

## Water, sewers and phone lines – a town grows up

1930-1950

*“Beautiful homes, well-cared for gardens ... bus and trolley service running directly through the community to Wilmington, are all parts of the progressive program.”*

-- 1934 newspaper article

As the 1930s dawned, the nation was tumbling into the depths of the Great Depression that began with the stock market crash in October 1929. But Bellefonte, having survived an initiative by a small group of residents to revoke the town's incorporated status, would continue to grow.

The big question – at least at the end of the next two decades – was precisely how much the town had grown, and when.

Despite the Depression and restrictions on construction caused by shortages of building materials during World War II, Bellefonte's population nearly doubled, from 761 residents in 1930 to 1,472 in 1950, according to U.S. Census data.

But census figures for 1940 would prove to be a source of significant confusion, although not at the time they were released. Shortly after the 1940 count was taken, F. Allyn Cooch, Delaware's director of the census, reported the town's population at 1,048. A little more than a year later, official census reports put the population at 2,593 residents, the largest total the town would ever record. Published reports show no challenges made to the count soon after its completion, but in January 1948, the Census Bureau requested that the commission provide an updated map of the town's boundaries, showing notations of any changes that had occurred since 1940. At that time, there were unofficial estimates that the town could have as many as 1,800 residents.

When the 1950 census count was released, putting population at 1,472, the 1940 count came into serious question. Benjamin Ableman, the state's census director in 1950, concluded that someone had made “a serious mistake” in processing the 1940 data, most likely including areas outside the town's boundaries in the count. He noted, for example, that 770 housing units were listed in the 1940 tally, compared with only 440 in 1950, even though new construction continued in Bellefonte throughout the 1940s.

Despite the confusion over the population count, there was no disputing that Bellefonte was growing, and many of the issues facing the town, as well as the advances it made, were a reflection of that growth.

In late 1932, residents of the portion of Marion Avenue between Brandywine Boulevard and Fairview Avenue asked the town commission and the New Castle County Levy Court to open up Marion Avenue from Fairview to Philadelphia Pike. Before the town was incorporated, Marion Avenue had provided the primary access to Bellefonte from Philadelphia Pike. Around 1920, however, the commissioners closed that portion of the road and turned it into a dumping ground, according to an account in the Evening

Journal, with the hope that the accumulated trash would eventually provide a better base for a permanent road. While waiting for the government bodies to take action, a group of unemployed men worked without pay for two weeks, cutting down trees, removing trash and digging gutters. Mrs. Lawrence B. Foulke, whose home was at 404 Marion Avenue and who served on the town commission, led those advocating to open up the road. She had developed a plan for creating a roadway about 20 feet wide, with a row of flower beds in the middle. No action was taken on the proposal, but the issue would resurface several times later in the decade and still hadn't been resolved by 1940.

Just as men left unemployed by the Great Depression performed community service, women also faced economic hardships. In early 1933, some residents sought to establish a sewing unit in town, to provide a place for needy women to work, but county officials did not think the operation would be sustainable and directed women to register to work at a site in downtown Wilmington.

On March 4, 1933, the day Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated as president, Delaware became the last of the 48 states to declare a bank holiday, shutting down the banks in the state to prevent a further on deposits. As a result, the Bellefonte Building and Loan Association, created to support construction and purchase of homes in the new community, could not pay off the first of its shares that had reached maturity. The delay lasted only a month, as Congress passed the Emergency Banking Relief Act on March 9, paving the way for reopening of banks across the nation. Later in the year Congress passed more comprehensive banking legislation, creating the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC).

1933 would be a year of special significance for the town commission, as a woman, Mrs. George P. Morris, was chosen as its president in June. She presided over a commission meeting for the first time on July 10.

The debate over providing water service to the town, an issue that had been percolating since 1926, was finally resolved in 1933, when the commission granted the water service franchise to the Wilmington Suburban Water Company. Also in 1933, as growth continued, Delaware Power & Light Co. installed 15 more street lights in town.

Land use issues would continue to be a concern. While not as controversial as the battle over Mrs. Gleeson's childcare business in 1927, a plan in 1935 for a barber shop at the corner of Brandywine Boulevard and Grove Avenue prompted a petition from 43 residents who were opposed to the new business. The commission scheduled a special hearing in June to consider the matter. The complaints were heard, but the town's attorney, Frank Speakman, delivered a concise and straightforward ruling for the commission to follow. Since the town has no zoning laws, it could not restrict the use of the property because the proposed business did not endanger the lives or the health of the town's residents. Two years later, in November 1937, the commission would venture into land use regulations as its members passed the town's first building code.

Later in 1935, the town's trolley stations – actually little more than covered shelters – became a matter of debate. In September, the commission heard complaints that the station at the corner of Brandywine Boulevard and Marion Avenue was becoming an annoyance because it was so close to the site of the apartment building under construction at that intersection. A month later, the discussion broadened as

reports circulated that trolley service into the town might be discontinued. If that were to occur, the commission would have to consider whether to tear down the stations or leave them standing to give residents some protection when they were outside during bitter cold.

### **Sewers – a symbol of progress**

By 1936, the town was readying for discussion of its next major improvement. Following the provision of reliable water service, it was inevitable that demand for a sewerage system would follow. Discussions about a sewer system had begun in late 1932 or early 1933, when New Castle County engineers studied the possibility of installing sewer lines from Hillcrest to Cragmere and for the Mount Pleasant School that was to be built on Duncan Road. Several meetings were held in 1936 to discuss plans for laying a total of 20,000 feet of sewer lines in the town. In November, residents narrowly approved, by a 67-64 vote, a proposal to issue a \$30,000 bond to pay for the sewer system.

In 1937, the commissioners added a tax of 15 cents per \$100 of property value to repay the sewer bonds, and they awarded a \$20,331.80 contract (plus interest) to Chandler & Co., a Philadelphia business, to lay a portion of the sewer line and hired civil engineer Howard Robertson, who had an office on Brandywine Boulevard, to stake out one of the first portions of the line, along the boulevard between Marion and Bellefonte avenues.

The \$193,000 project was developed in conjunction with the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA), the ambitious New Deal Agency that provided millions of jobs nationwide during the Great Depression. As in most WPA projects, state and local governments covered 10 to 30 percent of the costs, primarily for supplies and equipment, while the WPA covered the labor. Work began in September 1937, with 130 men on the job, and that number was increased to more than 200 later in the year. Toward the end of 1938, the town commission approved an expansion of the project, adding connections to the Villa Monterey section of town. It took until late 1939 to complete the entire project, in part because of significant challenges workers encountered along the way.

Gangs of blasters and drillers were slowed when they encountered deep layers blue granite – Delaware’s famous “Blue Rock” – under numerous streets in the area, including Bellefonte Avenue and Haines Avenue. Because of the proximity of so many homes in the area, crews had to limit the use of dynamite with each blast. Even with those precautions, some accidents did occur. In February 1938, a dynamite blast broke windows and shattered the woodwork on the front porch of Newton F. Mount, a town commissioner, who lived at 1012 Grandview Avenue. Bad weather compounded with the sewer work to create more problems. Heavy snow and rainfalls impacted roads torn up by the digging, leaving soft, muddy shoulders in which cars and trucks were easily trapped. By September, most of those roads had been resurfaced. Later in the year work was again slowed when workers encountered heavy concentrations of rock along Beeson Avenue near Philadelphia Pike.

When completed, nearly 200 homes were connected to the new sewer system. The project was believed to have been the largest of its kind in the state, with the possible exception of one in Wilmington. In early 1940, the town began using a bidding process to sell off much of the equipment used for the project, including a power compressor, air drills, jacks and planks. Revenue from the sale of the

equipment, plus the connection fees residents paid to hook into the sewer system, enabled the town to pay off its \$30,000 loan for the project and build a surplus estimated at \$29,000. (The town held on to some of the construction equipment, including a pump, some lanterns and a manhole cover, when it sold off the last of the surplus items in 1944.) According to George Grotz, the Works Project Administration supervisor for the sewer construction, many tons of rock were hauled by truck from Bellefonte to Delaware City and then taken by barge to Port Penn, where it was used to build a jetty.

The digging in the streets of the town wasn't limited to work on the water and sewer projects. In 1937, the Diamond State Telephone Company was also laying pipe, providing underground telephone wiring on Bellefonte Avenue from Philadelphia Pike to Brandywine Boulevard and along the boulevard from Bellefonte Avenue to Lore Avenue.

In 1936, another of the area's battles from the previous decade resurfaced. The city of Wilmington was making another push to expand its boundaries into the northern suburbs, and members of a wide array of civic groups met in December at the Brandywine Hundred Fire Hall to discuss the issue. The turnout included members of the Brandywine Hundred Civic Association, the Bellefonte Civic Club, the Pugh-Lenderman-Chalfonte Veterans of Foreign Wars post, the Villa Monterey Improvement Association, the Mount Pleasant School Parent-Teacher Association and residents of Phillips Heights. Participants at the meeting discussed the possibility of incorporating to create a new town to prevent annexation by Wilmington. The issue resurfaced again in 1938 and 1939, when a Wilmington legislator drafted a bill that would have given the city the authority to annex nearby areas without the consent of the residents of those areas. Once again, it turned out to be much ado about nothing. Wilmington did not expand northward and no new town was incorporated.

### **Trackless trolleys – and traffic on the Boulevard**

The commission would also grapple with road and traffic issues. In April 1936, the commission contacted the state Highway Department about conditions on Marion Avenue, Talley Road and Euclid Avenue, where the department had started to repair the roads but had not completed the work. At the same time, at the request of the women of the Bellefonte Civic Club, the commission asked the highway department to install a sidewalk on the west side of Brandywine Boulevard, between Bellefonte Avenue and Lindamere, for the safety of children who used the road to walk to school. In June of 1938, the commission granted a right of way to the Highway Department to install the sidewalk.

In March 1937, the commission wrote again to the Highway Department. Citing the high speed of vehicles traveling on Brandywine Boulevard, they asked the agency to look into ways to better control traffic at the intersection of the boulevard and Bellefonte Avenue. Then, in late 1938 and into 1939, the commission initiated another round of talks with the highway department, reviving the discussion about extending Marion Avenue, which then ended at Fairview Avenue, west to Philadelphia Pike.

Public transportation through the town experienced a change as the 1930s came to a close. In August 1938, the commission took up a proposed ordinance granting the Delaware Electric Power Company the right to operate electric trackless trolley coaches along Brandywine Boulevard. A month or so later, the trolley company said that, because of a 66 percent decline in ridership, it would be changing its service

from trolleys to gas-powered buses. But the switch to gasoline did not occur, the overhead lines were installed and the electric trolleys began running in late 1939. In December of that year, the commission asked the trolley company to remove the old tracks so they could be replaced with a southbound lane, transforming Brandywine Boulevard into what The Morning News described as “a dual highway.”

During the 1930s, the New Castle Levy Court took a more assertive role in improving Wilmington’s northern suburbs and that effort brought benefits to Bellefonte, in part because of the 1929 charter revision that gave the county control over the town’s streets.

### **“A model suburban district”**

A lengthy article in The Morning News, published September 19, 1934, touted the county’s decision to install electric street lights in the area as another example of how north Wilmington was becoming “a model suburban district.” The article credited Levy Court Commissioner John H. Wigglesworth, a Bellefonte resident, with leading the campaign to have the lights installed from Hillcrest and Gordon Heights north all the way to Claymont.

The article cited a number of improvements in and around Bellefonte, noting that macadam paving had transformed Brandywine Boulevard into “a first-class road” from Haines Avenue to Bellefonte Avenue, and that the boulevard had been extended north from Bellefonte Avenue to Duncan Road, with the new portion having macadam paving and concrete curbs. Also, Highland Avenue was completely rebuilt, from the boulevard to River Road, with concrete curbs, gutters and sidewalks as well as macadam paving.

The article also mentioned how Wilmington Suburban had improved the town’s water supply, and noted that installation of nine fire hydrants in town had contributed to reductions in insurance rates.

“Beautiful homes, well-cared-for gardens, the Blue Rock Community Club House, an athletic ground, the modern, well-equipped Brandywine Hundred Fire Company, all adjacent to the Philadelphia pike, with bus and trolley service running directly through the community to Wilmington, are all parts of the progressive program,” the article stated.

Construction of new homes continued at a steady pace during the 1930s. For example, in late 1936 builder Alfred Vilone began constructing a series of bungalows on Bellefonte Avenue between Philadelphia Pike and Brandywine Boulevard. Five five-room homes, each with a garage, had been completed by April 1937, and the foundations for ten more homes were laid later in the year.

With growth, however, came troubles ... in various forms. At their August 1937 meeting, commissioners voted to ask the state Highway Department to clean out the ditches along the recently paved Maple Avenue after heavy rains flooded the ditches and overflowed onto properties and streets between Brandywine Boulevard and Fairview Avenue. A matter of neighborliness also came up at the meeting, with the commissioners asking the town’s attorneys to draft an ordinance that would bar property owners from erecting “spite fences” of five feet or more in height (or planting hedges of that size) along their property lines.

Later in 1937, Bellefonte found itself in the center of a controversy over enforcement of the state's "blue law" and a drive to have the law repealed. "Blue laws," which originated in Colonial America in the 1740s, banned individuals from engaging in "worldly labor" and many types of entertainment on Sundays. In October, the Rev. James C. Steen, the pastor of Bellefonte Methodist Episcopal Church, and E.M. Ocheltree had Charles W. Frampton, a newcomer to town, arrested for building his home on a Sunday. At the same time, Wilmington police had arrested another 13 men for a different "blue law" violation, playing cards on Sunday and keeping a gaming table.

Frampton was fined \$40 for his offense. In a sermon on October 10, the Rev. Delos O'Brian, pastor of the First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, said the complaint against Frampton was "the kind of thing that makes religion ridiculous."

Steady population growth in Bellefonte, and throughout eastern Brandywine Hundred, inevitably created a need for more places of worship, and that prompted the construction of St. Helena's Catholic Church in 1936. Built on the corner of Philadelphia Pike and Bellefonte Avenue, the church was just outside the town's boundaries but it has long been closely associated with the town. Following the dedication of the church on November 22, a celebratory dinner was held in the Brandywine Hundred Fire Hall.

The church was named in honor of St. Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor of Rome, and it also honored Helena Raskob, the wife of John J. Raskob, for the couple's considerable gifts to the church and to the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington. The Raskobs lived in Claymont, in a mansion he built that was known as The Patio, now the centerpiece of the Archmere Academy campus. John Raskob, hired as personal secretary to Pierre S. du Pont in 1901, was a top executive with both the DuPont Company and General Motors, but was best known for being the developer of the Empire State Building and national chairman of the Democratic Party from 1928 to 1932.

In January 1939, the town commission's monthly meeting was highlighted by a series of complaints from Wilbert J. Adams, a former commission president, focusing on a residence on Euclid Avenue where the owners were raising geese in a rubbish-filled yard that had attracted rats. The geese, Adams claimed, honked and squawked through the night, apparently because of the rats. The commissioners acted promptly, directing the secretary to write a letter to the property owners advising them that if the rubbish wasn't cleaned up, the state Board of Health would be notified. Adams also complained about unregistered and wrecked cars and trucks parked on the streets and that residents were parking cars on the streets overnight. Commissioners voted to give owners of unregistered vehicles a week to have them moved before asking the state Highway Department to remove them. State police would be asked to check on cars parked overnight.



In 1938, the Hall-Lenderman-Pugh Post No. 2907 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars installed a memorial to Brandywine Hundred residents who lost their lives during World War I on the traffic oval at the intersection of Brandywine Boulevard and Bellefonte Avenue. The memorial, a bronze tablet affixed to a Brandywine blue granite boulder, was engraved with the names of the deceased servicemen. E. Howard Newlin, a post member and president of the town commission, created the design for the tablet.

As the decade drew to a close, commissioners began discussing the possibility of building a small hall to house town offices. Through much of the 1930s, the commission had been holding its meetings at the Brandywine Hundred Fire Hall and most of the town's records were being stored in the cellar of George Mason, the town treasurer, and the attic of Ernest Brownhill, the town secretary. Commissioner Newton Mount, who suggested building the office, said he would support a tax increase to finance the project, but added that, with all the new homes built in the town over the past two years, the increase in tax revenues might cover a significant portion of the cost.

#### **The '40s: trash, trolleys ... and a town hall?**

The new decade would begin with a discussion of what would become a frequent talking point in town: trash collection. At a meeting of the Bellefonte Civic Club, the women's organization, members criticized a statement in a letter from Ernest T. Brownhill, secretary of the town commission, in which he claimed that "95 percent of the residents of Bellefonte are satisfied with the garbage collection." Mrs. William Young, the club's secretary, said most members were not happy with collection. Brownhill's letter said the commission would not consider any complaints unless they were signed and made specific reference to the date and location where a problem occurred.

The club itself would demonstrate remarkable continuity when it held its election of officers in May. Mrs. Fred Hope was elected to a sixth consecutive two-year term as president and Mrs. Raymond Robertson was chosen for her tenth term as recording secretary. Two weeks later, both women were presented bronze medals in recognition of their service. Also honored was Mrs. Emma Curren, who had been an active member since the club was established in 1915.

On June 4, Irving H. Borer was elected to the town commission for the first time, and his peers would choose him as secretary two weeks later. Borer would continue to serve on the commission for 12 years, primarily as president and secretary.

At the June 17 meeting, former commissioner Howard L. Robertson, who had been defeated in the recent election, stirred some controversy as he expressed his views about possible construction of a town hall, as Commissioner Newton Mount had urged in 1939. (The proposed site of the building would have been on two lots the town had recently purchased on Brandywine Boulevard between Elizabeth and Marion avenues. For years, that property has been used as a town parking lot.) Rather than saddle

taxpayers with the cost of maintaining a building, he urged that the town surrender its charter. And, he said, rather than worry about maintaining the recently completed sewer system, it should turn those lines over to New Castle County.

By September, the town had at least found a solution for its storage problems, with the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company agreeing to provide the commission with space for storage and to hold its monthly meetings. The town agreed to pay the fire company \$400 annually for fire protection, and the fire company agreed not to solicit donations from residents.

In another sign of progress in September, the commission voted to tear down the trolley waiting stations on Brandywine Boulevard at Maple and Bellefonte avenues, saying they were no longer needed because the new trolley service was more frequent than it had been in the past.

As 1940 drew to a close, construction continued in Bellefonte Heights, with Brown and Madden, a Wilmington real estate firm, beginning work on a new section of homes along Wynnbrook Road. Brown and Madden described the five-, six- and seven-room homes as "custom-built" while offering the advantage of development pricing. The builders were promising the latest in construction advances, including storm windows and circulating air heating, and touted the neighborhood's proximity to the Mount Pleasant School and to city and suburban shopping areas.

The 1941 municipal elections on June 3 brought a record turnout, with 246 ballots at. E. Howard Newlin, the commission president, was re-elected with 185 votes. John Gotwals and Luther Broadway were elected for the first time, with 192 and 161 votes, respectively.

Two weeks after the election, the issue of support for the fire company surfaced again. The fire company, claiming it was operating at a deficit, asked the town for an increase over its annual support payment of \$400. Without additional funding, fire protection would be compromised, representatives of the fire company told the commission. Commission members noted that any increase in support would require increasing property taxes, and they said they would not tap into the current surplus in the town's sewer fund until outstanding sewer bonds and a \$1,200 debt to New Castle County were paid off.

The commission decided to put the issue to a referendum and, on June 27, residents voted 87-41 to increase the annual payment to the fire company to \$800. Partly because of the referendum, commissioners decided in July to raise the town's tax rate from 28 cents to 34 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation.

Property in the town was valued at a little more than \$1,537,000, so the new tax rate was expected to raise just over \$5,200. The town's budget for the new fiscal year was set at just over \$7,300, with \$1,300 of that amount set aside as a reserve fund. Collection of delinquent taxes and a \$500 transfer from the sewer fund were to be used to balance the budget.

With war raging in Europe, concern over national defense was mounting, so Boy Scouts in the Bellefonte and Penny Hill troops began a drive to collect scrap aluminum in July. The town commission set up a bin outside the fire hall to support the drive, and scouts canvassed a large stretch of eastern Brandywine



Hundred, from Edge Moor Terrace north to Holly Oak. By September, the scouts had collected 1,465 pounds of aluminum and had it delivered to the Wilmington Marine Terminal.

In October, Marion Myers, an office file clerk, gained a level of recognition somewhat unusual for a Bellefonte resident when her marionette caricature of entertainer Rudy Vallee was displayed at the National Marionette Exposition in New York City. Myers told the *Journal Every Evening* that her collection consisted of about 35 puppets she had made from wood or plaster, including caricatures of Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Uncle Sam. She said she used the Rudy Vallee marionette as part of a puppet orchestra on a miniature stage, and added that her biggest thrill during the New York show came when Vallee himself stopped by and manipulated the puppet.

The discussion over trash collection, an issue for nearly two years, resumed in October when a committee led by William Dawes, a former commissioner, proposed having the town take over the service. They estimated the cost, including the purchase of a truck and hiring personnel, at \$2,741 a year but suggested that the cost could be lowered to as little as \$1,100 if neighborhoods like Lindamere, Hillcrest and Bellevue Manor were included in daily collections. At the time, the town was paying a private contractor \$1,700 a year to handle collections.

#### **Response to the war: scrap drives, rationing and civil defense**

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, national defense became an intensely local concern. At the December meeting of the town commission, a telegram from the State Council of Defense was read, requesting that the town organize its own defense council. As it turned out, the organizational effort extended beyond the town and, by the end of the year, 529 residents of what was considered the Mount Pleasant area – including 89 from Bellefonte – had volunteered for civil defense service. Volunteers would be trained to serve as auxiliary police and firefighters. Members of the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company would be trained on proper methods of combating incendiary bombs and decontamination.

As 1942 began, wartime rationing moved into full swing. In February, the commission responded to a query from the Delaware Rationing Administrator that the town had no need for any new automobiles at this time. At the end of the month, Rationing Board No. 14, which was part of the Mount Pleasant Defense Council, issued a series of rationing orders. It authorized a new car purchase for Thomas MacAbee, a resident of Euclid Avenue, for a vehicle he ordered before rationing went into effect. It also approved several requests for automobile tires, including one for the Rev. James Steen, pastor of Bellefonte United Methodist Church.

By May, at least one Bellefonte resident was demonstrating some ingenuity to get around the rationing regulations. James Donald Rosemary, a 10-year-old who lived on Bellefonte Avenue, built his own motor-driven vehicle, using an old auto starting motor, two wheels from a lawn mower, an automobile battery, his own wagon and some wire. According to a report in the *Journal Every Evening*, the youngster could travel around town for two to eight hours before having to recharge his vehicle.

In March and April, the town commission busied itself by drafting and approving its own civil defense legislation. The ordinance gave the commission authority to enforce blackouts and other civil defense rules, setting a maximum penalty of a \$300 fine or up to three months in jail.

The war also created some crowding issues for the Mount Pleasant School, and some taxing woes for area residents. In 1941, district residents approved an addition to the school, on Duncan Road just north of Bellefonte, and the school board approved a bond issue to pay for construction. With the start of the war, construction was postponed because of restrictions on the use of materials needed for the war effort, but a higher school tax still had to be levied so the district could start paying interest on the bonds. As summer vacation came to its close, the district faced the predicament of figuring out how to fit an anticipated enrollment of 800 students into a building designed for 600 children. As it turned out, the situation proved worse than expected, with enrollment reaching 950 students.

The Brandywine Hundred Fire Company was also feeling the impact of the war, with many of its members working in essential defense industries. So the fire company asked the town commission's help in October in recruiting volunteers to assist in controlled burns of rubbish and trash in vacant lots throughout town in order to reduce the risk of fires during the winter months.

Residents also responded with pride and enthusiasm to a wartime scrap metal drive. A collection on November 7 brought in 17,750 pounds of scrap, including souvenir aerial bombs and three-inch shells from what The Morning News called "the last war." That collection brought the scrap metal total for the town up to 29,843 pounds since the campaign began earlier in the year.

In the town commission's final act of the year, it voted to pay off the remaining \$17,000-plus due on sewer bonds in early 1943, thus officially closing the books on the town's major public works project of the previous decade.

As the new year began, some Bellefonte residents working in factories north and south of town reported having trouble getting to work on time, prompting the town commission to write a letter in February, requesting the Delaware Coach Company to increase its service. A month later the trolley company responded that it would add more runs during rush hours whenever possible.

In March, the commission approved purchasing a plaque, to be hung in the entrance to the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company hall, recognizing town residents who were serving in the war. At the time, at least 48 Bellefonte men were on active duty in the military. At the same time, the commission allotted space to several residents who had applied for "victory gardens." The garden plots were in the northwest section of town, on land owned by Claude Banta, and in the town-owned lots on the west side of Brandywine Boulevard between Marion and Elizabeth avenues.

Although the town had recently paid off its bonds for the sewer construction project, frequent backups on the Maple Avenue portion of the sewer line created a new problem for the town. The proposed solution was to reverse the flow of the line on lower Maple Avenue, so sewage would be carried eastward, into New Castle County's sewer line in Riverside Gardens, just outside the town limits.

Planned construction of a 560-unit apartment complex between River Road and Governor Printz Boulevard stirred strong opposition from residents and the town commission in July 1943. Objections started with the anticipated appropriation of the town's name, calling the project the "Bellefonte Apartments," and included concern that the development would add to the crowding at the Mount Pleasant School. Not surprisingly, the townspeople were also concerned that such a large housing project would have a detrimental effect on their own property values. The commission decided to write a letter of protest to the National Housing Authority, the developer of the apartments, and to members of the state's Congressional delegation and to the president of the New Castle County Levy Court. (The apartment complex was eventually built, but not with the "Bellefonte Apartments" name. Originally called Kynlyn, it is now known as the Village of Fox Point.)

### **Public service issues: crowded schools and fire protection**

By August, the Mount Pleasant School faced another enrollment squeeze, with 1,000 or more students expected at the start of the fall semester. Officials attributed the growth to an influx of war workers, with many of them living in trailer camps in the area, and to the conversion of many area homes into apartments. The school board's response to the dilemma included shrinking the library on the second floor of the school by converting a portion of it into a fifth-grade classroom. Enrollment reached 988 by late September, and would have been much higher if about 200 children had not transferred to schools in the city of Wilmington, Principal Frank Wangler told the school's Parent-Teacher Association.

In December, the congregations of the Hillcrest and Bellefonte Methodist churches voted to merge, but they differed on where to meet. Hillcrest member favored using their church, while Bellefonte congregants favored selling both churches and building a new structure in a different location.

Just before Christmas, the family of Pvt. William H. Hudson, of Bellefonte Avenue, was notified that he had been killed while serving with an Army infantry unit in Iceland. Details of his death were not provided to the family at that time. The soldier, who had moved to Bellefonte from Georgetown in 1941, had enlisted in the Army in February.

In 1944, St. Helena's launched a campaign to raise funds to build a parish school. Planning for the school had begun before the war began, and the goal was to begin construction soon after the war ended. Construction contracts were awarded in January 1948, and the two-story building was designed to serve up to 320 students, with room for expansion at either end of the building. When the school opened in September 1949, it had more than 260 students enrolled.

Residents' support for the town government drew the attention of the editors of the *Journal Every Evening* in July 1944, when they wrote a glowing five-paragraph editorial noting, among other things, that the town had collected all but \$238.91 of the property taxes due for the recently ended fiscal year and that "the town was able to pay its way and kept within its means," spending only \$5,687.90 during the fiscal year. "This pleasing situation indicates good management on the part of the officials and cooperation of the residents in providing the funds to meet the expenses," the editorial concluded.

Late in 1944, residents learned of heroic actions by Pvt. Marion Townsend, a resident of Maple Avenue, who was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions during combat in Germany in September. Townsend, in a letter to his parents, told them he could not say what he did to earn the medal, but he described operations in France and Germany as “tough going.” The newspaper article that reported on his award also noted that Townsend’s former scoutmaster, Army Lieut. Clarence Lucas, who lived on Rosedale Avenue, had recently been released from the Veterans Hospital in Perry Point, Md., after being treated for serious injuries sustained in the South Pacific.

In December, the town commission continued to hold up its annual payment to the fire company, which had grown to \$1,000 for the past two years, because it wanted a better accounting of the fire company’s revenue sources. Commissioners contended that they were providing a disproportionate amount of the fire budget and that residents of nearby unincorporated areas were not contributing their fair share. E. Howard Newlin, the town treasurer, suggested that fire companies in New Castle County ask the General Assembly to pass a law authorizing the county’s Levy Court to impose a countywide tax to support fire companies in rural areas. The town eventually made the \$1,000 payment, but subsequently reduced its contribution to \$750 for the fiscal year that began on July 1, 1945.

1945 began with what had become a familiar and unpleasant problem for the town: trash collection. The town’s contractor had not made regular collections for about 10 days, causing garbage and ashes to pile up at many homes. The commission decided to solicit bids for a new collector. A new contract was awarded in March, with the town paying \$200 a month for collections.

By October, Mount Pleasant school officials had gone public with their thoughts on how to resolve the longstanding school crowding issues. Administrators said they were considering building two new elementary schools – one near Holly Oak and the other near Edgemoor, so the main building on Duncan Road could be used as a junior high school and its eight-room addition would serve as an elementary school for children from the Bellefonte area. The new schools would open in September 1948.

With the conclusion of the war, residential construction and business activity again started to pick up. In April and May, commissioners approved plans for a store and apartment at the corner of Brandywine Boulevard and Grove Avenue and for a store at the front of an apartment building at 1101 Brandywine Boulevard. In July, building permits were issued to the Grandview Construction Company for five new houses in the 1100 block of Prospect Avenue. Meanwhile, in June, the commission fielded a query from a resident who asked what could be done to prevent Negroes who owned lots in the town from building houses on them. The woman was told that the town could not prevent construction.

At the commission’s September meeting, several residents made a belated protest of the approval of the store at 1101 Brandywine Boulevard. Edgar Ocheltree, who lived across the street from the proposed store, said it would be detrimental to the neighborhood and would likely fail in business. Irvin Borer, the commission president, said he believed the commission acted fairly, but noted that the permit might not have been granted if new zoning rules, then under consideration by the town, had been in effect earlier in the year.

It took several months to draft and revise the zoning code, and the measure was unanimously passed by the commission in April 1947.

By July, Bellefonte residents had begun complaining about an issue that continues to rankle Brandywine Hundred residents more than 70 years later. After hearing from William Ocheltree and several other residents, the commission directed the town secretary to write to the state police, with a copy to Trans World Airlines, protesting excessively low flights over the town by many aircraft.

Discussion with the state Highway Department over widening of Brandywine Boulevard continued in September and October. The proposal under discussion would widen the roadway to 38 feet, install curbing on both sides and move the overhead poles for the trackless trolleys inside the curb line. One hitch was that the town would have to buy four narrow strips of land that had been part of the right of way for the abandoned track trolleys from the owners who had granted easements to the trolley company. There were, however, some difficulties in locating the property owners, and the state advised the town that the project could not start until 1949, at the earliest. The issue would drag on into 1949 – and beyond – because the state would not begin work until those rights-of-way had been secured, and the town had not yet done so.

In November, Frederic G. Krapf, a young Wilmington contractor and developer who would become prominent in New Castle County about two decades later, filed a request with the town's Zoning Board of Adjustment for a variance that would permit him to build a supermarket on the southeast corner of Philadelphia Pike and Beeson Avenue. The variance was needed because the market's site would extend into the town's residential district by 35 feet. Krapf estimated the project's cost at \$150,000 and said the market would include a bakery. In January 1948, the board denied Krapf's request and a market was never built on the site.

In May 1948, the Brandywine Hundred Fire Company acquired a 25-foot tower and mounted an electric fire siren atop the tower behind the fire hall. At the same time, the fire company began work on an expansion to add a third engine bay to the firehouse. The project was completed in September and was marked with a parade from Hillcrest to the firehouse, followed by a housing ceremony featuring a speech by Congressman J. Caleb Boggs.



In June, Bellefonte residents mourned the death of Emile F. Edelbrock, who had operated a real estate appraisal business for the past 20 years from his home at 715 Grandview Avenue, familiarly known as the Bird House and believed to be the oldest residence in the town.

Linda Churay, the current resident, says the main portion of the house was built in 1744 by Cornelius Empson, formerly a resident of New Castle, who gave the home to his daughter and her husband, John Bird (sometimes spelled Byrd). The original structure, with 24-inch stone walls, contained four rooms, a kitchen and living room downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs, according to Churay. The current dining

room was added during the Civil War era and the current living room in the 1930s. The original kitchen, which has a walk-in fireplace, is now a den. The house still has its original front door, now 275 years old, Churay says.

Another prominent resident, George E. Grotz, died in December. Grotz had been president of the town commission and, as a local administrator for the federal Works Progress Administration, was a key figure in the construction of the town's sewer system in the 1930s.

As the year drew to a close, the question of expanding the town's boundaries drew the commission's attention. Discussion focused on the irregular boundaries on the west side of town near Rodman Road on the south end of town and on West Talley Road in the northwest corner.

New construction, zoning debates and sewer issues took up much of the commission's time in 1949.

In January, A.G. Corless submitted plans to the building instructor for a new home that would include facilities for a doctor's office and for a kindergarten, as Corless's wife planned to move her private kindergarten into Bellefonte from its current location on Philadelphia Pike near Hillcrest Avenue. A permit for the home and office was issued in February, when the commission also gave the go-ahead for construction of a two-family home at the corner of Prospect and Euclid avenues even though the original permit was issued for a single-family home. The commission authorized the change because "these alterations would not detract from the appearance of the building to the detriment of the community."

Then, in March, the commission denied a request for construction of a two-family home at the corner of Brandywine Boulevard and Highland Avenue because it determined the structure would crowd the building lot.

Later in the year, A.J. Puglisi protested to the town's Zoning Board of Adjustment and then to the commission after the building inspector rejected his permit request to convert his home on River Road, well outside the town's business district, into a patent medicine store. Puglisi believed there was a need for retail establishments in the area to serve residents of the new Kynlyn Apartments nearby. Both the zoning board and the commission denied Puglisi's request.

In late January, heavy rains led to water backing up from sewers to flow into basements on Maple and Euclid avenues, prompting complaints to the commission, which held a special meeting to discuss the problem. The commission directed Howard Robertson, the town engineer, to try to determine the cause of the problem. In mid-February he reported that the problem was caused by the roots of a tree that had previously been cut down causing a stoppage in the Marion Avenue sewer line, which then backed up into the Maple Avenue line.

Yet another complication with the sewer system developed in early spring, when Claude Banta, developer of the Villa Monterey addition on the west side of Philadelphia Pike, connected 17 homes in the new community to Bellefonte's sewer line and sent a check for \$850 to the town to cover the cost of the connections. The commission concluded that Banta's action violated an earlier agreement with the town, and said he should have applied for permits for each home before making any connections. The

back-and-forth with Banta continued for several months, with the town asking that each permit be signed by the homeowner, not by Banta, and Banta replying that he was having trouble securing all 17 signatures. Eventually, Banta would connect the homes to his private sewer line, which was then connected to the town's system.

Perhaps the town's most touching story of 1949 focused on 6-year-old Teddy Hartman, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hartman of Elizabeth Avenue, who was diagnosed with leukemia in March. Neighbors and his first-grade classmates at Mount Pleasant School responded by bringing him toys, games and even an electric train. By June he had been admitted to Delaware Hospital, where he was reported in critical condition. When word got out that what gave Teddy the most pleasure was being able to watch television, residents rallied to his support. The town alderman, Russell S. Brown, who was also an officer of the Pugh-Lenderman-Chalfonte Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, led the campaign, soliciting friends, neighbors and fellow veterans by phone and in person. In just a couple of days, they raised enough money to buy Teddy a television set. Then, somewhat to the surprise of the hospital's medical staff, the electronic transmissions from the hospital's X-ray and electrocardiograph machinery did not interfere with television reception in Teddy's room. The toys and the television set kept Teddy in good spirits throughout his struggle, but he died on September 27.