated the thrift and economic success of this African American organization and its members.

The League's purchase and adaptation of the former schoolhouse also challenged spatially defined racial barriers. Though many African Americans lived on the west side of Buck Lane, none lived on the east side where the former school was located.[81] In practice, the street demarcated an edge of African American residences, and white residents reportedly opposed the purchase of the schoolhouse by an African American organization. Recalling the League's challenges, the *Philadelphia Tribune* wrote, "On the account of stiff opposition by the prejudiced whites who did not want colored people on the east side of Buck Road, they had to do some shrewd maneuvering to secure the

[79] Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 27, 1918.

[80] Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 14, 1920; Hayes, "How We Popularized Our Local League," 268–69.

[81] 1920 Census, Pennsylvania, Delware County, Haverford Township, enumeration district 167, sheets 2B–5A.

property, but they did it."[82] By overcoming the protests of white residents and purchasing the school, the Business League brought African Americans into a new section of Haverford, and ownership of the building symbolized the group's successful efforts to challenge an instance of racial discrimination.

Both the building's interior and its exterior embodied qualities associated with the mythic country estates of the Main Line: a deep setback, generous grounds, and a spacious interior.[83] However, the League Hall represented an opportunity for African Americans to interact with a space that recalled some of the same physical qualities found in larger Main Line estates in new ways. Those in building trades and landscape designed and created such spaces, and those who worked in domestic service labored in them as employees without ownership. At the League Hall, by contrast, African Americans of varied occupations could take full possession of an African American–owned space that embodied the Main Line suburban ideal, and their presence there was not contingent on employment. The League Hall and its grounds represented an environment of leisure rather than work, and African Americans existed there as insiders rather than as outsiders. They had the freedom to enter through the front door rather than the service entrance, to

---

[82] "A Resume of the Main Line Business League," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 12, 1927.

[83] In the absence of an available image, my analysis of the League Hall building is based on the real estate atlas and on the textual description given in R. A. Hayes, "How We Popularized Our Local League," 268–69.

move about the interiors and exteriors of the hall as they wished or, as MLNBL secretary Hayes once suggested, simply to loiter without productive intention.[84]

The league hosted programming that addressed political and social issues from African American perspectives. The organization's annual celebration of Booker T. Washington's birthday, which coincided with the branch's Founders Day, was the organization's signature event. The event typically featured an address by a locally or nationally prominent African American. Speakers included scholar W. E. B. Du Bois and Cheyney School principal Leslie Pinckney. At the 1919 celebration the league hosted a nationally significant speaker, Dr. Ernest Lyon. Lyon had served as US minister to Liberia and then as consul-general of Liberia to the United States. Speaking shortly after World War I, he addressed the contradictions of African American military service for the cause of democracy abroad in World War I at the same time that African Americans were denied the benefits of democracy in the United States, and his audience may have included veterans for whom this contradiction was particularly salient. Lyon, who spoke from an internationally informed perspective, provided an opportunity for African Americans on the Main Line to engage with larger questions of international affairs, democracy, citizenship, and race.[85]

---

[84] "Main Liners Entertain Board of National Negro Business League," *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 28, 1920.

[85] "'To Hell With Such Democracy!' Says Dr. Ernest Lyons," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 12, 1919; Hayes, "'How We Popularized Our Local League," 270–71. Decades after Lyon's address during World War II, the "Double V" campaign would take up the very contradictions that Lyon described. See, for instance, Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 210–11.

The League Hall became a core institution for African Americans on the Main Line beyond the Business League. The building expanded the range of African American–owned public spaces in the area[86] and, significantly, it provided another alternative to white-owned event spaces.[87] African American organizations and groups outside the league utilized the space for social, intellectual, and political exchange. For instance, the hall served as a meeting space for a fraternal organization, as a concert venue to raise monies for an African American institution of higher education, and as the site of a political rally to support a white candidate backed by leading African Americans and courting African American voters.[88] The capacity of a spacious venue like the League Hall to host such functions was a point of pride for some African Americans, who associated the building with racial progress. Indeed, in at least one instance the Ardmore Notes columnist chastised the organizers of an event for choosing a white-owned space and bemoaned the lost opportunity to hold an event in the "League Hall, which is owned and controlled by Negro Corporation of the Main Line."[89]

Conclusions

During the first three decades of the 1900s, the African American population in Ardmore grew significantly from a handful of households to a population of more than a thousand by 1930. As their numbers grew, African Americans established institutions and

---

[86] Hayes, "How We Popularized Our Local League," 270–71; Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 12, 1920, and March 20, 1920.

[88] Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 8, 1918; Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 20, 1920; Ardmore News, *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 18, 1918.

[89] Ardmore Notes, *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 14, 1920.

organizations like the Main Line Relief Association, Zion, Mt. Calvary, and Bethel churches, and the Main Line Negro Business League to support the intellectual, economic, educational development of African Americans in Ardmore and beyond. Shaping the built environment was integral to the work of these organizations. Yet their efforts remained largely focused on specific sites like the Downingtown campus, churches, and the League Hall. While Zion Baptist, Mt. Calvary Baptist, and Bethel AME churches continued to serve Ardmore's residents in the decades following World War II, both the Main Line Relief Association and the Main Line Negro Business League disappear from historical records in the early 1930s. However, all of these organizations established a tradition of action-oriented civic engagement. They formed a spatial nexus across Ardmore and the Main Line through which African Americans, both collectively and individually, negotiated social, cultural, gender, and racial relations. In the decades following World War II, new organizations would emerge that would continue to shape and redefine space to serve African American needs. However, the scale of these efforts would grow to encompass a comprehensive vision for all of South Ardmore. The final chapter considers these efforts.

Chapter 5: Postwar Activism in Ardmore

Writing in 1972 as president of the Ardmore Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit organization composed of community leaders, Nolan Atkinson asserted, "We are confident and certain that with your help in the centennial year of Ardmore's birth, we will build sixteen new homes of which you can be proud, and about which historians will one day write."[1] The homes to which Atkinson referred exemplified the mounting efforts of African American residents to attain affordable housing in South Ardmore and to shape South Ardmore into a neighborhood that better satisfied their needs. Two years later, in the spring of 1974, a crowd of over fifty people gathered on a lawn at the intersection of Ardmore Avenue and West Spring Avenue to break ground on what would be called the ArdSpring Condominiums. In the weeks that followed the groundbreaking, construction workers would begin to lay cinder blocks that would form the walls of the sixteen-unit condominium project intended to expand affordable housing opportunities for African Americans in South Ardmore. A sign at the construction site declared the project "A Community Effort."

The ArdSpring Condominiums represent one of many efforts initiated by African Americans in the postwar era to ensure that South Ardmore would be a place that could equitably support current and future generations of African Americans. The 1950s and 1960s were a time of growing political activity in areas of housing, zoning, education,

[1] Nolan Atkinson to Ardmore Community Development Corporation supporters, 1972, folder: Ardmore History (1) to 1980, record no. 43, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

and recreation. The ArdSpring Condominiums and other projects focused on expanding and preserving Ardmore's affordable housing stock. The NAACP and others organized to address concerns about segregation in the Ardmore Avenue elementary school (which eventually resulted in the closure of the school and the bussing of African American students to elementary schools outside of Ardmore), the Lower Merion School District's hiring practices, the limited representation of African Americans in the district's curriculum, and the quality of advising African Americans in high school received.[2] Others worked to develop recreational opportunities for youth with an awareness of the potential for violence amid the social unrest of the late 1960s.[3] This chapter focuses on the interrelated issues of housing and zoning to explore how African Americans assumed a new sense of agency to shape the built environment to meet their needs. For nearly a century, the Pennsylvania Railroad, civic associations, developers, housing reformers, and others had advanced evolving visions of Ardmore and its place on the Main Line. Earlier studies about Ardmore were financed by private entities like the Main Line Housing Association and the Main Line Citizens Association in 1912 and 1920, respectively, and offered prescriptive solutions with little substantive input from South Ardmore's African American residents. As discussed in chapter 3, the plans sometimes

---

[2] For an example of activism in education, see, for instance, *Main Line NAACP Newsletter* 1, nos. 1–2 (1966), Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Branch Files, part 29, series C: Branch Newsletters and Regional Field Office Files, 1966–1971, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

[3] Reflecting on the historical and political context that surrounded the establishment of the Soul Shack, a community center for youth, one interview subject noted, "'68 was the year of the riots. Everybody was a little nervous in terms of establishment-type people."

included African Americans but described them primarily as servants. In the 1960s, African Americans started to develop a broad vision for Ardmore that, in contrast to previous visions, centered on priorities they identified.

African American civic leaders and organizations working in Ardmore in the 1960s had clear aspirations for South Ardmore: They envisioned Ardmore as a place with well-maintained residential properties, affordable housing, an intergenerational population, and a decidedly residential character. Earlier views of what Ardmore should be similarly emphasized well-maintained residences, but the emphasis on affordable housing and an intergenerational population was distinctive. The realities of Ardmore in the 1960s and 1970s diverged from this vision as outside commercial interests competed with residential needs, some households struggled to find and maintain affordable housing, and younger generations departed. Beginning in the late 1950s, residents set about reconciling the differences between their aspirations and their realities through individual and collective actions in the areas of zoning, planning, and affordable housing.

The ways African Americans worked to achieve their goals built on processes established by Ardmore's early organizations. Like their predecessors of the first decades of the twentieth century, African Americans worked collectively to improve the lives of African Americans and demonstrated commitments to self-help. However, the direction of these efforts in the postwar era took new and more wide-reaching forms as African Americans focused their attentions not only on specific sites but also on strengthening the larger neighborhood in which they lived. Organizations also pursued new avenues to

effect change as they devised actionable plans and mobilized private resources to address gaps they perceived in public and private offerings.

The issues with which African Americans grappled and the means they utilized to address these paralleled processes unfolding in urban centers like nearby Philadelphia. In cities across the United States, shortages of affordable housing were widespread, urban renewal spawned debates about control over land use in African-American neighborhoods, and community-based organizations emerged to advocate for citizens' interests. Similarly, African Americans in Ardmore contended with a scarcity of affordable housing and an increase of commercial activity and formed organizations to address these challenges. While studies of this time period have typically characterized matters of affordable housing, land use, and community activism as urban, this chapter reveals that these phenomena unfolded in suburban settings, too. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates the ways African American residents mobilized to take control over the planning of their suburb in the 1960s and 1970s so it would accord with their vision for suburban life.

This chapter draws on archival sources and interviews to examine postwar activism in Ardmore. As African American residents worked to shape Ardmore at the neighborhood level, they increasingly worked with municipal entities in ways they had not in the prewar era. Thus, records of public agencies like the Lower Merion Township board of commissioners and the planning department provide records of events from policy perspectives and suggest the changing ways African Americans interacted with the township. Many of the efforts in which African Americans engaged garnered press

coverage in local and regional newspapers, and these serve as important sources. In the prewar era, the activities of African Americans in Ardmore were found almost exclusively in the pages of Philadelphia's African American newspaper, the *Philadelphia Tribune*. In the postwar era, Philadelphia's general audience newspapers included more coverage of issues impacting African Americans in Ardmore. Newspapers like the local *Main Line Time*s and the Philadelphia-based *Evening Bulletin* provide insight into how African Americans publicly presented their efforts and how their work was received. By documenting change over time, real estate atlases and fire insurance surveys provide historical context for debates surrounding Ardmore's built environment. Architectural plans and buildings developed in the 1960s and 1970s reveal the aspirations that some African Americans had for South Ardmore. Interviews with those who lived in Ardmore and worked with community organization in the 1960s and 1970s provide first-hand perspectives on the issues with which African Americans contended in this era.

Postwar Developments in Ardmore

To contextualize the actions of African Americans in Ardmore, it is important to understand the broader Main Line context in the postwar era. New patterns of suburbanization took root on the Main Line as developers, responding to the demands of a severe housing shortage, subdivided the estates of the Main Line's earlier years to build comparatively smaller houses for upper-middle-class homebuyers.[4] In 1930, the

[4] Not only had slowed housing production during World War II limited the availability of housing for newly formed families, but Philadelphia, like other Northern cities, experienced an influx of Southern black migrants between 1940 and 1960 that many white residents viewed in negative terms. These factors came together with the

population of Lower Merion Township had numbered 35,166, and by 1960 it reached 59,420.[5] Even as there were population changes, the dominant narrative of the Main Line that developers and boosters established in the 1870s persisted in popular culture and positioned new suburban developments within this narrative. In 1950, for instance, James Michener's profile of the Main Line in *Holiday Magazine* exemplified continuities in the popular Main Line image. Michener asserted that the Main Line had evolved into a "new Main Line"; he drew continuities between the ultra rich of the Main Line's fabled past and a "new aristocratic class" that replicated past patterns at a less extravagant scale. Thus, "Instead of a huge pile of masonry costing millions, the Main Line aristocrat now prefers a forty-thousand-dollar house; and in place of thirty servants he tries hard to find—and keep—one. . . . Families have two cars instead of seven."[6] Though they had

---

Federal Housing Administration's preference for insuring loans on suburban homes to spur widespread suburbanization in the United States. The Main Line, with open lands as well as large estates that could be subdivided, offered ideal building sites for the post-World War II suburban housing boom. In addition, houses constructed could draw on associations with the Main Line's legacy. Though there were a few exceptions, most residents moved into homes that were smaller when compared to the grand estates of earlier years, particularly as the cost of maintaining extremely large houses proved too much due to changing tax laws. See John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920–1974* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race Housing and Chicago, 1940–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Kenneth Jackson, "The Baby Boom and the Age of the Subdivision" in *Crabgrass Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 231–45; William Morrison, *The Main Line: Country Houses of Philadelphia's Storied Suburb, 1870–1930* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2002), 179.

[5] "Population," in *A Plan for Lower Merion Township 1937*, by Lower Merion Township (Ardmore, PA: Lower Merion Township, 1937), 34; "Population," in *Lower Merion 1979 Comprehensive Plan Volume 1*, by Lower Merion Township (Ardmore, PA: Lower Merion Township, 1979), C1—both accessed May 28, 2015, http://www.lowermerion.org/Index.aspx?page=599.

taken on new, comparatively more modest forms, the well-designed homes, well-to-do white families, and green spaces remained. While the era of the grand estates had passed, their legacy continued to shape representations of the Main Line.

New suburban development on the Main Line was not equally accessible to African Americans. Increasing the number of African Americans living in suburban areas like the Main Line became a centerpiece of organizations working to end housing discrimination and ensure open and fair housing practices.[7] Civil rights groups worked

---

[6] James Michener, "The Main Line," *Holiday Magazine*, April 1950, 39.

[7] Organizations worked both with buyers and real estate agents. Project For Real Estate Equality (FREE) represented a coalition that included churches, civil rights groups, community groups, and organizations working in fair housing and operated under the umbrella of the Fair Housing Council of Delaware Valley. Project FREE opened its Main Line headquarters in Ardmore, and its chief cause was to challenge the discriminatory practices of the Main Line Board of Realtors (which it identified as a "one of the most influential real estate organizations in the country") in the hopes that this would influence other Boards of Realtors in the region. Project FREE employed varied strategies, including a march, pickets, private negotiations with the Board of Realtors, and an advertisement campaign. "Fair Housing News June–July 1966," Series 4: Publications, box 2, folder 5; "Minutes of Project Free Briefing, February 3, 1966," Series 5: Projects and Initiatives, box 2, folder 20—all at Fair Housing Council of Delaware Valley Records, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

The Quaker-affiliated Friends Suburban Housing Committee established a real estate firm to list and sell houses and described itself as "a licensed real estate firm dedicated to overcoming discrimination in housing." In addition to working with white communities to improve receptiveness to black neighbors, the organization solicited listings from sellers willing to sell their houses without discriminatory restrictions and helped middle- and upper-income black families find suburban houses. A 1956 Friends Suburban housing report showed that the Main Line was the single most desired location among prospective homebuyers, identified by twenty of forty-five applicants seeking suburban housing as their preferred area. Though these organizations served African Americans outside of Ardmore, churches did lend their support. For instance, Leonard Jones, pastor of minister of Zion Baptist Church, served as a board member of Friends Suburban Housing and met with Project FREE. Both Mount Calvary and Zion Baptist churches were sponsors of Project FREE, paying membership fees, and provided meeting

primarily with African Americans living in Philadelphia who sought to relocate from overcrowded urban neighborhoods to the suburbs, including the Main Line. On the Main Line, these organizations worked to find housing opportunities outside the Main Line's traditional centers of black homeownership (such as South Ardmore) so as not to reinforce historical patterns of de facto segregation.

Industrial and commercial development also impacted the Main Line as industries and corporations left cities for suburban locations and chain stores established branches in growing suburban shopping centers. While industrial areas had long existed on the Main Line, the increased presence of these new commercial and industrial developments on the Main Line was part of a national trend. In the context of the Main Line, the growth of industry and commerce was in tension with an idealized notion of the Main Line that ignored its own industrial past. Some residents saw expanded commercial and industrial land uses as antithetical to the Main Line and regarded them as a threats to the suburban nature of their communities. A 1955 report published by the local newspaper, the *Main Line Times,* described some residents' fears that "their communities [were] losing their

---

space for Project FREE. "Minority Housing–Friends Suburban Housing," April 1958–March 1961, Housing Association of the Delaware Valley Records, Series I: URB 3, box 180, URB 3/V/1924; "Active List of Applicants—45," Housing Association of the Delaware Valley Records, Series I: URB 3, box 180, URB 3/V/1923; "List of Project FREE Sponsors," August 24, 1966, Fair Housing Council of Delaware Valley Records, Series 5: Projects and Initiatives, box 2, folder 19; "Minutes of FREE Project Committee Meeting on March 16, 1966," Fair Housing Council of Delaware Valley Records, Series 5: Projects and Initiatives, box 2, folder 20; Karen Batt, "Social Welfare Policies and Services," January 15, 1967, Series I: Administration, box 1, folder 1—all at Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

suburbanism."[8] For these residents, "suburbanism" meant low-density single-family houses and minimal commercial development. However, at a smaller scale, areas of the Main Line like downtown Ardmore had long been centers of commerce and industry, and what residents actually seemed to fear was the incursion of such commercialism into new areas.

As the broader Main Line context was shifting there were both continuities and changes within Ardmore. Most of Ardmore was already subdivided by the 1930s; however, the eastern and southern edges of Ardmore, which were outside of the areas where black residents lived, saw the construction of new housing that was part of the wider pattern of suburban development occurring on the Main Line. [Image: Atlas Plate with new construction highlighted] Various strata of white and black residents continued to reside in Ardmore. North Ardmore remained predominantly white and more affluent, and a mix of African Americans, Italian and Irish immigrants, and US-born white residents continued to live in South Ardmore. In 1930, there were 1,040 African Americans residents in Ardmore, and by 1960 there were approximately 1,617. African Americans constituted 35 percent of the population in the South Ardmore census district with the highest concentration of black residents. African Americans lived on many of the same streets as they did in the early twentieth century, including Greenfield, Holland, Spring, Chestnut, and Simpson. While African Americans were employed in a range of fields, they remained more heavily concentrated in service positions. In 1960 the top

---

[8] *This Is the Main Line* (Ardmore, PA: Main Line Times, 1955), 38.

three areas of employment for black residents fourteen and older were domestic service, non-household service work, and what the census called as "operatives and kindred workers."[9]

There were significant changes in the commercial and industrial land use in South Ardmore. In 1953, the Autocar plant relocated to a more distant suburb, and a large fire during the demolition of the plant in 1956 sped the destruction of the former factory buildings.[10] The plant had occupied stretches of Lancaster and Greenfield Avenues, and its removal opened significant tracts of land for development on Greenfield Avenue adjacent to where African Americans resided. Though some portions of the plant's sprawling property were first converted to other industrial uses, over time all of what had been the Autocar Factory transitioned to retail establishments. New commercial sites, including a Philadelphia Electric Company Substation and the Philadelphia Skating Club and Humane Society also entered into previously residential areas of South Ardmore

---

[9] US Census Bureau, "Race," "Occupation by Race," and "Country of Origin," all 1960, Census tracts M0053000 and M0055000, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Prepared by Social Explorer, accessed April 4, 2015, http://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1960TractDS/R10930886. The limitations of available census data necessitate an approximation for the African American population in 1960. South Ardmore spans two census tracts in the 1960 Census. While one of theses tracts includes primarily South Ardmore, the other tract includes both South Ardmore and a section of adjacent Wynnewood. Given the discriminatory housing practices of this time period, it is likely that the vast majority of African Americans listed in this census tract did live in South Ardmore rather than in Wynnewood. Domestic service, trades, and manual labor continued to represent the leading sources of employment for African Americans.

[10] Lower Merion Historical Society, *The First 300: The Amazing and Rich History of Lower Merion* (Darby, PA: Diane, 2000), 82.

more distant from Lancaster Avenue. This increased commercialization significantly shaped the political aims of African American organizations.[11]

Organizations

In the postwar era, organizations and institutions (both longstanding and new) were instrumental to African Americans' efforts to shape the built environment and to improve housing and planning in South Ardmore to meet the needs of black residents. The goals of these organizations overlapped, and at times they shared membership and leadership.[12] The decades old Main Line branch of the NAACP continued to include members from Ardmore. Another entity, the Ardmore Coalition, was established in 1968 and composed of African American residents who were members of the NAACP and Haverford College students and staff. The Ardmore Progressive Civic Association was a non-partisan group of African Americans in South Ardmore. The group liaised with township officials on behalf of South Ardmore and sought to address needs it identified in South Ardmore. In 1967 they gained membership in the predominantly white Lower Merion Federation of Civic Associations, a network of civic associations in the township. These groups functioned as intermediaries between residents and municipal government and promoted residents' interests. Each civic association represented a geographically defined area within the township, and Ardmore Progressive encompassed the area bound

---

[11] My analysis of Ardmore's changing physical environment is based on a survey of real estate atlases.

[12] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 2; Charles Montgomery, "Negro Civic Unit Is OKd by L. Merion Federation," *Evening Bulletin*, January 12, 1967, folder: Ardmore—Ardmore Progressive, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

by Linwood Avenue to the east, County Line Road to the south, Haverford College to the west, and Lancaster Avenue to the north. The Ardmore Community Development Corporation, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, focused on housing. Churches also continued to play significant roles in the individual and collective lives of African Americans but they assumed new roles. While their significance as sites of religious practice and social interaction persisted, churches increasingly reached into the formal political sphere. The spaces of Calvary and Zion Baptist served as venues for meetings and events that addressed such issues as affordable housing, planning, and discrimination. Pastors served as early interlocutors with municipal government and regularly addressed the board of commissioners.

Competing Visions: Ardmore Zoning

Since the turn of the twentieth century, Ardmore had functioned both as a center of retail and commerce and as a center of African American residential and communal life. However, in the postwar era, tensions emerged as commercial interests in Ardmore expanded and African American political engagement with planning issues increased. Where some saw opportunities for commercial growth, many African Americans feared for the survival of their residential neighborhoods and employed various strategies in response. In this context, African Americans articulated a residentially centered vision of South Ardmore in local politics throughout the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s. Early efforts to maintain the residential character of South Ardmore focused on zoning. Over time, however, African Americans developed a comprehensive vision for South Ardmore that linked education, planning, economic development, and affordable housing. To achieve

this vision, African Americans engaged with local municipal authorities and emphasized concrete, actionable projects for change.

In the decades following World War II, some white business owners desired to maintain and strengthen Ardmore's status as a commercial hub of the Main Line. Business owners sought additional lands to expand retail enterprises. In tandem, merchants sought additional parking spaces to accommodate shoppers traveling by car as they attempted to adapt an early pre-automobile suburban district to the parking demands of the car-centered postwar era. These priorities often came at the expense of housing. White business and property owners advocated for the conversion of residentially zoned land to commercially zoned land and demolished existing housing to create additional parking spaces. From this perspective, Ardmore was primarily a site that offered opportunities for economic development.[13]

The priorities of these expanding commercial interests often ran counter to those of black activists. Many African American residents perceived the expansion of certain types of businesses and parking as threats to the fabric of their neighborhood and to

---

[13] Because street-front properties on Lancaster Avenue preceded widespread automobile usage, limited space existed for parking in an era when dependence on cars increased, and business owners voiced repeated concerns about the availability of parking. In their efforts to compete with newer suburban retail centers as well as with neighboring Suburban Square, both of which provided ample parking, merchants repeatedly advocated for the conversion of available land to parking. Stephanie Dyer, "'Holding the Line against Philadelphia': Business, Suburban Change, and the Main Line's Suburban Square, 1926-1950," *Business and Economic History* 27, no. 2 (1998): 9. Jim Myrtetus, "Ardmore Civic Group Attacks Move to Tear Down Homes for Parking," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 29, 1970. "Residents Protest Proposal to Rezone Ardmore Block," *Evening Bulletin*, June 19, 1958, folder: Ardmore—Penna—Zoning, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

affordable housing. These residents expressed concerns about increased traffic, reduced housing supply, and diminished parking for residents. African American leaders and organizations voiced their opposition to proposed zoning changes in the pages of local newspapers and before township boards. Houses adjacent to or near existing commerce were particularly vulnerable. Such was the case on Greenfield Avenue, for instance, which abutted the central thoroughfare Lancaster Avenue. While retail, industry, and housing had always existed in close proximity in Ardmore, the advance of commercial enterprises onto previously residential properties threatened this balance. In the late 1960s, South Ardmore residents began utilizing the terms *commercial creep* and *creeping commercialism* to draw attention to the cumulative effects of case-by-case land use changes.[14]

Through their efforts, African Americans achieved increased political agency. As African Americans presented their grievances and proposals in township meetings in the halls of the Lower Merion Township Building on Lancaster Avenue, they participated in formal public civic spaces that they had not in the early twentieth century. An African American candidate also entered into electoral politics, and in 1969 Nolan Atkinson made a bid to represent the township ward that included South Ardmore.[15] The son of a

---

[14] Jim Myrtetus, "Atkinson Campaigns to Hold Line in Commercial Creep," *Evening Bulletin*, October 26, 1969, folder: Ardmore—Penna—Elections and politics; Michelle Osborn, "'Creeping Commercialism' Fought in South Ardmore," *Evening Bulletin*, May 5, 1970, folder: Ardmore—Penna—Housing and Apartments—both from *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

doctor, Atkinson grew up in Bryn Mawr and studied law at the University of Pennsylvania and at Howard University. During the late 1960s, Atkinson moved to Ardmore, and he became deeply involved in local civic and political organizations. Atkinson made commercial creep a centerpiece of his campaign for the Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners.[16] Atkinson first ran unsuccessfully for commissioner in 1969, but he won his second campaign for office in 1974. While Atkinson represented a multiracial constituency that included both South Ardmore and portions of nearby Haverford, he also advocated strongly for the needs of African Americans.

To limit commercialization and maintain housing stock, African American leaders and organizations spoke against proposals to expand commercial zoning, both before township boards and in the pages of local newspapers. Over time, African Americans

---

[16]Atkinson's October 1969 platform for commissioner specifically addressed the "'creep' of commercial interests." Campaign platform, Nolan N. Atkinson Jr files, Lower Merion Historical Society. However, the term *creeping commercialism* in reference to urban planning and land use appears to have been in circulation nationally as early as 1955, when an article in *Planning and Civic Comment* (a journal distributed by American Planning and Civic Association and the National Conference on State Parks), explained, "The rural or semi-rural surroundings of yesterday are dissipated by 'creeping commercialism.'" Tom Wallace, "Skokie Sets Foresighted Example in Town Planning; Chicago Suburb, Growing Rapidly, Adopts Master Plan for Parks and a Bond Issue to Finance It (Reprinted from the *Louisville Times*, August 1955)," *Planning and Civic Comment* 21, no. 3 (1955): 27. Locally, "creeping commercialism" was also mentioned three years earlier in the case of white residents opposition to a gas station in the northern section of Ardmore. "Owners Seek to Move Gas Station in Ardmore, January 27, 1966, folder: Ardmore –Penna.—Zoning, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. *Creeping commercialism* had and has a parallel usage referring to the incursion of commercial interests into previously noncommercial spheres. For instance, in the 1960s and 1970s there were debates about "creeping commercialism" in national parks and public television. See, for instance, "The Second Battle of Gettysburg," *U.S. News and World Report*, October 18, 1971, 66–67; Val Adams, "Non-Commercial Plugs, *New York Times*, May 9, 1965.

also adapted more proactive approaches to maintaining residential zoning in Ardmore. In 1969, the Ardmore Progressive Civic Association offered a proposal for what it called "upzoning"—rezoning parcels of land from a commercial designation to a residential one as part of an effort to preserve the residential nature of South Ardmore and to limit the intrusion of commercial establishments the association viewed as detrimental to the neighborhood.[17] These issues impacted Atkinson personally when his own residence, a rented twin house at 63 Greenfield Avenue, was threatened with demolition to make way for a parking lot.[18]

Tensions between residential and nonresidential land unfolded throughout Ardmore and across racial and economic lines, and there is a long-standing history of homeowners opposing the zoning changes proposed for businesses and other non-residential uses. One of the earliest examples of this was the opposition surrounding the

[17] James Myrtetus, "Lower Merion to Study Plea for Ardmore Upzoning," folder: Ardmore—Penna.—Ardmore Progressive Civic Association, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. The Ardmore Progressive Citizens Association presented another petition for upzoning in 1973. The headline for the Evening Bulletin article, "L. Merion Rezoning Is Designed As Compromise for Blacks, Business," that detailed negotiations over zoning a set of parcels in South Ardmore threw into sharp relief the tensions between residential needs of African Americans for housing and needs of white business owners. January 21, 1973, folder: Ardmore—Penna.—Ardmore Progressive Civic Association, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. The areas the proposal identified for upzoning encompassed sites previously used as part of industrial manufacturing plants, including a portion of the former Autocar factory and included both African American residents and working-class white residents.

[18] Jim Myriepus, "Ardmore Civic Group Attacks Move to Tear Down Homes for Parking," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 29, 1970

construction of Suburban Square in the 1920s.[19] White residents in the northern section of Ardmore also objected to other projects that ranged from the siting of a gas station to the construction of a new YMCA building on a former estate in 1950. Across these debates, white homeowners raised the concern that their home values would decline.[20]

While both black and white Ardmore residents resisted the intrusion of nonresidential land uses, the implications of commercial zoning and unwanted land uses differed. African American organizations and leaders argued that displaced black residents often lacked the means to purchase housing in other areas of the Main Line. For instance, speaking before the planning commission in opposition to a proposed zoning change, Reverend Leonard Jones of Zion Baptist Church declared, "It would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle . . . than for my people to buy such homes anywhere from City Line Av. to Coatesville."[21] Invoking a biblical reference, Jones challenged the idea that a proposal to eliminate residentially zoned land could be race or class neutral; instead he demanded attention to the specific socioeconomic positions of the African Americans he represented.

---

[19] Stephanie Dyer documents the tensions some of the tension surrounding the construction of Suburban Square in "'Holding the Line against Philadelphia'"

[20] See "Zoning Plan Protested: Ardmore Residents Oppose Change of Y.M.C.A. Property Status," July 20, 1939, folder: Ardmore—Penna.—Zoning, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA; Linda P. Mathew, "History of the Main Line YMCA," 1970, 4 and 6, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. "Owners Seek to Move Gas Station in Ardmore," January 27, 1966, folder: Ardmore—Penna.—Zoning, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

[21] "Residents Protest Proposal to Rezone Ardmore Block" June 19, 1958, folder: Ardmore-Penna.-Zoning, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

A Plan for South Ardmore

Building on earlier efforts to address zoning issues, African Americans presented a holistic vision for Ardmore's future as part of a 1970 master plan developed in a tradition of advocacy planning.[22] While it addressed a wide range of issues under the title *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements in the South Ardmore Community*, including zoning, education, and economic development, it ultimately prioritized housing needs. Spurred by African American frustration with a perceived lack of responsiveness from the township as well as frustration with discriminatory housing practices, the plan signaled a push on the part of African Americans to work collectively and proactively to meet their housing and planning needs and to shape Ardmore's built environment in a manner that accorded with their vision for Ardmore's future. A number of the ideas raised within the plan had been circulating in South Ardmore, and civic leaders and organizations had been working to address many of the concerns that the plan identified. However, the plan for South Ardmore crystallized these ideas, along with those that emerged through the planning processes, in a comprehensive assessment and action plan. While African Americans contracted professional planners with new forms of expertise to develop the plan, the plan was driven by the desires of African Americans. The plan exemplified the ways African Americans thought broadly about shaping Ardmore's built environment to meet their needs.

---

[22] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements in the South Ardmore Community* (1970).

The plan for South Ardmore grew out of an effort by the Main Line NAACP to develop a plan that would outline the needs of African American residents living in the southern sections of Bryn Mawr and Haverford. When funding for the project ran short, an entity known as the Ardmore Coalition continued the project and shifted the plan's emphasis to Ardmore. The coalition included individuals drawn from the NAACP who lived in Ardmore as well as students and staff from Haverford College. Individuals like Leonard Jones, long-time pastor of Ardmore's oldest black church, Nolan Atkinson, who would become the first African American township commissioner in 1974, and Lewis Hazzard, president of the African American civic association and long-time business owner, were among the coalition's members. Among the group's wide-ranging goals, which included expanding affordable housing opportunities and addressing housing discrimination, was "the funding of a Master Plan for the long and short range development of the Community."[23] To finance the plan's twelve-thousand-dollar cost, the coalition raised funds from local institutions, organizations, and individuals.[24]

The NAACP and later the Ardmore Coalition engaged the services of planning practitioners committed to community involvement in planning. Planners were charged with helping African Americans develop a master plan that articulated their needs rather than dictating a plan from a position of professional authority. Janet Scheff Reiner served as the lead planning consultant. Reiner's prior experience in planning included academic and applied pursuits, and she was at the forefront of changes unfolding in the planning

[23] Ibid., 2.
[24] Ibid.

field at the time.[25] In particular, Reiner expressed a strong commitment to the involvement of community members in planning processes and regarded planning as an avenue for addressing racial and socioeconomic inequality.

Reiner's work with the plan for South Ardmore overlapped with her work at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where she served as a research Associate in the Government Studies Center. Issues of race and planning were salient at the University of Pennsylvania, from which Reiner also received her PhD in 1970. The university came into conflict with surrounding communities as it sought to expand its campus into West

---

[25] Scheff Reiner was a founding member of Planners for Equal Opportunity, an organization that believed planning practice could be instrumental in addressing civil rights inequalities. Among her academic appointments was a course in social planning at Cornell University, and a retrospective of progressive planning at Cornell University cited her work "teaching 'social planning' from a grassroots perspective, introducing new ideas into the curriculum." Scheff Reiner also worked as a research associate at the University of Pennsylvania, where she collaborated with colleagues Thomas Reiner and Paul Davidoff; Reiner and Davidoff would go on to coauthor "A Choice Theory of Planning," a journal article that was foundational in the field of advocacy planning. Scheff completed her PhD in City and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania in 1972. Walter Thabit, "A History of PEO: Planners for Equal Opportunity," Planners Network: The Organization of Progressive Planning, accessed May 30, 2015, http://www.plannersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/A_History_of_PEO.pdf; Ann Forsyth and Neema Kudva, eds., *Transforming Planning: 75 Years of City and Regional Planning at Cornell* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2010), 96; Marcia Marker Feld, "Martin Meyerson: Building the Middle Range Bridge to Educate Professional Planners—An Appreciation and Reminiscences," *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 3 (2011): 240; Thomas Reiner, Robert Sugarman, and Janet Reiner, *The Crosstown Controversy: A Case Study* (Philadelphia: Transportation Studies Center, Center for Urban Research and Experiment, University of Pennsylvania, 1970); Thomas Reiner and Paul Davidoff, "A Choice Theory of Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 28, no. 2 (1962): 103–15; Janet Scheff Reiner, "Client Analysis and Planning of Public Programs" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1972); "Janet Scheff," Puerto Rico Management and Economic Consulting, accessed August 25, 2008, http://www.prtc.net/~prmec/ResumeScheff.htm (site discontinued).

Philadelphia. The neighborhoods adjacent to the University of Pennsylvania were home to African American communities that had expanded rapidly with post–World War II black migration from the South, and the university, viewing these neighborhoods as "blighted" or "decaying," called for their demolition to serve its own needs.[26]

Reiner partnered with the Philadelphia-based organization the Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement (PCCA) and the architectural firm of Ueland and Junker to develop the plan. PCCA's typical approach was to support the efforts of nonprofit organizations based in particular neighborhoods or towns to develop affordable housing.[27] The PCCA expressed a specific commitment to addressing the housing needs of people of color not only in Philadelphia but in the suburbs as well. In a 1971 annual report, the organization wrote, "Unlike other agencies, we do not concentrate solely on urban housing problems, ignoring the suburban situation. Nor do we build housing in the suburbs to the neglect of the inner city."[28] The projects on which they collaborated, including the plan for South Ardmore, gave evidence of this commitment. Prior to their

---

[26] Leon Rosenthal, *A History of Philadelphia's University City* (Philadelphia: Printing Office of the University of Pennsylvania, 1963); Charles G. Dobbins, ed., *The University, the City, and Urban Renewal: Report of a Regional Conference Sponsored by the American Council on Education and the West Philadelphia Corporation, March 25, 1963* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1964); Philadelphia City Planning Commission, *The West Philadelphia District Plan*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1964).

[27] Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement Descriptive Statement, Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement Acc. 675, Series I: Administration, box 1, Histories, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

[28] *Annual Report, 1971*, Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement, Acc. 675, Series I: Administration, box 1, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

work for the Ardmore Coalition, the PCCA had completed an assessment of resources and low- to moderate-income housing needs in the Philadelphia suburb of South Coatesville. In addition, the organization had helped develop affordable housing projects in the metropolitan area.[29] Wilson Goode, executive director of the PCCA, was instrumental in the research and development of the plan for South Ardmore.[30] The

---

[29] The PCCA was started in 1962 with funding from the Ford Foundation. Philadelphia mayor James Tate designated the PCCA as the organization responsible for developing a community action program in North Philadelphia, an expectation established in the federal Economic Opportunity Act. However, the Philadelphia NAACP heavily criticized the PCCA; the NAACP believed that the PCCA lacked representation from the impoverished African American communities of North Philadelphia and therefore could not carry out a community action program. In 1965, after losing funding from the Ford Foundation, the PCCA shifted its focus to urban development. The organization came understand its "identity as a Black organization designed to help Blacks." *War on Poverty Program: Hearings Before the Committee on Education and Labor*, 89th Cong. 522 (1965) (statement of Cecil Moore, president, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), Acc. 675, Series II: Activities, box 2, News Clippings and Releases, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA; "Tate Names Task Force for Antipoverty War," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 22, 1964, Civil Rights in a Northern City, accessed May 31, 2015, http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/content/tate-names-task-force-antipove.

[30] Wilson Goode's first engagement with issues of community development came through his leadership of the Paschall Betterment League in the late 1960s; the league grew partially out of the civil unrest that erupted in North Philadelphia in the summer of 1964 and inspired a sense of black activism in the neighborhoods where poor black Philadelphians lived. Goode began at the PCCA in 1967 and held the position of executive director by 1970. Goode's work at the PCCA formed the foundation of a political career: He left the PCCA in 1978 to take an appointed position as head of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission. Two years later, in 1980, he was appointed as the first black managing director of the city of Philadelphia, and in 1983 he was elected Philadelphia's first black mayor. Like Reiner, Goode also brought both applied and academic expertise to his work, having completed a master's degree in public administration at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School in 1968. "PCCA Accomplishments a Natural Outgrowth of W. Wilson Goode's Involvement and Experience," news release, April 26, 1977, Acc. 675, Series II: Activities, box 2, News Clippings and Releases, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple

architectural and planning firm of Ueland and Junker served as the final component of the planning team, and the firm brought experience in community planning and low- and moderate-income housing to the project.[31]

The plan for South Ardmore reflected a broader shift in planning practice toward increased citizen participation. The plan's introduction stated this commitment explicitly: "The plan for South Ardmore is one of a new breed of planning efforts where the local citizenry analyzes its own problems and charts its own destiny."[32] Ardmore had been the subject of urban renewal plans in 1964 and 1965. Strong resident participation served as a rebuttal of what the authors viewed as the top-down, technocratic planning practices of the past.[33] The emerging movement of advocacy planning also informed the plan for South Ardmore. Advocacy planning emphasized creating plans that centered on particular populations, especially those who had been underserved and had experienced inequality. Early on in the text, the plan for South Ardmore proclaimed, "The plan for the

---

University, Philadelphia, PA. W. Wilson Goode with Joann Stevens, *In Goode Faith: Philadelphia's First Black Mayor Tells His Story* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1992).

[31] At the time that Ueland and Junker began working on the Ardmore plan, they were in the early stages of their careers. Ueland and Junker, both white men, founded the firm Ueland and Junker, Architects and Planners in 1967. Ueland completed a master's degree in Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania in 1964, and Junker completed a master's in architecture, urban design, and planning at the University of Pennsylvania in 1963. Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 76.

[32] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 4.

[33] While the urban renewal plans themselves are no longer available, an article published in 1962 provides a broader context for urban renewal in suburban contexts in Pennsylvania. See Nick S. Fisfis and Harold Greenberg, "Suburban Renewal in Pennsylvania" *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 111, no. 1 (1962): 61–110.

South Ardmore community is a plan by and for the black community."[34] This approach differed radically from past planning efforts in Lower Merion Township.

It is unclear from the PCCA's archival materials whether the organization produced similar reports for other communities, but community engagement was a hallmark of PCCA's work in settings throughout metropolitan Philadelphia region. Through the Assistance in Development—In Neighborhoods (AID-IN) program, for instance, PCCA provided grants to community organizations in Philadelphia, many of them in black neighborhoods, for up to five thousand dollars. The underlying aim of the project was to "give . . . 'voiceless groups' tools, guidance, information and other assistance in order to develop a 'loud' and 'clear' voice in seeking and securing changes and solutions to community problems," an approach that served as a counterpoint to bureaucratic planning processes.[35] PCCA funded proposals to purchase and renovate properties for organizations, hire organizers to identify needs and implement community-identified projects, and survey neighborhood conditions. While the AID-IN program was limited to Philadelphia, PCCA's collaborations with suburban partners reflected similar goals. In a report of its work with residents in the South Coatesville, a suburb with a longstanding African American population, addressed "community support" and noted PCCA's eight-month process to understand residents' needs and support for affordable

[34] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 4.

[35] Community Organization AID-IN Development in Neighborhoods, Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement, Acc. 675, Series II: Activities, box 2, Housing Program/Progress Reports, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

housing.[36] The South Ardmore Plan, and the process by which it developed, took shape in a moment in which residents elsewhere in the Philadelphia area were engaging in similar efforts to shape positively the places where they lived.

While Ardmore had been the subject of many planning efforts, none had centered on the needs of African Americans. The Olmsted firm produced the earliest planning effort in 1919, and the Main Line Citizens Association funded this effort privately. In 1937, the township authored its first comprehensive plan, and a second plan followed in 1954. The plans addressed issues like roads, street lighting, housing, and infrastructure; however, each of these plans assumed perspectives that were ostensibly race neutral, addressing the concerns of all Main Line residents but implicitly privileging the concerns of white residents.[37] By contrast, the community-driven plan for South Ardmore sought to respond to the unique needs of a long-standing black suburban enclave that historically had had limited say in shaping the built environment at larger scales.

Residents contributed directly to the planning process, and planners translated the ideals of citizen participation into their methods. In the data-collection stage, planners reached out to residents through meetings and surveys. A series of block meetings in the earlier stages of the research provided residents opportunities to raise planning concerns.

---

[36] "South Coatesville Project: Summary," Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement, Acc. 675, Series II: Activities, box 3, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

[37] Frederick Law Olmsted and Arthur Coleman Comey, *Main Line District City Planning Report to the Main Line Citizens' Association"* [advance draft] (Brookline, MA: 1919), Lower Merion Historical Society; Lower Merion Township, *A Plan for the Growth of Lower Merion Township* (Ardmore, PA, 1954); Lower Merion Township, *A Plan for Lower Merion Township* (Ardmore, PA, 1937).

Rather than a meeting in every block (an ideal expressed by the planners, but limited by funding), the block meetings represented a sampling. Households in each of the selected blocks received a flyer inviting them to a "coffee klatch." Planners held a total of 11 such meetings. While eight were for residents, three meetings (two for business and one for youth) catered to specific population groups. The planners hoped that such meetings would provide insight into "families in the community, the quality of housing seen from the viewpoint of the residents, [and] their attitudes toward housing the community."[38] A survey of residents complemented these meetings, and in the summer of Summer of 1968 the PCCA undertook a survey of five hundred households that addressed income, length of residence in Ardmore, rental and homeownership rates, desire to move, car ownership, and occupation.[39] The PCCA team was not the first group to have surveyed Ardmore's households. Housing reformers had surveyed previous generations of African Americans in the 1910s and 1920s, assessing the living conditions of African Americans against standards they imposed.[40] While white organizations without direct connections to South Ardmore commissioned these earlier studies, the PCCA's work was at the behest of African Americans and intended to address needs they identified.

---

[38] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 5.

[39] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements,* 3, 5.

[40] Louise Marion Bosworth, *Housing Conditions in Main Line Towns: An Investigation Made Under the Direction of the Committee on Investigation, Main Line Housing Association*, ca. 1913; Philadelphia Housing Association, *Housing Conditions in Ardmore, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr,* survey report by the Philadelphia Housing Association to the Main Line Citizens' Association, 1919, Housing Association of Delaware Valley Records, Subseries 1.2: Executive Secretary's Files, 1917–20, URB 3/II/7, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

Residents also had opportunities to review and make recommendations on a draft of the plan. At a meeting at Zion Baptist Church in the fall of 1969, approximately two hundred interested residents viewed the draft of the plan and raised questions and comments.[41] A review period followed, with copies of the draft plan available in four places: two of these sites, Zion Baptist Church and Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, were faith-based, underscoring the continuing involvement of clergy and the church in advocating for political change. The second site was the Spring Cleaners, a dry cleaning company owned by an African American named Lewis Hazzard that had been a fixture on Spring Avenue since the 1940s.[42] Finally, residents could review the plan for South Ardmore at the Gate Library, an Afrocentric library supported by Ardmore Civic Association and the Main Line NAACP and located at 33 E. Spring Street. Similar to the plan's goals of centering the urban and economic development needs of African Americans in Ardmore, the Gate Library aimed to center the lives of African Americans in literature and present fuller perspectives on black life than those available in holdings of other local libraries. The planners selected four sites that touched Ardmore residents as they moved through religious, commercial, and educational spaces during the week—conducting business at a dry cleaner, attending church events, or visiting the library.

The completed plan highlighted the needs identified by South Ardmore's African American residents and outlined proposals to respond to these needs. The seventy-six-page document was made up of two main sections: "General Plan—Analysis and

---

[41] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 6.

[42] Reid Kanaley, "Blacks Entering Business Get Support from New Group," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 4, 1988.

Proposal" and "Action Projects—Description and Funding." Maps, graphs, and appendices supported the plan's findings. The scope of the plan was holistic, and it addressed a range of issues under the broad categories of economic development, housing, zoning, community facilities, and services. Housing, however, emerged as the leading concern with residents expressing their concerns about limited housing supply, high costs, and the intrusion of commerce into residential areas.

The plan for South Ardmore shared elements with community-driven plans developed nationally that both assessed existing conditions and articulate solutions for change. Two examples of plans from New York, *An Alternate Plan for Cooper Square* in 1959 and the *East Harlem Triangle Plan* in 1968, emerged in response to city-proposed urban renewal plans. Like the plan for South Ardmore, these studies relied heavily on the experiential knowledge of residents and incorporated both analysis of existing conditions and community-centered proposals for change. Additional commonalities between these and the Ardmore plans included an emphasis on preventing the displacement of current residents and a vision for land use that differed from existing trends and proposals. While the Cooper Square plan described some of the specific experiences of people of different ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses, the Harlem plan centered the needs and experiences of black residents. Indeed the introduction closed with the provocative reflection, "For a long time Whites have been asking black folks, 'What do you people want?' This report attempts to speak to that question." The 1960s were a time period in which the relationships between municipal planning departments, professional planners,

and residents were being renegotiated, and the work happening in South Ardmore was part of this broader conversation.[43]

One of the plan for South Ardmore's central findings about housing was the interrelationship between housing needs and the ages of residents. The plan argued that available housing stock did not match the needs of Ardmore's residents as they aged. Lacking alternatives, older residents continued to live in houses that were larger than they needed. This in turn limited the availability of affordable housing for young families who either lived in dwellings too small for their needs or moved away from Ardmore. The result was a community that lacked balance between older and younger residents. Contrary to these realities, residents envisioned Ardmore as a place that was home to residents across generations. This included young people who desired to remain in the place where they were raised as they began their own households and seniors who wanted to continue living in Ardmore as they aged. To achieve an intergenerational community, the Plan for South Ardmore called for the rehabilitation of existing housing and the construction of new housing units for low- and moderate-income families and for the

---

[43] Cooper Square Community Development Committee and Businessmens Association, *An Alternate Plan for Cooper Square* (New York: 1959). Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem, *East Harlem Triangle Plan: Prepared for the Community Association of the East Harlem Triangle and the New York City Housing and Development Administration* (New York: 1968), 9. The Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem was a community-oriented collective of black architects, planners, and lawyers that focused on the needs of black residents. For additional information on ARCH, see Priscilla Tucker, "Poor Peoples' Plan," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s., 27, no. 5 (1969): 265–69; Brian Goldstein, "A City within a City: Community Development and the Struggle over Harlem, 1961–2001" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013).

elderly; such housing would respond to the spatial needs of households at different stages of life. Beginning in the late 1960s, African Americans worked to realize this vision.

ArdSpring Condominiums

In 1969, African American civic and religious leaders from South Ardmore, many of whom had been involved with the plan for South Ardmore, helped charter an organization they called the Ardmore Community Development Corporation (ACDC). In addition to Leonard Jones, Nolan Atkinson, and Lewis Hazzard, ACDC included people like Cleopatra Nelson, a civically engaged Ardmore resident and Democratic Party committeewoman, and Daniel Jones Jr., a lifelong Ardmore resident. ACDC's purpose was "to combat community deterioration and to secure adequate housing facilities and other related services and conditions for the community of Ardmore, Pennsylvania."[44]

The ACDC was a local example of a national movement underway. The community development corporation model emerged in the late 1960s as part of broader efforts to alleviate poverty in urban and rural areas. CDCs focused on geographically defined areas, and they prioritized community control in the development process. Drawing on private and public funds, the activities of CDCs spanned housing development, job training, community services, economic development; however,

[44] Ardmore Community Development Corporation, Annual Report 1971, folder: Ardmore History (1) to 1980, record no. 42A, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

housing became the area in which most CDCs directed their efforts.[45] The ACDC adapted a model utilized more often in urban and rural contexts to a suburban area.

In 1971, ACDC began to develop the ArdSpring Condominium Project, Ardmore's first intentional affordable housing project. The ACDC mobilized public and private resources to plan and carry out the project and maintained the community involvement that had been a hallmark of the comprehensive planning process. In order to respond effectively to community needs within economic constraints, the ACDC developed the project as a multifamily condominium. The ACDC's willingness to think expansively about the suburban home as something different than a detached, single-family house sometimes brought the project into conflict with longstanding ideas about the types of development that did and did not belong on Philadelphia's storied Main Line.

The ACDC drew on both public and private financing to support the ArdSpring Project, and the Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement advised the organization on financing. Under a federal program, the Federal Housing Administration insured the mortgage and subsidized the cost of the project by paying a portion of the

---

[45] On the growth of community development corporations see for instance Robert Halpern, *Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), Patricia Watkins Murphy and James V. Cunningham, "Community Development Corporations and the Emergence of Organizing," in *Organizing for Community Controlled Development: Renewing Civil Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 38–52; Kimberly Johnson "Community Development Corporations, Participation, and Accountability: The Harlem Urban Development Corporation and the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 594 (July 2004): 109–24.

interest.[46] Private funding to support the purchase of the land came from sources like a breakfast for area businessmen as well as from less conventional approaches like bake sales.[47] The varied ways the ACDC raised monies allowed people of varied income levels to contribute to the project.

The property the ACDC purchased lay at the intersection of Spring Avenue and Ardmore Avenue (one of South Ardmore's busiest roads). The site allowed the ACDC a rare opportunity to construct new housing on one of Ardmore's few vacant parcels of land. The location positioned the condominium amid a variety of building types and land uses that exemplified the type of physical diversity found in South Ardmore, especially in comparison to wealthier sections of the Main Line. In the areas surrounding the site, there were a handful of stores and Zion Baptist Church as well as detached and twin houses. In spite of the great physical variety already present in Ardmore, nothing like the proposed condominiums existed in the immediate vicinity or in South Ardmore. The ArdSpring Condominiums introduced yet another housing type into this environment and thus represented a difference within a difference.

---

[46] Ardmore Community Development Corporation, Annual Report 1971, 3–4, folder: Ardmore History (1) to 1980, record no. 42A, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

[47] Ardmore Community Development Corporation, Annual Report 1972, 8-9, folder: Ardmore History (1) to 1980, record no. 43, Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA; Joan Perkolup, "S. Ardmore Group Halfway to Goal in Fund for Low-Cost Housing," *Evening Bulletin*, November 9, 1972, folder: Ardmore Community Development Corporation, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

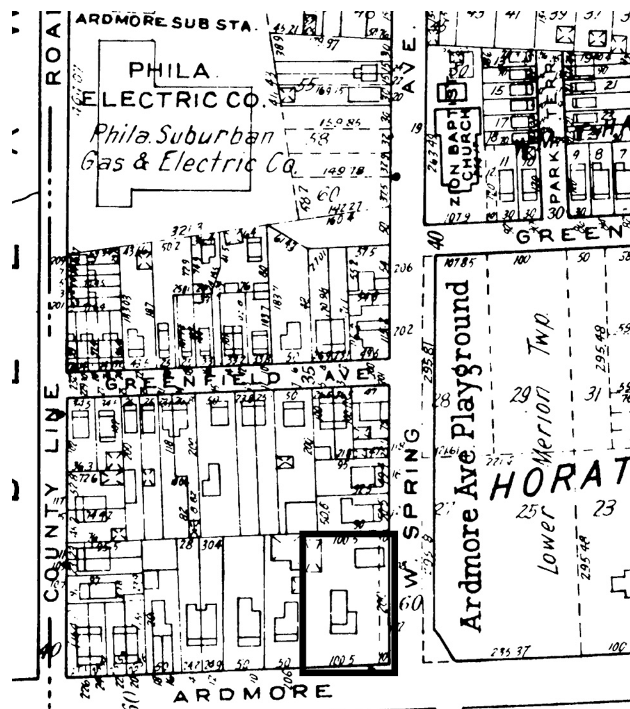

Figure 31. ArdSpring Condominium building site. This real estate atlas plate highlights the diverse land uses and building types that surrounded the ArdSpring site, highlighted. *Property Atlas of the Main Line, Penna. Including the Township of Lower Merion and the Borough of Narberth in Montgomery County and the Townships of Haverford and Radnor in Delaware County* (Philadelphia: Franklin Survey Company, 1961), plate 11.

The ACDC, comprised primarily of people who lived or worked in Ardmore, sought the participation of other Ardmore residents both in acquiring the building site and in the condominiums' design process. The ACDC contracted the Philadelphia-based architectural firm of Ueland and Junker, which had worked on other community-initiated affordable housing developments in the Philadelphia area and also had participated in the development of the Plan for South Ardmore. While Ueland and Junker presented initial plans, these proposals were subjected to community input in the form of meetings. From the perspective of the ACDC, "community buy-in" was essential to the project's success, and opening its planning process allowed ACDC to build community support. Though the project would house only sixteen families, it clearly had larger significance for

African Americans in South Ardmore. In the words of the ACDC's 1972 annual report, "A successful conclusion to this Project will provide additional units of housing where most needed, stimulate new growth and vitality and improve the quality of life in the entire Township of Lower Merion."[48]

In the early stages of planning the project, the ACDC encountered resistance from the township concerning the type of housing that it wanted to construct. Initially, the ACDC intended to construct the ArdSpring Project as a series of row houses. However, the township refused to approve these plans because of a township ordinance prohibiting row houses; the township also rejected a request to provide an exception for the project. The township's prohibition of row houses, a housing type common in the city of Philadelphia, reflected a long-standing sentiment that such building types were unbecoming of the suburban context because of their strong urban associations. The Main Line had a long history of placing restrictions on building types and land uses, whether by developers or by the township. However, the acceleration of housing development in the years following World War II had created a vocal white majority citizenry intent on excluding building types (and implicitly populations) they felt did not accord with their vision of the Main Line as a site of spacious, detached, single-family homes.[49]

The leadership team working on the ArdSpring Project came together to consider how they might respond to this obstacle, and from their discussions the idea emerged to

---

[48] Ardmore Community Development Corporation, Annual Report 1972, 5.

[49] For an example of majority residents' responses to postwar suburban development on the Main Line, see Main Line Times, *This Is the Main Line* (Ardmore, PA: Main Line Times, 1955).

construct the project as a condominium. Condominiums were a new form of homeownership at the time and had been permitted in the township only since 1970. As a new type of homeownership, the condominium did not carry the historical baggage of the row house.

Figure 32. The Centennial Village Condominiums, located in North Ardmore, were among the earliest condominiums in Lower Merion Township. Photograph by author.

In order to obtain the designation of a condominium, they had to adapt the initial plans in two key ways. First, the condominium designation required that the entire building have a common roof, rather than separate roofs for each unit, as was planned previously. Second, while units would be owned individually, the exterior land would be owned collectively by the condominium association rather than by individual owners. The finished project, completed in 1975, consisted of sixteen three-story units. Eight adjoining units faced the front, street-side of the property and shared a rear wall with

eight adjoining units that faced the rear of the property. The project's inclusion of an off-street parking lot also responded to a need outlined in the South Ardmore Plan, as residents felt significant frustration competing with local businesses for parking.[50]

Figure 33. North-facing units of ArdSpring Condominiums. Photography by author.

Architect C. Anthony Junker expressed a desire to deemphasize the project's status as a multiunit one and to integrate elements that recalled single-family houses. In Junker's own words, he wanted the design to suggest "houses rather than apartments."[51] Most African Americans in Ardmore, both in 1960 and historically, had lived in houses. Junker, in his efforts to evoke houses, thus tried to design a dwelling that more closely aligned with the dwellings where other African Americans had lived for multiple generations. Similarly, a *Main Line Times* article published in the early stages of planning quoted Junker as saying, "We are working on a very handsome, domestic exterior using

---

[50] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 13.

[51] John Dubois, "Low Income 'Condo' Lauded in Lower Merion," *Evening Bulletin*, December 23, 1977, folder: Ardmore Condominium Houses, *Evening Bulletin* Collection, Urban Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

the materials we associate with individual homes such as siding and perhaps masonry."[52] The completed project stayed true to this early vision articulated by Junker, and the building's exterior integrated a mix of materials, including brick, aluminum siding, and shingles. The building's first and second floors were composed of red brick and the third story utilized white aluminum siding. In the context of South Ardmore, where most houses were originally built with brick, the use of brick for the majority of the building's exterior also provided a visual linkage between the ArdSpring Condominiums and their neighborhood context.

Even before the specific plans for the ArdSpring Condominiums were set in motion, the *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements in the South Ardmore Community* had identified the provision of outdoor space in new construction as a high priority and noted, "private outdoor space is desirable for families with children."[53] The condominiums responded to this call, which echoed claims made elsewhere about the benefits of post-World War Two suburban housing for children.[54] The front and side of the property were set back thirty feet from the property line, and the parking lot was positioned on the western edge of the property, all of which left a significant amount of open, green space surrounding the building.

---

[52] Joan Filvaroff, "A Condominium for S. Ardmore?," *Main Line Times*, December 9, 1971.

[53] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 41.

[54] Delores Hayden, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 254.

Figure 34. Yards of ArdSpring Condominiums. The significant setback of the ArdSpring Condominiums gave the property a more suburban-style front yard. Photograph by author.

Since each unit had only a front entrance and shared its rear wall with a neighboring unit, outdoor space was limited to front yards where concrete patios extended from the front of the units. This left units without private backyards at a time

when postwar suburban houses were increasingly oriented toward the private backyard as a social and recreational space. However, African American residents who grew up in Ardmore during this time period report that porch life in the houses where black residents lived was active and included everything from older residents watching over neighborhood activities to teenagers listening to records. The patio space afforded condominium residents the use of a similar, though more exposed, site for the production of social space at the front of their homes.

At the scale of individual units, the plans accorded with conventional notions of social and private space in the home. The units, which were a mix of three- and four-bedroom units, were generous in size and ranged from 1,100 to 1,300 square feet at a time when the average house constructed in the United States was 1,500 square feet.[55] The design of the units also responded to housing needs that had been laid out in the *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements in South Ardmore*, which had called for the addition of housing units with more bedrooms to meet the needs of families with children.[56] This was especially pressing given concerns about the out-migration of young families unable to find housing. The decision to develop the condominiums as three- and four-bedroom units helped alleviate a shortage of housing for families with children in South Ardmore and also allowed families to accommodate extended family members.

The ArdSpring Condominiums garnered positive responses. The project received a special planning award from the Montgomery County Planning Commission for

[55] National Association of Home Builders, "New Home Characteristics (Single-Family)," *Housing Facts, Figures, and Trends* (March 2006), 14.

[56] Ardmore Coalition, *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements*, 13.

"outstanding land development,"[57] and the project also received praise from area residents and on the editorial pages of the local *Main Line Times*.[58] Over twenty-five years later, original homeowners still composed half of all residents and more than three-quarters had lived at ArdSpring for over ten years.[59]

Conclusions

Black residents in Ardmore mobilized when they perceived threats to the suburb in which they lived. Their efforts ultimately shifted from being responsive to being proactive as they devised a vision for Ardmore that prioritized their social and economic needs. Contextualizing these efforts historically illuminates their broader significance: The actions of Ardmore activists happened in a time period during which racism and discrimination restricted African Americans' abilities to control the places where they lived. African Americans experienced ghettoization, redlining, block busting in cities while discriminatory practices limited access to new suburban developments that were widely available to white homebuyers leaving cities. These were all processes that happened to black people. By contrast, the endeavors of African Americans in South Ardmore during the 1960s and 1970s suggested ways that black residents could collectively shape the built environment and neighborhood where they lived to align with their values.

---

[57] John Dubois, "Low-Income 'Condo' Lauded in Lower Merion," *Evening Bulletin*, December 23, 1977.

[58] "Housing for South Ardmore," *Main Line Times*, December 16, 1971.

[59] Montgomery County Property Records, 108 West Spring Avenue, accessed April 1, 2009, http://propertyrecords.montcopa.org.

Black people in postwar Ardmore had longstanding historical connections to Ardmore that informed their activism. The first influx of black migrants came to Ardmore seeking jobs in affluent white households and institutions. But African Americans quickly established their own networks and institutions. As they did so, the houses where they lived and the buildings they collectively owned were instrumental to advancing individual and shared aims in Ardmore. By the 1960s, then, the concern was not just about having affordable housing but about having affordable housing in this place where African Americans had lived for decades. The desire to preserve Ardmore as a home for current and future generations of African Americans motivated organizers' actions.

In the years since the development of the ArdSpring Condominiums, affordable housing projects in South Ardmore have taken on varied forms. In many ways, these reflect the legacies of the plan for South Ardmore and the ArdSpring Condominiums. This includes two apartment complexes for senior citizens intended to allow residents to stay in the area as they age and can no longer maintain larger homes as well as the construction of ten twin homes for first-time homebuyers. In all of these efforts, churches, civic associations, nonprofits, and federal financing have continued to have important roles.

Conclusion

A group of black residents and their white allies packed the Lower Merion Township board of commissioners meeting on December 16, 1970. The unusual size of the audience prompted the board president to request that "those who do speak be as brief and concise as they can."[1] The meeting took place in the township's administration building, an imposing stone structure that clearly communicated its civic purpose. The building was located not far from South Ardmore on Lancaster Avenue, South Ardmore's northern border and Ardmore's commercial corridor. While the physical distance between the streets where African Americans resided in South Ardmore and the location of the board meeting was short, it was evident that December evening that there was a political chasm between black residents and their commissioners. In November, the board, which decided on township policies and allocated tax revenues, had approved a redistricting plan for political wards that split off a section of South Ardmore into an adjacent ward and thereby divided black residents. The response from African Americans and their supporters was forceful.

One of the people who addressed the board was Cleopatra Nelson, a democratic committeewoman who was enmeshed in black organizing in Ardmore as a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Ardmore Community Development Corporation. Nelson's connections to organizing were longstanding: she grew up in a politically-oriented family in Norristown, another

[1] Lower Merion Township Secretary's Office, Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes, December 16, 1970.

Philadelphia suburb, and married Russell Nelson, the son of York Nelson, a civic leader in early twentieth century Ardmore whose story opens this dissertation.[2] Speaking in an era of growing black power nationally, she explicitly charged the fourteen-member board of white men with racism and declared that they consistently disregarded the needs of black residents. The board meeting minutes summarized what she said: "The community, black and white, is suffering from the fact that the black people are being ignored completely—ignored in housing, no place to live; ignored in schools. . . . She stated it was high time that something was done about it, that there is no housing, no jobs here, nothing because of the Board." Nelson continued on, situating the redistricting plan in the context of national events: "She stated that they have done everything they can to keep the Main Line from burning—this Main Line could burn, just like any other city in the United States—it would burn down in two minutes, but because of the civic association and the Main Line Branch of the NAACP, you haven't had one fire."[3]

The scenes of violence that Nelson referenced could not have been far from the minds of those listening. From Philadelphia in 1964 to Watts in 1965 to Newark in 1967, African Americans across the United States had turned to violence to express their frustrations with systematic inequality, poor schools, lack of access to quality housing, police brutality, constrained economic opportunity, and urban renewal. In Ardmore, however, Nelson asserted that community organizations had been instrumental in

---

[2] Kristin E. Holmes, "C. Nelson, 95, political party chief," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 30, 2004.

[3] Lower Merion Township Secretary's Office, Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes, December 16, 1970.

preventing violent outcomes. This may have been because they advocated for a less radical approach. But it may also have been because these organizations had taken steps to respond to the needs voiced by African Americans in Ardmore and on the Main Line and thereby mitigated the need for violence as a strategy for change.

Another speaker that evening echoed the significance of black-led community organizations in his comments to the board. Nolan Atkinson, who was the president of the Ardmore Community Development Corporation and who would later become the township's first black commissioner, noted that this was "a community which has been working for years to develop the area." Atkinson also linked contemporary efforts with a shared history saying, "These people have a common heritage and common background and the majority who are affected are black citizens. They are persons who have worked together and their efforts have brought forth the neighborhood improvement and the Ardmore Community Development Corporation."[4] For Atkinson, Ardmore's history as a black enclave and residents' connections to this history were integral to the success residents achieved through community organizing in the 1960s and 1970s.

Many of the groups active in Ardmore in the 1960s and 1970s shared an ethos of self-help and self-determination. When local public entities failed to meet the needs of African American residents, they consistently developed parallel organizations to fulfill functions that typically lay in the public domain. Concerned with the tracking of black high school students into vocational careers, a group offered information on the college admissions process. A lack of books on African American history spurred the formation

---

[4] Ibid.

of a storefront library that centered on African American experiences. The charge that the township did not adequately address Ardmore's physical needs prompted the community-based master plan discussed in the last chapter. These initiatives shared an emphasis on mobilizing community resources to address gaps in public offerings. Rather than a radical separation from municipal government, however, these organizations framed their efforts to work in tandem with public resources and, at times, sought out local and federal support for their efforts. In their pleas to the board of commissioners, Nelson, Atkinson and others who spoke that night registered the significance of direct participation in governance. The issues raised by black residents at the board of commissioners meeting—planning and development, housing, jobs, education, recreation—were all connected to policy and funding. The ability to elect a commissioner who would represent and advocate for their priorities was critical to success. In citing both the importance of organizations and government, the speakers sought a hybrid model that blended community organizing with participation in the formal political process.

Ardmore has been a site of lively civic engagement and activism for black residents since the early twentieth century. The Main Line Relief Association supported a vision of industrial education for black youth; debate societies discussed pressing questions of the time; and the Main Line Business League endorsed state legislation supporting civil rights. These efforts involved African Americans in Ardmore with broader questions about racial equality and advancement and linked them with black people in other communities who engaged in similar work. These activities also contrasted with the narratives of developers and real estate agents, black and white, who

sold the Main Line and other suburbs as places of tranquility divorced from the conflict and struggles they located in the distant city. These suburban residents were involved actively with local, regional, and national matters. They moved toward, rather than away from, social and political issues. By the 1960s the scope of organizing efforts had shifted and become more encompassing and systems oriented, and organizations from the Afrocentric Gate Library to the Ardmore Community Development Corporation addressed different realms of black experience. The efforts to ensure fair representation on the board of commissioners were an extension of this.

The strong roles that black residents and organizations assumed in the 1970s in envisioning Ardmore's future differed from their roles in earlier efforts to reshape Ardmore. White housing reformers working in the 1910s were the first to assert the need for broad-scale change in Ardmore. At the behest of white civic associations, reformers entered into Ardmore (and other areas like it on the Main Line) to document conditions they labeled as problematic and to propose solutions that aligned with values they espoused about appropriate domestic environments. Undoubtedly, African Americans who lived in the houses that reformers surveyed would have welcomed the physical improvements for which reformers advocated. However, housing reformers failed to engage black residents as partners in their studies and sometimes discussed poor conditions as a result of their moral failings. By the 1960s, however, African Americans were leading efforts to change Ardmore to match *their* ideals. Outside organizations continued to participate in this process. But they now came at the invitation of African Americans and worked with them collaboratively to achieve community-identified goals.

The community-led planning that took place in Ardmore was an example of a national pattern in which black people worked to define the future of the neighborhoods in which they lived in opposition to externally imposed processes.

Decades before African Americans assumed roles in shaping their neighborhood, the first environments they controlled were the houses in which they lived. African Americans consistently adapted residential spaces and transformed them for other uses. Houses intended for one nuclear family housed extended family members as well as unrelated people as boarders. Houses were also the locations of businesses that brought clients into the home. Homes were also instrumental in the relationships that African Americans formed with each other. Some of these connections were personal, as in social gatherings, while others were in service of budding institutions and organizations. Residential spaces helped African Americans sustain themselves economically, form social bonds, establish social standing, and build institutions.

Investigating the lives of early black suburbanites, a group the archive often excludes, required methodological creativity, and my treatment of hairdresser A. M. Johnson in Chapter 3 illustrates my approach. According to an advertisement she listed in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, “Mme. A. M. Johnson Graduate of Madame Russell's School” offered clients “Electric Massage, Manicuring, Shampooing. Hair Straightening a Specialty. Transformations, Scalp Treatment, Pin Frizzies, Braids, Curls, Puffs” at 152 Simpson Road.[5] Johnson’s advertisement sparked several questions for me: What did 152 Simpson Road look like, and what was its neighborhood context? Who was Madame A.

---

[5] A. M. Johnson, advertisement, *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 2, 1916.

M. Johnson? Who lived at 152 Simpson Road? What were the practices and conditions of black hairdressers in the early twentieth century? To answer these questions, I looked at census records, Sanborn maps, real estate atlases, and primary and secondary literature on the experiences of black hairdressers. I integrated these materials to create a picture of Johnson's work that engaged substantively with the physical environment. Applying this methodology systematically allowed me to recover and discover the activities and practices of African American households in early twentieth century Ardmore.

This case study of South Ardmore combined attention to individual lives with attention to the occasions and institutions that brought African Americans together to further individual and shared goals. The narratives surrounding the Main Line and suburbia more broadly have often emphasized the individual—the ideal of the individual house, detached from neighbors with its own entrance, separating interior life from exterior life. Housing reformers evaluated black residents against this standard, and the Ardmore Notes columns praised homeownership as a marker of success. Recall also African American real estate agent Hebert Nelson's 1924 advertisement: "When a man owns his own home, he is SOME-BODY. Until he DOES own his house, he is only somebody else's TENANT, a useful cash producing personage, but a different being from a man who OWNS his own home."[6] As Nelson's advertisement and the Ardmore Notes attested, there were certainly African Americans in Ardmore who valued individuality. However, connections to other African Americans were also integral to the experiences

[6] Herbert C. Nelson, "Home Buyers," advertisement, Real Estate for Rent and for Sale—Mortgages—Etc., *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 10, 1924.

of many African Americans in Ardmore. Structuring my dissertation as a case study allowed me to look at individual lives *and* at how people gathered for different purposes, whether to socialize, learn, debate, worship, or organize.

Following the lives of black people in South Ardmore, both their individual and shared pursuits, required a metropolitan framework that considered not only suburban/urban connections but also intra- and inter-suburban relationships. This contrasts with an approach that defines the suburb exclusively in relationship to the central city. Previous scholarship on suburbs like the Main Line identified the city as the site of work and the suburb as the site of residence.[7] For African American residents in early Ardmore, the city was rarely the center point of orientation, and looking at the Main Line through African American perspectives elevates the importance of understanding Ardmore and other suburbs as sites for work, socializing, and organizing. These patterns foreshadowed trends that scholars of suburbia identified in the 1980s and 1990s when writers such as Robert Fishman and Joel Garreau started to discuss changing relationships between suburbs and cities: instead of living in the suburbs and working in the city, increasing numbers of suburban residents conducted all of their activities in suburbs, sometimes crisscrossing multiple suburbs in the metropolitan region while skirting the central city.[8] Long before this, however, African Americans in the early 1900s developed

---

[7] See, for instance, Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[8] Fishman, "Beyond Suburbia: The Rise of the Technoburb" in *Bourgeois Utopias*, 182–207; Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

and sustained intra- and inter-suburban connections in their individual and collective lives. Even in the earliest suburbs there were residents who lived their lives primarily apart from the city. Following this finding scholars might revisit other early suburbs to consider previously overlooked relationships that may have existed within and among suburbs.

This case study also demonstrates the value of a longitudinal study of one suburb as a way to understand change over time. Studying early twentieth century Ardmore demonstrated the distinctive circumstances that gave rise to a significant black population, and examining the postwar era illuminated the ways subsequent generations experienced shifting social, economic, and political contexts. Looking at examples of organizing in both the early suburban years and in the postwar years highlighted the growing role of African Americans in determining the future of South Ardmore.

From housing reformers of the early twentieth century to the work of housing activists in the 1960s and 1970s, the question of affordable housing and its availability to African American households has surfaced in varied ways, and the same is true in contemporary Ardmore. Like their counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s, residents I interviewed during fieldwork in 2008 and 2009 wondered about whether African Americans would continue to be able to live in Ardmore. Whereas "creeping commercialism" prompted concerns about affordable housing in the 1960s, the issue is now of gentrification. The qualities that originally made Ardmore unattractive to wealthy white Main Liners—its proximity to commerce, higher densities (which facilitate ease of walking), and businesses—are qualities that have increasing value in current real estate

markets. Added to this, Ardmore is a comparatively affordable area in Lower Merion Township, providing access to the exceptionally strong Lower Merion School District. These factors have all contributed to rising housing prices.

A housing development constructed in 2006 called Ardmore Crossing exemplifies African American neighbors' concerns about gentrification. The lot where Ardmore Crossing now stands was previously the site of the Philadelphia Electric Company's Ardmore Substation. (The substation had been immediately adjacent to houses and had been exactly the type of industry about which activists in the 1960s and 1970s had expressed concerns.) The Ardmore Crossing project recuperated this brownfield site and turned it into a development that included an apartment building with 57 affordable housing units for seniors, 5 townhouses designated as affordable, and 26 market-rate townhouses.[9] Referring to "those houses over on Spring Avenue," nearly every Ardmore resident and community leader with whom I spoke mentioned Ardmore Crossing. While affordable units responded to a continued need for such housing in the area, it was the market-rate townhouses that concerned residents.

Linking class and race, they asserted that the $500,000 price placed the properties out of reach of the majority of black households in South Ardmore. As they confronted rising housing prices and negotiated the diminishing presence of African American households and the growing presence of non-black residents, particularly white households, many pondered whether there would be a place for them and younger

---

[9] Montgomery County Planning Commission, "The Montgomery Awards, 2009 Revitalization Award: Ardmore Crossing," accessed July 29, 2015, http://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/3849.

generations in Ardmore's future. This was an especially charged question given the longstanding presence of African American families and institutions in Ardmore. African Americans had always had white neighbors; however, what set these contemporary white households apart from their historical predecessors was their ability and willingness to purchase houses at prices that longtime black residents regarded as exorbitant. Efforts to address escalating home prices recall and build on organizing efforts begun in the 1960s to preserve housing options for black residents.

My research is part of a larger shift in how scholars think about suburbs. The new suburban studies recognizes the diversity of the people who live in suburbs and the types of activities in which those residents engage.[10] Reflecting on the range of case studies that make up the recently published anthology *Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America*, Margaret Crawford writes: "Charting the complexity, contradictions, and even paradoxes contained within suburbs, these accounts suggest that *difference* may actually be the defining characteristic of suburbia, rather than the sameness consistently attributed to it."[11] Ardmore's history challenges the notion that there has ever been anything quintessentially suburban.

---

[10] See, for instance, the monographs Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See, for instance, the anthologies John Archer, Paul J. P. Sandul, and Katherine Solomonson, eds., *Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[11] Margaret Crawford, "Afterword," in Archer, Sandul, and Solomonson, *Making Suburbia*, 382.

Bibliography

Abbott, Carl. "'Necessary Adjuncts to Its Growth': The Railroad Suburbs of Chicago, 1854–1875." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 73 (Summer 1980): 117–31.

Adams, Annmarie. *Medicine by Design: The Architect and the Modern Hospital, 1893–1943*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Adams, Val. "Non-Commercial Plugs." *New York Times*. May 9, 1965.

Archer, John. *Architecture and Suburbia: From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690–2000*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

———. "Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no. 4 (1983): 139–56.

Archer, John, Paul J. P. Sandul, and Katherine Solomonson, eds. *Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Armstrong Association of Philadelphia. *A Study of Living Conditions among Colored People in Towns in the Outer Part of Philadelphia and in Other Suburbs Both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey*. Philadelphia, 1915.

Baltzell, E. Digby. *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*. 1958. Reprint, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1989.

Bauman, John F. *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920–1974*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

Bean, Theodore, ed. *History of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1884. Accessed July 29, 2015. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9g45bh93.

Becker, Marshall J. "Lenape Archaeology: Archaeological and Ethnological Considerations in Light of Recent Excavations." *Pennsylvania Archaeologist* 50, no. 4 (1980): 19–30.

Becker, Marshall Joseph. "The Lenape of Southeastern Pennsylvania: A Brief History." *Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society History Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1985): 3–8. Accessed May 14, 2015. http://www.tehistory.org/hqda/html/v23/v23n1p003.html.

Birmingham, Stephen. *The Right People*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1968.

Blockson, Charles. *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*. Jacksonville, NC: Flame International.

Borchert, James. "Visual Landscapes of a Streetcar Suburb." In *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, 25–63. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.

Bosworth, Louise Marion. *Housing Conditions in Main Line Towns: An Investigation Made under the Direction of the Committee on Investigation, Main Line Housing Association*. N.p., 1913.

Browning, Charles. *Welsh Settlement of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1912. Accessed May 4, 2015. https://archive.org/details/welshsettlemento00brow.

Buck, William J. *History of Montgomery County within the Schuylkill Valley*. Norristown, PA: E.L. Acker, 1859. Accessed July 29, 2015. https://archive.org/details/historymontgome01buckgoog.

Burroughs, Nannie. *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*. Edited by John Cries and James Ford. Prepared for the committee by Charles Johnson. The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, 1932. Accessed April 27, 2015. archive.org/details/negrohousingrepo00presrich.

Clark, Clifford Edward, Jr. *The American Family Home, 1800–1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

Connolly, Harold X. "Black Movement into the Suburbs: Suburbs Doubling Their Black Populations during the 1960s." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1973): 91–112.

Contosta, David. *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850–1990*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995.

Crawford, Margaret. "Afterword." In Archer, Sandul, and Solomonson, *Making Suburbia*, 381–387.

Creditt, William. "The Neglected or Overlooked Negro Youth in the North." In *A Child Welfare Symposium: Twenty-Five Special Papers Contributed by Leading Pennsylvanians*, edited by W. H. Slingerland. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1915. Accessed May 18, 2015. http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100332095.

Davis, Patricia Talbot. *End of the Line: Alexander J. Cassatt and the Pennsylvania Railroad*. New York: Neale Watson Academic Publishers, 1978.

Dobbins, Charles G. ed. *The University, the City, and Urban Renewal: Report of a Regional Conference Sponsored by the American Council on Education and the West Philadelphia Corporation, March 25, 1963*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1964.

Drake, St. Clair, and Horace R. Cayton. "The Measure of a Man." In *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, 495–525. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1945.

Dyer, Stephanie. "'Holding the Line against Philadelphia': Business, Suburban Change, and the Main Line's Suburban Square, 1926–1950." *Business and Economic History* 27, no. 2 (1998): 279–91.

Emlen, John T. "Discussion." National Conference of Social Work Proceedings, 1917, 500–503. University of Michigan Digital Library Text Collection. Accessed May 16, 2015. http://name.umdl.umich.edu/ACH8650.1917.001.

———. "The Movement for the Betterment of the Negro in Philadelphia." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49 (September 1913): 81–92.

Erickson, Ethel. *Employment Conditions in Beauty Shops: A Study of Four Cities*. Bulletin of the Women's Bureau (US Department of Labor) 133. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1935. Accessed January 16, 2015. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HBS.BAKER:455431.

Evans, Sara M., and Harry C. Boyte. *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1986.

Farley, Reynolds. “The Changing Distribution of Negroes within Metropolitan Areas: The Emergence of Black Suburbs.” *American Journal of Sociology* 75, no. 4 (1970): 512–29.

Feld, Marcia Marker. “Martin Meyerson: Building the Middle Range Bridge to Educate Professional Planners—An Appreciation and Reminiscences.” *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 3 (2011): 239–48.

Fisfis, Nick S., and Harold Greenberg. “Suburban Renewal in Pennsylvania.” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 111, no. 1 (1962): 61–110.

Fishman, Robert. *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

Forsyth, Ann, and Neema Kudva, eds. *Transforming Planning: 75 Years of City and Regional Planning at Cornell*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2010.

Franklin, Vincent P. “The Philadelphia Race Riot of 1918.” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 3 (1975): 336–50.

Garreau, Joel. “Atlanta: The Color of Money.” Chap. 5 in *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*, 138–78. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

Gatewood, Willard. *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000.

Gerstle, Gary. *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Gill, Tiffany M. “Beauty Pioneers: Racial Uplift and Gender in the Creation of a Black Business Community.” In *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s*

Activism in the Beauty Industry, 7–31. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

———. "'I Had My Own Business . . . So I Didn't Have to Worry': Beauty Salons, Beauty Culturists, and the Politics of African American Female Entrepreneurship." In *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender and Culture in Modern America*, edited by Phillip Scranton, 169–94. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Gilpin, Joshua. "Journal of a Tour from Philadelphia Thro the Western Counties of Pennsylvania in the Months of September and October, 1809." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 50, no. 1 (1926): 64–78.

Glenn, Thomas Allen. "The Great Welsh Tract or Barony in the Province of Pennsylvania 1682 to 1700." In *Merion in the Welsh Tract: With Sketches of the Townships of Haverford and Radnor*, 21–55. Norristown, PA: Herald Press 1896. Accessed May 4, 2015. https://archive.org/details/cu31924010481723.

Goode, George Benjamin, and Charles Brown Plant. *Who Is Who: The Afro-American Social Directory*. Ardmore: Ardmore Printing Company, 1922.

Goode, W. Wilson. *In Goode Faith: Philadelphia's First Black Mayor Tells His Story*. With Joann Stevens. Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1992.

Halpern, Robert. *Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Harris, Dianne. *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Hartigan, John. *Racial Situation: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Hayden, Delores. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000*. New York: Vintage, 2004.

Haynes, Bruce. *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church: 1880–1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hirsch, Arnold. *Making the Second Ghetto: Race Housing and Chicago, 1940–1960*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Hoffman, Frederick Ludwig. *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1896. Accessed May 31, 2015, https://archive.org/details/racetraitstenden00hoff

hooks, bell. "Black Vernacular: Architecture as Cultural Practice." In *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, 145–51. New York: New Press, 1995.

Hotchkin, S. F. *Rural Pennsylvania in the Vicinity of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Co., 1897.

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Jackson, Luther P. "The Educational Efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau and Freedmen's Aid Societies in South Carolina, 1862–1872." *Journal of Negro History* 8, no. 1 (1923): 1–40.

Jacobi, Lauren. "William J. Robinson." In *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865–1945*, edited by Dreck Spurlock Wilson, 501–3. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Jenkins, Philip. "The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania, 1920–1940." *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 69, no. 2 (1986): 121–38.

Jenkins, Virginia Scott. "'Fairway Living': Lawncare and Lifestyle from Croquet to the Golf Course." In *The American Lawn*, edited by Georges Teyssot, 116–33. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

Johnson, Karl Ellis. "'Trouble Won't Last': Black Church Activism in Postwar Philadelphia." In *African American Urban History Since World War II*, edited by Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter, 245–62. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Johnson, Kimberly. "Community Development Corporations, Participation, and Accountability: The Harlem Urban Development Corporation and the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 594 (July 2004): 109–24.

Johnson, Valerie. *Black Power in the Suburbs: The Myth or Reality of African-American Suburbanization*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

Jones, Jacqueline. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present*. 2nd ed. New York: Basic Books, 2009.

Kilde, Jeanne. *When Church Became Theatre*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

King, Moses. *Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians*. New York: Moses King, 1902.

Krus, Kevin M., and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds. *The New Suburban History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Kuznets, Simon, and Dorothy Swaine Thomas. *Population Redistribution and Economic Growth: United States 1870–1950*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1957.

Lacy, Karyn R. *Blue Chip Black*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Landis, Charles I. “History of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike: The First Long Turnpike in the United States” Pts. 1–5. *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 42, no. 1 (1918): 1–28; 42, no. 2 (1918): 127–40; 42, no. 3 (1918): 235–58; 42, no. 4 (1918): 358–60; 43, no. 1 (1919): 84–90; 43, no. 2 (1919): 182–90.

Langdon, George. “Evolution of a Transportational Route as the Core of a Suburban Region.” *Scientific Monthly* 76, no. 6 (1953): 325–34.

Lawrence, David. *From Buildings and Loans to Bail-Outs: A History of the American Savings and Loan Industry, 1831–1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Leigh, Nancey Green, and Sugie Lee. "Philadelphia's Space In Between: Inner-Ring Suburb Evolution." *Opoli* 1 no. 1 (2005): 13–32.

Lerner, Gerda. "Early Community Work of Black Club Women." *Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (1974): 158–167.

Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. "The Performed Word: Music and the Black Church." In *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 346–81. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990.

Logan, John, and Mark Schneider. "Racial Segregation and Racial Change in American Suburbs, 1970–1980." *American Journal of Sociology* 89, no. 4 (1984): 874–88.

Longstreth, Richard W. *From City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920–1950*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.

Lower Merion Historical Society. *The First 300: The Amazing and Rich History of Lower Merion*. Darby, PA: Diane, 2000.

MacDonald, John S., and Leatrice D. MacDonald. "Chain Migration: Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks." *Milibank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1964): 82–97.

Mackintosh, Michael Dean. "New Sweden, Natives, and Nature." In *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*, edited by William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter, 3–17. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.

Marks, Carol. *Farewell—We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Martin, Isadore Maximillian. *Negro Managed Building and Loan Associations in Philadelphia: Their History and Present Status*. Philadelphia: Associated Real Estate Brokers of Philadelphia, 1936.

Mason, David L. "Homeownership Is Colorblind: The Role of African American Savings and Loans in Home Finance, 1880–1980." *Business and Economic History Online* 8 (2010): 1–8. Accessed May 18, 2015. http://www.thebhc.org/sites/default/files/mason.pdf.

Mathew, Linda P. "History of the Main Line YMCA." Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1970.

McCarthy, Michael P. "Corrupt and Contented? Philadelphia's Stereotypes and Suburban Growth on the Main Line." In *Suburbia Re-examined*, edited by Barbara Kelly, 111–18. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989.

McHenry, Elizabeth. "Literary Coalitions in the Age of Washington." In *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, 141–86. Durham: NC, Duke University Press, 2002.

Merrill, Carol. *The Strother Family: Charlottesville to Ardmore*. N.p.: C. R. Merrill, 1983.

Montgomery County Planning Commission. "The Montgomery Awards, 2009 Revitalization Award, Ardmore Crossing." Accessed July 29, 2015. http://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/3849.

Mooney, Barbara Burlison. "The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 1 (2002): 48–67.

Moore, Shirley Ann Wilson. *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910–1963*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Moore-Smith, Alberta. "Women's Development in Business." In *Proceedings of the National Negro Business League: Its First Meeting, Held in Boston, Massachusetts, August 23 and 24, 1900*. Boston: J. R. Hamm, 1901, 131–141. Accessed May 19, 2015. https://archive.org/details/proceedingsofnat00nati_0.

———. "Negro Women's Business Clubs: A Factor in the Solution of the Vexed Problem." In *Report of the Second Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League*. Chicago: R. S. Abbot Publishing Company, 1901, 60–64. Accessed May 31, 2015. https://books.google.com/books?id=ubo6AQAAMAAJ&.

Morris, Vivian. "Harlem Beauty Shops." US Work Projects Administration, Federal Writers' Project, Folklore Project, Life Histories (April 19, 1939). Accessed January 16, 2015, www.loc.gov/item/wpalh001481.

Morrison, William. *The Main Line: Country Houses of Philadelphia's Storied Suburb, 1870–1930*. New York: Acanthus, 2002.

Muhammad, Khalil Gibran. *Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Murphy, Patricia Watkins, and James V. Cunningham. "Community Development Corporations and the Emergence of Organizing." In *Organizing for Community Controlled Development: Renewing Civil Society*, 38–52. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003.

National Association of Home Builders. *Housing Facts, Figures, and Trends.* Washington, DC: NAHB Public Affairs and NAHB Economics, 2006.

National Negro Business League. "First Day, First Session." In *Proceedings of the National Negro Business League: Its First Meeting, Held in Boston, Massachusetts, August 23 and 24, 1900*. Boston: J. R. Hamm, 1901, 7–8. Accessed May 19, 2015. https://archive.org/details/proceedingsofnat00nati_0.

Newman, Bernard J. "The Negro Migration to Philadelphia." *Housing Betterment* 12, no. 4 (1923): 408–9. Accessed May 16, 2015. http://books.google.com/books?id=DbxNAAAAMAAJ&.

Oldmixon, John. *The British Empire in America*. Vol. 1. London, 1708. Accessed May 5, 2015. http://archive.org/details/britishemireina00oldm.

Owen, Griffith. "At a Meeting of the Comm, 13th of 10 mo., 1690." In *Pennsylvania Archives: Selected and Arranged from Original Documents in the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, Conformably to Acts of the General Assembly, February 15, 1851, and March 1 1852*, by Samuel Hazard. Philadelphia: Joseph Severns and Company, 1852. Accessed May 4, 2015. http://books.google.com/books/about/Pennsylvania_Archives.html?id=GwEQAAAAYAAJ.

Passenger Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad. *Suburban Homes on the Lines of the Pennsylvania Railroad within a Radius of Thirty Miles around Philadelphia, with Useful Information for Summer Home Seekers*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1890.

———. *Suburban Stations and Rural Homes on the Pennsylvania Railroad*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1874.

———. *Thirty Miles around Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1913.

Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Pennsylvania Railroad. *Guide for the Pennsylvania Railroad with an Extensive Map; Including the Entire Route, with All Its Windings, Objects of Interest, and Information Useful to the Traveler*. Philadelphia: T. K. and P. G. Collins, 1855.

Plater, Michael A. "African-American Insurance Enterprises: An Early Vehicle for Economic and Social Development." *Journal of Management History* 3, no. 1 (1997): 42–58.

Porter, Dorothy. "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828–1846." *Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 4 (1936): 555–76.

Reiner, Thomas, and Paul Davidoff. "A Choice Theory of Planning." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 28, no. 2 (1962): 103–15.

Reiner, Thomas, Robert Sugarman, and Janet Reiner. *The Crosstown Controversy: A Case Study*. Philadelphia: Transportation Studies Center, Center for Urban Research and Experiment, University of Pennsylvania, 1970.

Reynolds, Anita, with Howard Miller. *American Cocktail: A "Colored Girl" in the World*. Edited by George Hutchinson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Rose, Harold M. *Black Suburbanization: Access to Improved Quality of Life or Maintenance of the Status Quo?* Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1976.

Rosenthal, Leon. *A History of Philadelphia's University City*. Philadelphia: Printing Office of the University of Pennsylvania, 1963.

Scott, Emmett J. *Negro Migration during the War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1920. Accessed May 18, 2015. https://books.google.com/books?id=c0kaAAAAYAAJ&.

Sernett, Milton C. *Bound for the Promised Land*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

Shaw, Stephanie J. "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women." In *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible": A Reader in Black Women's History*, edited by Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, 433–47. New York: Carlson, 1995.

Sies, Mary Corbin. "'God's Very Kingdom on the Earth': The Design Program for the American Suburban Home, 1877–1917." In *Modern Architecture in America: Visions and Revisions*, edited by Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson, 2–31. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991.

———. "North American Suburbs, 1880–1950 Cultural and Social Reconsiderations." *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 3 (2001): 313–46.

Simpson, George E. "Race Relations and the Philadelphia Press." *Journal of Negro Education* 6, no. 4 (1937): 628–30.

Sipes, William. *The Pennsylvania Railroad: Its Origins, Construction, Condition, and Connections*. Philadelphia: Passenger Department, 1875.

Smith, Eric Ledell. "'Asking for Justice and Fair Play': African American State Legislators and Civil Rights in Early Twentieth-Century Pennsylvania." *Pennsylvania History* 63 (1996): 169–203.

Smith, George. *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania: From the Discovery of the Territory Included within Its Limits to the Present Time, with a Notice of the Geology of the County and Catalogues of Its Minerals, Plants, Quadrupeds and Birds*. Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, 1862. Accessed May 18, 2015. https://archive.org/details/historyofdelaw00smit.

Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1971.

Stilgoe, John. *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1939*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988.

Sugrue, Thomas. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

———. "The Peopling and Depeopling of Early Pennsylvania: Indians and Colonists, 1680–1720." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 116, no. 1 (1992): 3–31.

Thabit, Walter. "A History of PEO: Planners for Equal Opportunity." Planners Network: The Organization of Progressive Planning. Accessed May 30, 2015. http://www.plannersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/A_History_of_PEO.pdf.

This Is the Main Line. Ardmore, PA: Main Line Times, 1955.

Toll, Jean Barth, and Michael J. Schwager, eds. Vol. 1 of *Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years*. Norristown, PA: Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983.

Townsend, John. *The Old Main Line: Personal Reminiscences of the "Main Line," Principally in the Sixties and Seventies*. 2nd ed. N.p., 1922.

Tucker, Priscilla. "Poor Peoples' Plan." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s., 27, no. 5 (1969): 265–69.

US Bureau of the Census. *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1910*. Population Schedules. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1978.

———. *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910.* Population Schedules. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1982.

———. *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920.* Population Schedules. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992.

———. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930.* Population Schedules. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2002.

US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *Negroes in the United States, 1920–32*. Prepared by Zellmer Roswell Pettet and Charles Edward Hall. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1935.

Van Slyck, Abigail. "The Spatial Practices of Privilege." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70, no. 2 (2011): 210–39.

Vaux, George. "Settlers in Merion: The Harrison Family and Harriton Plantation." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 13, no. 4 (1890): 447–59.

Walcott, Victoria. *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Wallace, Paul A. W. *Indian Paths of Pennsylvania*. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1965.

Wallace, Tom. "Skokie Sets Foresighted Example in Town Planning; Chicago Suburb, Growing Rapidly, Adopts Master Plan for Parks and a Bond Issue to Finance It." Reprinted from the *Louisville Times*, August 1955. *Planning and Civic Comment* 21, no. 3 (1955): 26-28.

Warner, Sam Bass. *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987.

———. *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston (1870–1900)*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Washington, Booker T. "Educational Engineers." *New Outlook*. June 4, 1920, 266–67.

———. *The Negro in Business*. Boston: Hertel, Jenkins, and Company, 1907.

Wiese, Andrew. "Black Housing, White Finance: African American Housing and Home Ownership in Evanston, Illinois, before 1940." *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 2 (1999): 429–60.

———. *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

———. Review of *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb*, by Bruce Haynes. *Journal of American History* 80, no. 3 (2002): 1135–36.

Wilson Brothers Company. *Catalogue of Work Executed*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Company, 1885.

Wilson, William Julius. *The Truly Disadvantage: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Woodson, Carter G. "Insurance Businesses among Negroes." *Journal of Negro History* 14, no. 2 (1929): 202–26.

Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981.

Newspapers and Magazines

Autocar Messenger

Automotive Industries–the Automobile

Bus Transportation

Chicago Defender

Christian Banner

Crisis

Evening Public Ledger

Friends Intelligencer

Holiday Magazine

Main Line Times

New York Times

Pennsylvania Freedmen's Bulletin

Philadelphia Inquirer

Philadelphia Tribune

US News and World Report

Dissertations and Theses

Goldstein, Brian. "A City within a City: Community Development and the Struggle over Harlem, 1961–2001." PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013.

Groff, John Marshall. "Green Country Towns: The Development of Philadelphia's Main Line." Master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1981.

Karr, Ronald. "The Evolution of an Elite Suburb: Community Structure and Control in Brookline, Massachusetts, 1770–1900." PhD diss., Boston University, 1981.

Leonard, Kevin. "Paternalism and the Rise of the Black Community in Evanston, Illinois, 1870–1910." Master's thesis, Northwestern University, 1982.

Porch, Marvin E. "The Philadelphia Main Line Negro: A Social, Economic and Education Survey." EdD diss., Temple University, 1938.

Reed, Alison Janet. "The Bryn Mawr Hotel: The Relationship Between the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Nineteenth-Century Railroad Resort Hotel." Master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania 1989.

Reiner, Janet Scheff. "Client Analysis and Planning of Public Programs." PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1972.

US Bureau of Education. *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*. Accessed May 18, 2015. https://archive.org/details/negroeducation00fundgoog.

Wright, Richard, Jr. "The Negro in Pennsylvania: A Study in Economic History." PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1912.

Archival and Manuscript Collections

Athenaeum of Philadelphia

Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/index.cfm

Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement records

Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Philadelphia

Downingtown Industrial and Agricultural School collection

Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Autocar Company records

Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Historical American Buildings Survey / Historic American Engineering Record / Historic American Landscapes Survey, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/

Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, http://www.loc.gov /pictures/collection/hh/

Prosperity and Thrift: The Coolidge Era and the Consumer Economy, 1921–1929, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/coolhtml /coolhome.html

Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division

Lower Merion Historical Society, Bala Cynwyd, PA

Gerald A. Francis Collection

News and Ephemera

Lower Merion Township Secretary's Office, Ardmore, PA

Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Property records, http://propertyrecords.montcopa.org

Records of the National Negro Business League

Annual meetings records, microfilm

Special Collections Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

Evening Bulletin Collection

Fair Housing Council of Delaware Valley Records

Philadelphia Housing Association

Temple University Library

Civil Rights in a Northern City, http://northerncity.library.temple.edu

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Documenting the American South, http://docsouth.unc.edu/index.html

Local Plans

Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem. *East Harlem Triangle Plan: Prepared for the Community Association of the East Harlem Triangle and the New York City Housing and Development Administration*. New York: 1968.

Ardmore Coalition. *Plan for Housing and Community Improvements in the South Ardmore Community*, 1970.

Cooper Square Community Development Committee and Businessmens Association. *An Alternate Plan for Cooper Square*. New York, 1959.

Lower Merion Township. *A Plan for Lower Merion Township 1937*. Ardmore, PA: Lower Merion Township, 1937.

———. *A Plan for the Growth of Lower Merion Township*. Ardmore, PA, 1954.

Olmsted, Frederick Law, and Arthur Coleman Comey. *Main Line District City Planning Report to the Main Line Citizens' Association"* [advance draft]. Brookline, MA, 1919. Housed at the Lower Merion Historical Society.

Philadelphia City Planning Commission. *The West Philadelphia District Plan*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1964.

Atlases and Maps

Atlas of Bryn Mawr and Vicinity or of Properties along the Pennsylvania R.R. Including 1 1/2 Miles Each Side of the Road and from City Line to Malvern Station. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, C.E., 1881.

Atlas of Properties Along the Pennsylvania R.R. Embracing Two Miles Each Side of the Road and From Overbrook to Malvern Station. Philadelphia: J. L. Smith, 1887.

Bromley, George, and Walter Bromley. *Atlas of Properties on Main Line from Overbrook to Paoli from Actual Surveys and Official Plans*. Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley, 1926.

Kiser, Ellis. *Atlas of Properties on Main Line Pennsylvania Railroad from Overbrook to Paoli*. Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1908.

Kiser, Ellis, and C. A. Potts. *Atlas of Lower Merion, Montgomery County Including Part of Delaware County and Overbrook Farms, Wynnefield & Overbrook Impr. Co.* Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1896.

Kiser, Ellis, and J. M. Lathrop. *Property Atlas Main Line Pennsylvania R.R. from Overbrook to Paoli Embracing Lower Merion, Haverford and Radnor Townships and Parts of Upper Merion, Easttown and Tredyffrin Townships*. Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1913.

Kiser, Ellis, J. M. Lathrop, and Milton R. Yerkes. *Atlas of Properties on Main Line Pennsylvania Railroad from Overbrook to Paoli*. Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1920.

Macfarlan, Douglas. *The Mills of Mill Creek, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, as They Were in 1776 with Certain Additions, etc*. 1937. Accessed May 31, 2015, http://www.lowermerionhistory.org/atlas/mills.html.

Naeff, M. A. *Atlas Map of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: J. L. Smith, 1893.

Property Atlas of the Main Line, Penna. Including the Township of Lower Merion and the Borough of Narberth in Montgomery County and the Townships of Haverford and Radnor in Delaware County. Philadelphia: Franklin Survey Company, 1937, 1948, and 1961.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Delaware County, Pennsylvania*. Vol. 4. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1925.

———. *Insurance Maps of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*. Vol. 1. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1926.

Smith, E. V. *Atlas of Properties along the Pennsylvania R.R. Embracing 1 to 4 miles Each Side of the Road and from Overbrook to Malvern Station*. Philadelphia: J. L. Smith, 1900.

City Directories

Delaware and Atlantic Telegraph and Telephone Company. *Telephone Directory of the Main Line District*. Philadelphia: Delaware and Atlantic Telegraph and Telephone Company, 1904.

Main Line and Residential and Business Directory. Ardmore: F. L. M. Hawkins, 1916.

Paschall Directory Service. *Business and Street Directory of Ardmore, Bryn Mawr and Wayne: The Main Line from Overbrook Hills to Strafford, with Highway Map*. Merchantville, NJ: Paschall Directory Service, 1928.