

# **A new century dawns, a town is born**

## **1900-1930**

***“Nothing like it around Wilmington”***

*--- Real estate ad, 1915*

At the start of the 20th century, Bellefonte did not yet exist, but the first steps toward its creation were being taken.

An 1893 map of Brandywine Hundred, part of the Baist Atlas, shows three streets extending east from Philadelphia Pike within the current town boundaries – Rodman Road, Marion Avenue and Bellefonte Avenue – with River Road running parallel to the pike. Between Philadelphia Pike and River Road is an unnamed roadway that would eventually become Brandywine Boulevard. The area consisted largely of farmland.

The property along Philadelphia Pike between Rodman Road and Marion Avenue was owned by a “Miss Weldin,” presumably Louisa Weldin, who also owned a larger property on the south side of Rodman Road. J.G. Jefferies owned the land between Marion Avenue and Bellefonte Avenue. The unnamed roadway marked the eastern boundary of the Weldin and Jefferies properties. The land to the east, between the unnamed road and River Road was owned by H.C. Clark. North of Bellefonte Avenue, and on both sides of the pike, the map shows property owned by a “Mrs. Beeson.” To the east of her property, and stretching east to the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad tracks along the Delaware River, was a farm owned by Henry Guest, for whose family Guest Lane in nearby Cragmere is named.

The map shows a concentration of houses on the east side of Philadelphia Pike along Marsh Road and streets that had already been laid out for the Gordon Heights community.

According to personal papers kept by H.B. Hurst, chief emeritus of the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company and his wife, Clara, that were used to prepare a history of the area and the fire company, there were only 16 houses in what is now Bellefonte in 1910. There were two farms, and two residents opened small stores in their homes. The few streets were merely dirt roads, dusty in the summer and muddy in the winter. The Wilmington Traction Company, which provided trolley service through the town on a route that extended to Darby, Pennsylvania, would periodically deliver loads of cinders and the townsmen would gather on Saturday afternoons with their wheelbarrows and shovels to spread the cinders along the roadways.

With the community situated on the eastern edge of a ridge, the early residents and many of those who would arrive in the next few decades could enjoy a clear view of the Delaware River, an asset that would frequently be touted in future real estate ads.

At the time, Brandywine Hundred was largely rural, with U.S. Census figures showing a population of 3,899 in 1900 and 4,440 in 1910.

In the first years of the new century, Bellefonte would begin to take shape. The area called Montrose, bordered by Bellefonte Avenue, Brandywine Boulevard, Rodman Road and the rear of lots on the west side of Fairview Avenue, was subdivided in 1902. Four years later came the subdivisions of Montrose Addition and Montrose Terrace. Montrose Addition extended north from Rodman Road to Bellefonte Avenue, between Brandywine Boulevard and Rosedale Avenue. Montrose Terrace made up the eastern portion of the town, bordered by Rodman Road, Rosedale Avenue, Highland Avenue and the town line on the east.

In 1911, subdivision maps were filed for Bellefonte Heights, the area north of Bellefonte Avenue between Brandywine Boulevard and Wynnbrook Road. A few years later came Villa Monterey, whose eastern section abuts Bellefonte Heights near Philadelphia Pike and School House Lane. Villa Monterey also has a western section, across Philadelphia Pike, which never became part of the town.

In these years before incorporation, newspaper references to the area were sparse. One of the first mentions came in a one-paragraph item in the Wilmington Evening Journal of March 24, 1905. It read:

“Constable Thomas Buckley held a sale on the Lattomus farm at Bellefonte yesterday. Live stock and farming implements were sold. About \$500 was realized by the sale.”

The community made the front page of the Wilmington Morning News on November 4, 1912, thanks to the disappearance of Morgan, described in the headline as a “trick pony,” from the pasture of S.G. Camperson, at the corner of Philadelphia Pike and Bellefonte Avenue. “He has either wandered away, as the result of a Halloween prank, or has been stolen,” the article stated. Someone had apparently opened the gates to the pasture, allowing some cows and the pony to run free. Camperson was able to secure the cows the next morning, but the pony was nowhere to be found.

According to the newspaper, “the pony is one of the smartest little animals ever seen in Brandywine hundred, and almost all of the children for a radius of three miles knew and loved him. He was almost surfeited on sugar and he was wise enough to do little tricks to receive the sweet rewards. Mr. Camperson’s children had him trained so that he would come to them at the call of his name and follow like a dog.”

There was no follow-up report on whether Morgan ever returned home.

Historian Carol E. Hoffecker, in *Corporate Capital: Wilmington in the Twentieth Century*, traced the start of Wilmington’s suburban development to Elsmere’s beginnings in 1886. The arrival of trolley lines was an important factor in early suburban growth. Three lines stretched like spokes from the heart of the city – one south to New Castle, another southwest through Elsmere to Prices Corner and Brandywine Springs, and the third north along Market Street and Philadelphia Pike to Chester, Pennsylvania.

The trolley line that ran north of Wilmington could not follow Philadelphia Pike, as the grade near Penny Hill was too steep. Instead, it was routed up Hillcrest Avenue to the street that became Brandywine

Boulevard before cutting back to Philadelphia Pike north of the town limits. The convenience of the trolley line became a key component in the marketing of the new communities. As early developers sold lots for home sites, they made certain they included a reference to the trolley – and its five-cent fare – in their ads. In the 1910 U.S. Census, the community along Brandywine Boulevard was labeled “Montrose on Trolley.”

In 1911, Mullins Publishing (need full name) in Wilmington, published what it said was the first directory of businesses and residents in Wilmington and along the trolley lines that extended from the city. The directory made no reference to Bellefonte, but it did list residents of Montrose.

Hoffecker described Montrose as a “workingman’s suburb” and noted that newspaper advertisements offered lots for sale for between \$74 and \$149.

She wrote:

A lot in the new “village of homes” could be had for \$10 down plus \$1 a week, and transportation via the trolley line was available to downtown Wilmington and to the Pennsylvania Railroad’s new shops at Todd’s Cut. In the decade that followed, other tracts were offered for settlement close by these original sites, each with its appealing name suggestive of snug retreat and its claim of offering more house and more fresh air for less money than could be had in the city....

Another technique developers used was the appeal to the conscience of parents. “Get your children into the country,” urged an advertisement for Montrose. “The cities murder children. The hot pavements, the dust, the noise, are fatal in many cases, and harmful always. The history of successful men is nearly always the history of country boys.”

This ad was typical of the times.

Before Purchasing Look At  
**Bellefonte Heights**  
 With Its Fine Old Shade Trees,  
 Nothing Like It Around Wilmington  
 Five Cent Car Fare; 15 Minutes from  
 Court House on Darby Trolley. Now is  
 the time to select your lots—location  
 unsurpassed.

Terms to Suit

For plots and particulars address or call

**J. J. Peirce & Son**  
 813 Shipley Street

The trolley was not the only 20th century innovation that made the community more accessible to Wilmington. Telephone lines also extended from the city into suburban areas. An advertisement from the Wilmington Light, Power, & Telephone Company published in the Evening Journal on May 23, 1907 contained a lengthy list of telephone installations completed in the previous week. All but two of the new lines were associated with Wilmington homes and businesses. The others were for two suburban residences, H.G. Vernon at Philadelphia Pike and Grubbs Landing, near Claymont, and for W.M. Ennis, who, according to the notice, lived at the corner of Philadelphia Pike and Bellefonte Avenue.

As these new communities grew, residents began to develop a desire for self-governance and a recognition that, as an organized entity, they might have greater influence with agencies that had an impact on their daily lives – like the trolley service and the post office.

So, on January 28, 1915, Representative Webster introduced House Bill 145, titled “An Act to incorporate the Town of Bellefonte, New Castle County,” in the State House of Representatives.

Introduction of the measure garnered some attention in the local press. On January 29, the Evening Journal included a paragraph on the proposal as part of a lengthy article on “important bills” presented to lawmakers for consideration. Following references to proposals related to construction of the DuPont Highway, taking the politics out of the issuance of liquor licenses, abolishing the position of chancellor (the chief judge of the Court of Chancery), increasing pay for Wilmington policemen, increasing pay for state prosecutors, funding for improvements to the state’s colored schools, and appropriating \$35,000 to finish construction of a Girls Industrial School in Claymont, the newspaper reported that “Bellefonte, a suburb of Wilmington adjoining Gordon Heights, desires a charter, and Representative Webster introduced a bill to incorporate it into a full-fledged town. The incorporators named in the bill are Joseph

J. Lawrence, Winfield S. Clark, Thomas C. Pierce, Carl Snellenberg and Harry A. Hirst, whose successors shall be elected in June 1916.”

The measure went through the committee processes that were standard at the time, passing the House on February 23 and the Senate on March 3. Governor Charles R. Miller signed the bill into law on March 9, four days before the close of the year’s legislative session.

The boundaries of the town, as described in the charter legislation, were smaller than they are today. From the intersection of Rodman Road and the western boundary of the property of the Wilmington and Philadelphia Traction Company (today’s Brandywine Boulevard), the boundary extended to the southeast along Rodman Road to what is now the rear property line of homes on the west side of Riverside, and along that line until reaching the southerly boundary of the property on the east side where Bellevue Avenue now dead-ends. The boundary then follows the rear property lines of homes on the east side of Bellevue Avenue until it reaches the rear boundary of properties on the south side of Highland Avenue, and continues along that line until it reaches River Road. From there, the boundary continues northeasterly until it reaches what are now the rear property lines of homes on the north side of Prospect Avenue. The boundary then runs eastward to its intersection with the Wilmington and Philadelphia Traction Company property (Brandywine Boulevard), then east to Wynnbrook Road, jogging slightly before continuing east along what is now School House Lane to Philadelphia Pike. It continues southwesterly along Philadelphia Pike to Bellefonte Avenue, then east on Bellefonte Avenue to Brandywine Boulevard and south back to the starting point at Rodman Road.

Interestingly, in those years, newspapers – and the real estate developers who advertised in them – would often refer to Bellefonte as “formerly Montrose.” However, the area originally developed as Montrose and subdivided in 1902, bordered by Bellefonte Avenue, Brandywine Boulevard, Rodman Road and the rear of lots on the west side of Fairview Avenue, was actually outside the town’s boundaries.

The charter legislation required that all five commissioners be residents of the town and that at least three of them be freeholders, or property owners. The law directed the commissioners named in the act to draw lots, with three serving a one-year term and two serving a two-year term, with subsequent elections being for two-year terms. Also, starting in 1916, town residents would elect an alderman, a treasurer and an assessor.

Commissioners would elect a president and secretary from among their membership. Commissioners would serve without pay, but they were given authority to determine how much to pay both the secretary and the treasurer. They also had authorization to hire and pay one or more auditors each year to review the books kept by the treasurer.

The law provided that the alderman would be responsible for hearing cases regarding violation of any laws the commission passed, and he would have the power to impose fines of up to \$10 for violations of those laws.

Some provisions of the charter might seem quaint by today's standards but were essential at the time. Sections 9 and 10, for example, consist of an elaborate eight-paragraph description of procedures to follow in laying out new streets for the town and for compensating the property owners through whose land the new streets might run. Section 11 gave commissioners the authority to direct property owners to install sidewalks in front of their property and, if the property owner declined to do so, to install the sidewalks and bill the property owner for the cost incurred.

The law also required the owners of male dogs to pay an annual tax of 50 cents, and the owners of female dogs to pay a \$1 tax, with fines for violations ranging from \$1 to \$5. (There was no tax imposed on cat owners.)

Section 15 authorized the commissioners to "appoint some discreet and judicious citizen" as town bailiff. It also stated that the alderman, commissioners and bailiff as well as any New Castle County justice of the peace or constable who lived in the town, had the duty "to suppress all riotous, turbulent, disorderly or noisy conduct of any person or persons, or disorderly or noisy assemblages or gatherings of any person or persons in the streets, lanes, or alleys of the said Town or in any house situated therein, after night or on the Sabbath day, or at any other time or season whatever...." Anyone convicted of disorderly conduct could be fined up to \$10 and be committed to the New Castle County Workhouse for up to five days.

The charter also prohibited bonfires, the firing of guns or pistols, or setting off fireworks within town limits.

The charter enumerated the types of ordinances the commissioners could approve, including improving streets and sidewalks, planting trees, developing and maintaining a water supply system, and policing. It also gave the commission authority to make rules governing traffic, transportation and stray animals within town limits.

Since the town was incorporated in 1915, before the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, only men could vote in town elections. And they had to be 21 or older, as well as up to date on payment of town taxes.

Newspapers of the period generally limited their reporting on Bellefonte to the legislative action creating the new town, except for this one-sentence note in the News Journal on April 19:

"Five houses are being erected in the newly incorporated town of Bellefonte, Brandywine hundred, and it is understood that about 20 additional houses will be erected in the near future for rent or for sale."

With such sparse reporting, the duty of defining the town's character to the public fell to the real estate developers. On April 17, just one month after the incorporation legislation was passed, the Montrose Co., one of the primary developers, touted the "remarkable real estate bargains" available and asserted "Now's the time, this is the place ... Bellefonte ... formerly Montrose," with lots available for anywhere from \$70 to \$180, and a 10 percent discount for cash. According to the ad, an express trolley ride on the

Darby Line from Tenth and Market streets in Wilmington (where Rodney Square stands today) to Bellefonte Avenue took only 11 minutes.

(According to a notice from the Wilmington and Philadelphia Traction Co. published a month earlier, the express run's first stops in the suburbs were at the Hillcrest pumping station and at Lore Avenue, followed by Bellefonte Avenue, before heading north toward Claymont and Chester. Stops farther north were at Orchard Lane, Holly Oak Road, Grubb's Landing, Manor Avenue and Myrtle Avenue.)

Two weeks later, on May 1, another ad for lots in Bellefonte proclaimed the availability of "remarkable bargains on beautifully located home sites overlooking the Delaware River."

But construction lots weren't the only item on sale in the new town. The News Journal's classified ads on April 15 included an item placed by J.C. Willing of Bellefonte, who was selling S.C. Black Minorcas, "large birds bred for eggs and beauty. Eggs for hatching, \$1.50 per 15."

In the town's first year, there were significant indications of community spirit, and some feistiness as well.

About the time the commission was having its first meetings, two organizations formed – a men's group called the Bellefonte Improvement Association and a women's group called the Bellefonte Civic Club. While the commission was responsible for governance, these groups helped build a sense of community, holding fundraisers and social events that would raise money to meet a variety of needs, including construction of a community building, support of a new fire company and installing electric street lights in the town.

The Evening Journal in March reported that the Riverside A.A. of Bellefonte met at the home of Samuel Camperson, presumably the farmer who lived at the corner of Philadelphia Pike and Bellefonte Avenue, to discuss plans for the baseball season. The article indicated that the group would appoint a manager who would schedule games for 16-year-old athletes from the area against other clubs or local town teams.

In September, according to the Evening Journal, "public protest meetings" were being held to complain about changes in mail delivery service in Bellefonte and Montrose, as well as in other rural areas. The concern was that two mail routes were being merged into one, and that the new route would start in Wilmington rather than at Edge Moor. Residents contended that mail service was better with two carriers and their horse teams than it would be with one carrier using an automobile, in part because of the poor conditions of the roads in Brandywine Hundred for about five months out of the year.

According to the article, Bellefonte and Montrose residents were also upset by reports that, instead of having mail delivered to their homes, it would be taken to a central location in Bellefonte for pickup. "This, they declare, is almost unbearable, and would subject their mail to the danger of being tampered with by persons so inclined. It would also make a row of letter boxes that would be unsightly," the newspaper reported.

In mid-October, a sudden thunderstorm flashed through Wilmington, and the Evening Journal noted damage outside the home of William Carter, a Wilmington jeweler who lived at the corner of Grandview and Elizabeth avenues. A large tree limb crashed to the ground, taking with it “a birdbox, which one year harbored wrens, sparrows, martins and bees.”

The Carter residence was a hub of civic activity, the site of meetings and social gatherings for the Women’s Civic Association of Bellefonte, which, according to The Morning News edition of Nov. 19, “is one of the most active in Brandywine hundred and numbers about 50 women – all ‘live wires.’” That short article noted that the women were devoting their energies to improving the streets in town while the men were raising funds to build a town hall. The women organized bake sales and socials to finance their efforts and hired “a man and team to gather up rubbish from around the town and deposit in the washouts and gullies along the streets.”

Residents apparently took advantage of any opportunity to socialize. About three dozen residents gathered on Nov. 17 at the home of Beatrice Rutan for a surprise party to welcome her home from a two-month visit to Connecticut.

The men of Bellefonte organized their own social club, the “Jolly Twelve,” and they also gathered on Nov. 17 at the home of C.E. Clark on Grandview Avenue for an evening of singing followed by dinner “around the festal board, which fairly groaned under the weight of turkey and good ‘eatings.’”

In December, the trolley company heeded a plea from a Bellefonte delegation headed by Carl Snellenberg, one of the town commissioners, and announced it would expand service between the town and the Wilmington train station. Under the new schedule, trolleys would run every 15 minutes on Monday through Saturday from 6:30 to 9 or 10 a.m., depending on the day, and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sundays. Afternoon service would run from 4 to 8:30 p.m. except on Saturdays, when the last scheduled departure from Bellefonte was at 11:45 p.m.

Starting in 1915, one of the more popular fundraisers for the town hall campaign was the presentation of minstrel shows, a form of racially charged entertainment developed in the early 19th century that consisted of comic skits, variety acts, dancing and musical performances that mocked people of African American descent.

On Nov. 24, the Evening Journal published this lengthy unsigned exhortation, part of the program for a minstrel show held earlier in the week, which expressed great hopes for what the new town might become.

We would make a town, if you please, of Bellefonte. We have thought much about it and we do not esteem it an impossible vision by any means. If there is any doubts about what Bellefonte will be, the basis for their doubts is not in Bellefonte’s environment. The basis for these doubts is, moreover, in the minds and in the enthusiasm of Bellefonte’s people.



Everything worth while the accomplishment of man first occurred in the human intellect. The thing is always only the expression of the thought. Great deeds are always the reflection of great thoughts and great enthusiasm.

If Bellefonte people, any large number, will determine or will that Bellefonte will be a city, it will grow and expand. When we say this we do not mean that Bellefonte will be great merely because its people or some of its people wish or can convince themselves that they would be pleased if it was great. We mean a great deal more than that.

The foundation of what we call civilization is formed of stones made by the homes of the individual. These homes, however, are the product of the minds and desires of the individuals forming what we call society. In other words, civilization rests on the virtues of the civilized and these virtues of the civilized find their expression and their permanence on the homes of the civilized.

The town or the place is your home as much as is the house in which you live. The greatest town or city or place is not the largest or the most beautiful or the most wealthy. It is the place having the best people and therefore the best homes.

Walt Whitman was not far from the truth when he said that the greatest city was not the one having the largest population and the greatest docks and boulevards and the like, but it was the city containing the greatest men.

We in Bellefonte have a magnificent opportunity. We are nearly all city folk and we have had experience in the town; we not only have visions of what Bellefonte might be, but we have had experiences in the mistakes which we have seen in other places.

All towns and cities are proud of talking of their advantages. We are convinced that natural advantages are negligible and even dangerous if they are separated from spiritual advantages. There is no impossible environment for the willing spirit.

If we in Bellefonte will it and have it so, there is no prohibitive cause why Bellefonte should not be the best of them. We have the location. We have the environment, and all we need is the conception and the will. We, who are here and who will stay here, have a responsibility and an obligation upon us. The Bellefonte of twenty years from now will be the Bellefonte of our conceptions and aspirations of today. What a city can or a town hope for does not come from the outside; it comes from the inside.

What an opportunity this is for you and me. Let us think for Bellefonte as we think for our own individual homes. Let us aspire to have it better and sweeter. Let us yearn that it radiate an influence and atmosphere of justice and home likeness and Bellefonte will glorify you and me."

Fundraising for the proposed town hall would continue for several years, with events scheduled at many different locations. A 1916 newspaper notice identified Carl Snellenberg, one of the original town commissioners, and chairman of the Bellefonte Building Fund Association, and mentioned plans for a

benefit show at the Garrick Theater, just north of the Grand Opera House on Market Street in downtown Wilmington. "Bellefonte, a newly-incorporated town, situated just beyond Gordon Heights, is a fast-growing community. Many people say it will soon be the finest suburban site in this vicinity," the article stated.

The show must have been a rousing success, as the News Journal reported on February 24 that "it was impossible for some to get into the theatre and several hundred persons were turned away."

According to the Nov. 4 edition of the Every Evening, one of the town's big social events for year took place on Halloween night at "Brownshingles," the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clinton W. Gray. The Grays hosted a masquerade party for about 30 clerical workers from the finishing department of the DuPont Co.'s powder mill in Carney's Point, N.J. The article does not give the location of the home but it refers to a "dancehall on the second floor, which was extensively decorated with cornstalks, foliage and pumpkins."

In 1917, the first steps were taken to organize what would become the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company. "Bellefonte is without fire protection and the residents feel that in view of the large number of residences which have been erected in that section recently they are warranted in taking these precautionary measures," the Evening Journal reported in March.

A group had begun meeting in February to write a constitution and bylaws for what was initially called the Bellefonte Fire Company and to determine what equipment would be needed. The group contemplated purchasing a hand-drawn apparatus with a 50-gallon chemical tank from the Ajax Chemical Company. Later in the year, the Bellefonte Civic Club voted to make a donation to the fire company to help pay for the equipment. Fundraising for the fire company continued in 1918, with members dividing the community into eight districts for a door-to-door campaign to collect funds and increase membership.

According to a memoir prepared from the papers of H.B. and Clara Hurst, the fire equipment was kept in a small building behind what was known as Clark's Store, a grocery and meat shop on the northeast corner of Brandywine Boulevard and Marion Avenue.

In 1917, during World War I, Philadelphia Pike became the first Federal Aid Highway in Delaware, and one of the first heavy-duty concrete industrial highways in the United States. The paving marked an important transition for Philadelphia Pike, from its longstanding role as a cultural route, one which evolved over time as part of the most popular route between cities in the northeast, into a new function as an engineered route, one designed primarily for the efficient movement of goods and services.

The paving project would cause a short-term increase in traffic in the new town as autos and horse-drawn carriages would require detours around the construction work. In mid-1918, commissioners decided to place cinders on one of the roads through town to accommodate the traffic increase.

1919 would mark the founding of the Bellefonte Methodist Church. The Revs. Hugh Kelso and J. Beauchamp were among the leaders of a small group that chose a site at the corner of Rosedale and

Marion avenues. In May, a congregant's donation of a \$50 Liberty Bond funded the purchase of a tent under which Sunday services could be held. Only a month later, the group was making plans for construction of a chapel, with G.M. Weldin and Henry Folsom loaning the church \$2,500 each to pay for its construction. Plans were drawn up, the cost was estimated at \$3,590 and the decision to move ahead was made on July 31. On August 13, a groundbreaking ceremony was held, with participants including Jack Tait, Jennie Foulk, Annie Tucker, Frank Long, George Martin, Isabel Foulk, Pearl Grimes, Mary Jamison, Bayard Sallaway and Howard Robertson, according to a church history based in part on notes from Rev. Kelso's diary.

Folsom was in charge of building the chapel, and work was completed in November, with its final cost totaling \$5,312.86. The congregation held its first evening service on December 21. On January 4, 1920, the chapel was dedicated and members of the congregation made donations sufficient to cover the difference between the construction loans and the final cost.

While the church was being built, the Bellefonte Civic Club funded a \$500 improvement that would benefit the entire town, installing a dozen electric street lights throughout the community in November. The street lights were hooked up to the electric meters of residents of nearby houses, who were to be reimbursed a dollar a month for providing the connection.

By late 1919, construction of Bellefonte's community building was on the horizon. The corner of Bellefonte Avenue and Eleventh Street, as Brandywine Boulevard was then known, was chosen as the site, and the commissioners purchased several lots there. Plans were drawn up and excavation of the basement began.

A group known as the Bellefonte Community League had taken over where the Bellefonte Building Fund Association had left off. Residents paid a dollar a year to become members, and some made larger donations. Donations for the year totaled \$1,291.25, including \$100 each from resident Ray Eaton and the Bellefonte Civic Club, which also turned over \$494.75 in proceeds from bonds it had sold for the building project.

Donations in 1920 totaled \$2,835.15, including \$135 from the town commission and larger grants from two prominent landowners who lived nearby -- \$500 from William du Pont, who owned the Bellevue estate northwest of the town and \$300 from Richard F. Sellers, whose estate was near Edgemoor.

Significant progress was made in construction during 1920 and early 1921, with the organization making payments for roofing, a chimney, a heater and plastering.

Craftsmen in the town did much of the work, and the building's features included a large auditorium with a stage, a powder room, and a meeting room. Meetings, dinners, dances and card parties would be held in the building. In March of 1921, even though the building was not yet complete, the Community League was holding its meetings there, and it promptly voted to rent out a room to the Mount Pleasant Board of Education to serve as a classroom for first- and second-grade students who lived in Bellefonte and Montrose, and other nearby areas as well.

The Community League also expressed its voice on some of the larger issues of the day. At its March 7 meeting, members passed a motion that the “League go on record in favor of a bill giving women of incorporated towns the right to vote.”

1920 would mark the first year since its recognition as a town that Bellefonte’s population would be recorded in the U.S. Census. A total of 291 residents were counted, but the growth suggested by housing construction in the previous decade was a mere harbinger of what was to come.

By 1930, the town’s population had grown to 761 residents, an increase of 161.5 percent.

One contributing factor to the population growth was an extension of the town’s borders, as residents of the Montrose community, the area on the east side of the trolley line – then known as 11th Street and now as Brandywine Boulevard – between Rodman Road and Bellefonte Avenue, petitioned the town commission in January of 1923 to be annexed into the town. Montrose resident E.M. Ocheltree, who presented the petition, said that 70 percent of the property owners, and 60 percent of the residents, favored the consolidation. Most of those who were opposed, Ocheltree said, feared that their taxes would increase. The petition was forwarded to the General Assembly, which soon approved the expansion.

Bellefonte, literally and figuratively, roared through the ’20s, with completion of the community building and the annexation but two of the signs of progress.

By 1923 some residents had become concerned with the growing number of fires in Brandywine Hundred and the lack of sufficient firefighting apparatus north of Wilmington. Volunteer companies within Wilmington were being organized into a paid fire department, but some members of those volunteer companies were residents of Bellefonte who desired to serve their own community. The stalled movement from 1917 to create a fire company was revived. Morris Ainscow, the deputy chief of the Wilmington Bureau of Fire, helped the group with its organizing plan and, in September, 100 residents pledged one dollar each to get the fire company started. Harry G. Little, James Montgomery and Joseph Billingsley filed the necessary incorporation papers.

On March 19, 1924, the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company No. 1 was officially organized. It was the first volunteer fire company in Brandywine Hundred and the only one in the area for several years, until the Claymont and Talleyville fire companies were created.

Joshua Kelley was elected the company’s first president and Harry Draper its first fire chief, serving for the remainder of 1924. In elections held on Jan. 1, 1925, Kelley was again elected president and John Wigglesworth was elected chief.

Throughout 1924, the fire company raised funds for new equipment by holding bake sales and a carnival and selling raffle tickets on a Model T Ford. Its first piece of apparatus was built on a Reo-Speed Wagon chassis and featured a 350-gallon rotary pump, two nickel-plated 35-gallon chemical tanks, 200 feet of half-inch chemical hose, a hose body for 500 feet of 2 ½-inch fire hose, handheld fire extinguishers, oil

lanterns, a hand siren, an ax and a bar. The new apparatus was received in January 1925, and was housed in a double garage rented from Wigglesworth on Rosedale Avenue.

It wasn't long before the new equipment received its first serious test— spending 20 hours that spring battling a fire in a warehouse at one of the piers of the Coast Guard service station at Edgemoor, near what would later become the DuPont Co. Edge Moor plant.

The annual carnivals soon became the fire company's main source of revenue, growing in size until it became regarded as the largest of its kind in Delaware. It often ran for 10 or 11 nights, with a new car being raffled every night.

In 1925, representatives of the U.S. Post Office approached the commission with a recommendation that some of the streets in the town be renamed, perhaps to eliminate confusion with similarly named streets elsewhere in Wilmington and its suburbs, and the renumbering of some of the houses. Elizabeth Street became Elizabeth Avenue and Park Avenue became Talley Road, but the big discussion concerned the renaming of 11th Street. One faction proposed renaming it Blue Rock Avenue, but Commissioner Frank R. Heaton offered Brandywine Boulevard as a suitable name, and commissioners voted to approve his motion.

Later in the year, the town took a major step toward modernization when the commission approved an ordinance to authorize the Wilmington Gas Company to install natural gas lines under the town's streets and alleyways.

In 1926, as the building boom in the town continued, the commission took its first steps toward establishing construction standards. In February it appointed a committee to write a building code for the town, using Wilmington's code as its model.

Another form of construction sparked a controversy in March, when the Hassler Advertising Company put up a sign 11 feet high by 100 feet long – in four 25-foot segments – along Brandywine Boulevard between the community house and Elizabeth Avenue. Residents were not pleased and 166 people signed a petition that was presented to the commission protesting the presence of the sign. Seeing the widespread community opposition, the business agreed to take down its sign.

With the issue of gas supply settled, the town's attention turned in 1926 to finding a reliable water supply. At the time, the Springhill Water Company planned to lay new water mains from 36th and Market streets in Wilmington north toward Hillcrest, making connection to the nearby lines a tempting proposition. However, the commissioners were told that, if they wanted to be part of the new water system, they would have to agree to have the town annexed into the City of Wilmington.

Residents of several communities – Bellefonte, Hillcrest, Gordon Heights, Cragmere and Penrose – gathered for a meeting in late March, to discuss the water supply and annexation issue. When it came time for a vote, more than 200 people in attendance voted overwhelmingly against annexation.

While there was some support for annexation because of the prospect of better water supply for home use and fire protection, residents were concerned about taxes – Wilmington's rate was \$1.95 per \$100

of assessed valuation and Bellefonte's rate was 50 cents – and they were also concerned that Wilmington was doing little to improve streets on the edge of the city and that its building regulations and zoning codes might be too onerous.

The water service discussion would continue throughout the year, with the new focus becoming drawing water from a quarry at Bellevue. William du Pont, owner of the Bellevue estate that is now a state park, offered to install an 8-inch water line along Philadelphia Pike, one mile in each direction from the quarry.

Another important service in any town is trash collection, and the commission addressed that issue in July, when it agreed to a contract with John H. Woodlen to collect rubbish – once a month for \$18 a month.

In 1927, a major controversy engulfed the town as a group of residents protested that Arlene Gleeson was operating a childcare business in her home. The complainers, who included the wife of Mark E. Brown, the commission president, stated that Mrs. Gleeson was caring for eight or nine small children in her two-bedroom house.

A public hearing was held on May 16, and the town commissioners even hired court reporters to transcribe the proceedings. During the hearing, Mrs. Brown stated: "How in the world can anyone have that many in a small place? She gets paid for them. If they were poor people we could not do anything about it. They would have to live that way. She does it for profit and she should get some place where she would have more room to keep them respectably. They tell us we have a Baby Farm, and I do not think that is so nice."

Another opponent, Benjamin E. Harrar, asserted: "any woman can not possibly take care of, in a sanitary manner, nine little children, or seven, or six of them. As Mrs. [Margaret] Grotz says, the odor must be something awful from this place in the summer.... I would not want my people to live next to a place where there are nine strange babies."

But Albert Mundorff, who lived next door to Mrs. Gleeson, rallied to her defense, saying the children in her care were not a nuisance. "Those people that have those babies, I know as a positive fact, are leaving them there because there are no healthier people in the City of Wilmington or the State of Delaware," he said.

Another speaker, Mrs. A. Gregg, said she had visited the home and had always seen the children in proper condition. "There is not any odor. I found that the house is very clean," she said.

When the commission met a week later to decide the matter, it became front-page news in the Evening Journal.

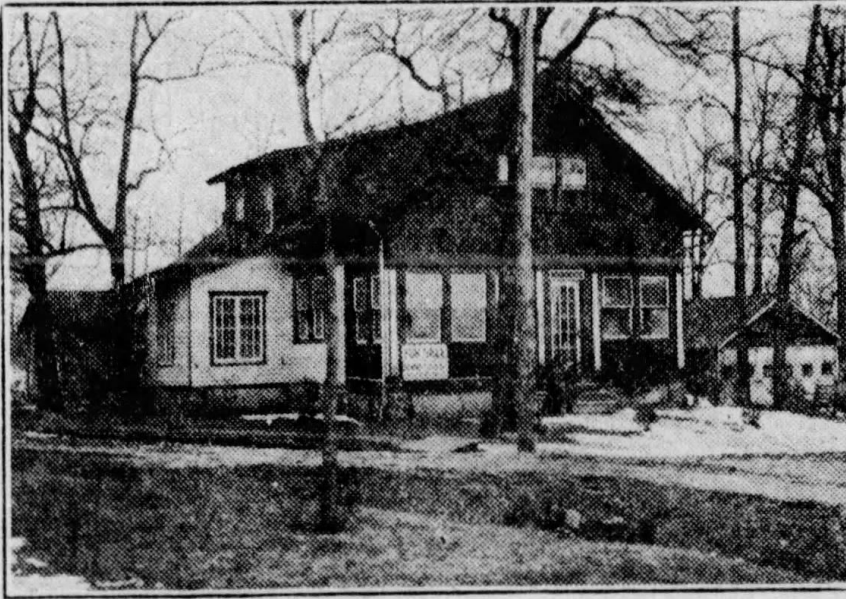
Early in the meeting, Mundorff rose to speak, hoping to respond to comments Mrs. Brown apparently made about him at the previous hearing. Mark Brown, however, gaveled him down, saying his comments were out of order. Mundorff and other supporters of Mrs. Gleeson then left the meeting, according to the newspaper account.

Several others spoke, both commissioners and members of the public, before Frank Speakman, the commission's attorney, delivered his report, which concluded that Mrs. Gleeson was not violating any state or town laws. The commission decided that Mrs. Gleeson could continue to operate her home-based business, but Mark Brown did suggest that the commission consider making a law to govern situations like this one.

The children in Mrs. Gleeson's care may have gained a reprieve that night, but Bellefonte's canines were less fortunate. After resident Leroy Grimes asked what redress citizens might have if they were bitten by a stray dog, commissioners agreed that the town's growing dog population was a nuisance. However, they weren't certain how to deal with it. Summoning Wilmington's dog catcher would be too expensive, commissioners said, as the town would be charged two dollars for each dog rounded up. According to the newspaper article, it was suggested that the strays be shot, but "this plan was frowned upon, several saying the gun toter, whoever he might be, might shoot a child instead of a dog." As the discussion concluded, Brown said residents would be reminded of the town's dog-licensing requirements by a notice included in their upcoming tax bills.

While some residents decried what they considered a large number of small children crowded into a two-bedroom home, there were many larger homes in the new town. Photographs were not yet a common feature in newspapers, but this April 1927 ad included a photo of a "Beautiful Bellefonte Home" that was "Modern in Every Way."

## Beautiful Bellefonte Home



### Modern in Every Way

This most attractive home has ten rooms, two baths, gas, electric, hardwood floors, hot water heat, pretty open stairway and laundry tubs.

Shades, screens and linoleum are included in the purchase price.

### Very Large Lot Two-Car Garage

Surrounded by an abundance of shade, with three entrances to the house and conveniently located to the trolley line. This property is your answer for an

## Ideal Suburban Home Edward V. DuRoss

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While no price was given for that 10-room home, ads from newspapers published in September 1928 do give some indications of property values.

A new, six-room home, with a bath, enclosed porch, hardwood floors and “all conveniences” was being offered for \$5,500. There was no price mentioned for another six-room home, this one with a two-car garage and a poultry house, but the ad said the seller “will accept automobile as part payment.” A third six-room home was described as a “real bargain,” going for “\$1,000 cash.” Features included a large attic, hardwood floors, two toilets, two concrete porches, a laundry area, hot water heat, gas and electric connections and a garage. Yet another six-room home, this one featuring “a good view of the river,” was being offered for \$6,000. No price was given for a nine-room home with a two-car garage and porches, plus gas, electric and hot water heat, but the seller said the price was “greatly reduced.”

An October 1928 ad for a new house with six large rooms on a 50- by 125-foot lot set the price at \$6,250.

In September, the Civic Club opened a library in a room in the Community Building. According to the Evening Journal, the library, which would be open for one afternoon a week, had received donations of 300 books, and more donations were expected.

Even with the opening of a library and the continuing building boom, there was apparently some restiveness among its residents. The minutes of the Commission’s August 13 meeting stated that “the topic in general was centered on the Revocation of the Charter of the town of Bellefonte,” with no further details offered. There was a reference to a special meeting being scheduled for Sept. 17, but the minutes of that meeting are missing. The topic surfaced again at the commission’s November 12 meeting, but the minutes offered no details.

The commission did schedule a special election for January 4, 1929, to give residents a voice on the matter. They voted in favor of reincorporating the town by a 92-39 margin.

Bellefonte was here to stay.