

TURNING SPACE INTO PLACE IN THE SPRAWLING “NEW CITY”:
SHRINKING SPACE, VISIONS OF PLACE, HOMEOWNERS IN CONFLICT

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The City University of New York

2008

UMI Number: 3296976

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the
Dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

TURNING SPACE INTO PLACE IN THE SPRAWLING “NEW CITY”:
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by

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Was there a “real place” to be found in the sprawling “new city” landscape? This interview study considers the categories of sprawl as a placeless, apolitical space, and of the suburban white middle class, to explore how “place” is variously understood by homeowners confronting rapid spatial reconfiguration. The interviewees are residents of a municipality located in one of New Jersey’s “growth corridors.” Emphasis is on homeowners’ experiences, and on what they view as problems related to rapid growth.

Given the long settlement history of this northeastern seaboard region, this study finds that relations among homeowners had changed over time in surprising ways. In the

present era, homeowners are differentiated according to historical position (settlement layer), taste culture, and related housing ideologies. Housing is treated as many things. Among these things it is a commodity, a valued property, exclusionary or inclusionary space, and also a moral stance vis-à-vis others in a wider body politic.

The sprawling “new city” landscape is not an impersonal space, a haphazard jumble of spatial uses. It is instead fractured into separate political entities, each a work in progress. In New Jersey, “home rule” grants residents of its 566 municipalities the power to make zoning determinations (within overarching guidelines). Residents are often in conflict as they engage in a politicized process of balancing one spatial use against another and one set of values against another, never entirely losing track of a necessary competition with other municipalities for revenue-generating clean ratables. They are not only users of space; they are also its makers.

Housing, space and place are subjects of particular relevance for planners. Knowledge of residents’ categories of meaning and experience is an indispensable prerequisite for specific hypothesis-testing research and survey design aimed at identifying problems and solving them. Interviewees do not view sprawl as a problem that has to be solved. They do not need a small town configuration with a Main Street, as posited in a New Urbanist model. What they do view as problematic is the shrinkage of open space, necessary for the fulfillment of their different visions of place.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is the product of the contributions of many people. First, my warmest thanks go to the township residents who so graciously opened their doors to me, gave freely of their time, and patiently answered my questions, many of which must have seemed obvious. I realize that not everyone will agree with my findings. Nevertheless I hope that they will enjoy this account and understand that it is produced in a spirit of tremendous appreciation for all that they do to create a place of value. They are the true authors of this study.

To the memory of my teacher Ray Birdwhistell, of the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, my deepest gratitude for inspiring curiosity in the seemingly ordinary, taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life, in the spirit of achieving a state of not knowing on purpose.

To Phil Kasinitz, of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, I extend my appreciation for his keen insight into urban life and history and for his sustaining humor through long bouts of field work and writing. I also thank Bill Kornblum and Paul Attewell for their invaluable comments at many stages of this research. I extend my appreciation to Doug Kruse and Lisa Schur of Rutgers University for their technical expertise and their sustained interest in this endeavor.

Finally, I dedicate this study to Jim, in gratitude for his long-term support and critical overview at all stages of the writing. And I pay special tribute to Mei, whose patience and high spirits have been essential to the completion of this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

A Question of Place

To the uninitiated, the vast stretches of housing developments, strip malls and office plazas in regions expanding beyond urban peripheries create a sprawling, entirely placeless landscape. Such was my impression as I embarked on a daily negotiation of the complex transportation network of the northeastern region in which I had relocated from a northern California town. “Take 287 North,” would go typical directions as I set out for a destination. “Stay in the right lane and take the third exit onto Route 80 East. Take Route 80 for three miles to 280 East. Get off at the second exit, pass through three stop lights and then turn onto Fairfax Avenue. At the second light turn left onto Custer Street. We’re the fourth house on the left.” So it is that a transition was made from Interstate to house without my passing through or arriving at anything resembling a “real” place. End up in the wrong lane, take the wrong exit, and risk ending up heading north instead of south, or east instead of west, with the opportunity for a U-turn some unknown miles distant.

Where was a “real” place, something with a Main Street, with local shops and pedestrian-friendly spaces? A rare such town answering to this description was clogged with weekend tourist traffic, an apparent anomaly in the region. While I found the seeming placelessness of the area in which I now lived unpalatable, I noticed that those whom I encountered accepted this sprawling landscape and the lifestyle it imposed uncritically. Their adaptive abilities piqued my interest. I wanted to find out how their

images and expectations of place differed from mine and whether place as I understood it even mattered to them.

My family and I eventually settled in what at least looked like a “real place”---an ungentrified hamlet of a mixed variety of housing of vintages ranging primarily from the late 18th to early 20th century. Periodic flooding had created this as an oasis of farm and forest land, beyond which lay extensive housing developments constructed in the post-World War II decades. I was drawn to the small, manageable scale of this hamlet and the visual pleasure to be found in the varied housing styles. A population as heterogeneous as the housing, consisting primarily of second- and third-generation residents of the region and, in addition, a few newcomers like ourselves, was accustomed to the exchange of pleasantries at the hamlet’s small post office and 1930’s-era convenience store. Certainly no such friendly exchange took place in the malls and big box complexes just minutes away. This enclave was a “real” place in my estimation, but it was an anomalous blip amidst numbing miles of housing developments, strip malls, big box shopping malls and office plazas. We settled into this hamlet, negotiating daily treks via the web of transportation conduits for work, necessities and leisure pursuits, in so doing spending considerable time behind the wheel, as did everyone else we knew.

Formalizing my interest in place and how it is constituted in a sprawling landscape, I was confident that this was a subject that I was in no danger of sentimentalizing. I was challenged by prospects of carrying out field work in a decidedly nontraditional locale, one where there was no obvious place to hang out---no street corner, no Main Street, and aside from the usual fast food outlets, no habitual gathering

spots. Finally, suspect of my own too-ready condemnation of “sprawl,” I was interested in how a landscape treated by its critics as everything that is wrong with America is experienced and understood by its inhabitants.

Penetrating the Impenetrable Landscape

For an outsider in search of a “field” in which to carry out field work, the sprawling landscape is a decidedly nontraditional site posing unique challenges. In a domain where speeding traffic is the norm, where there is no Main Street and where there are few, if any, pedestrian-friendly spaces, “going native” means getting behind the wheel and driving from one destination to another. This navigational mode offers little chance to scrutinize the landscape. (Residents of even several years’ standing do not often get an opportunity to actually “see” the township. A one-time township-sponsored bus tour of South Brunswick, the fieldwork site, was packed with residents eager for a chance to glimpse some of this landscape.) Moreover, even when it is possible to stop and observe a setting this is such a rare occurrence as to be suspect. (In one instance a police officer stopped to check on my safety at a warehouse site where I had parked and was preparing to take photos.)

It is not surprising that in a landscape where there is virtually no street life, it is not only the lone individual or the couple who stand out, but also the unidentifiable car. In housing developments there are unspoken rules, it seems, governing what makes, models and vintages of cars are acceptable and where it is acceptable for them to be parked. In housing developments where cars are stored away in garages, a lone car

parked at curbside is an aberration. In developments where cars spill out in driveways and at curbside, a model that is not similar in make and vintage to those of neighborhood residents is also a singular event. Even the act of slowing down while driving along a residential street can elicit a quizzical glance.

Leaving the car behind, the pedestrian stands out as a glaring anomaly in this privatized landscape. It is within the bounds of acceptability, it seems, to be walking within the nearly-invisible boundaries of a housing development, for occasional pedestrians can be seen out ambling or jogging along residential streets. Along more trafficked residential streets a stranger on foot can be suspect. One resident reasons that the individuals who occasionally walk past her house must be renters who are too poor to own a car. (Among the few pedestrians I sighted along roadside edges of developments was an Asian Indian couple in traditional dress out for an evening stroll alongside a “feeder” road, seemingly oblivious to the speeding traffic.

So how are the “natives” identified in the intended field of observation? The daily trajectories of all residents are highly individualized. Those for whom the township is a relevant civic entity are more easily identified, for they are the usual meeting attenders and office holders and they are cited with greater frequency in the local newspaper. They also number among some of the writers of letters to the editor. These residents keep up with local events through word of mouth (usually by telephone), by reading the local paper, by participating in voluntary organizations and by voting in local elections.

While meetings and events posted in the local paper are for anyone’s purview, they are generally considered events for insiders. As I learned through experience, an

outsider's attendance at events such as zoning board and school board meetings can require justification. Who else but members of the "community," the reasoning seems to go, would be interested in such things? At meetings, it seems that "a place for everyone, everyone in their place" is the rule of the day. (I once arrived at a zoning board meeting to find petitioners seated on one side of the room and objectors seated on the other. For neutrality I chose to sit at the back center, but much to my consternation I found myself the object of a few backward-directed, quizzical glances. For those present there was no neutral position. Seated alongside me was a person who had also chosen a presumed neutral mid-position. As I learned, she had recently moved to the township and was attempting to determine whether to affiliate herself with the local Democratic or Republican party, her intended goal being to eventually move up the ranks of the more penetrable group.)

The local newspaper is the one obvious entry point for the outsider. Clearly it is considered permissible for an outsider to contact those who are cited in articles or who insert themselves into the public domain through letters to the editor. That I was a woman, and in addition a resident of a nearby township who was carrying out a project so implausible as to be plausible, were factors that, almost without exception, contributed to favorable responses to my initial phone call.

Methodological Approach

The design of this exploratory study is intentionally broad, a central purpose being to investigate what “place” is for middle class homeowners confronted with rapid spatial reconfiguration. In interviews with homeowners the subject of housing is foregrounded as a means of understanding what place is for interviewees.

I undertake this study with the premise that while the middle class is socialized into a world view extolling the primacy of home ownership, the multifaceted meanings and uses of housing are such as to produce considerable distinctions within this broad category. To identify subgroups within this population I treat interviewees’ taken-for-granted meanings, as expressed in categories of thought and experience, as objects of study.

This is a longitudinal study, conducted over a seven-year period. Data come from open-ended, in-depth interviews and in addition follow-up interviews, as deemed necessary, with 44 residents. Particular attention is paid to the following themes: (1) housing as expression of person and place; (2) the use and/or exchange value of house and property, or environs; (3) the extent and nature of homeowners’ perceived rights to determine the use of space beyond their property lines; (4) school as expression of place; and (5) problems posed by rapid spatial reconfiguration. Data are also derived from local, regional and national newspaper articles, census reports, observation and transcriptions of public meetings, resident-led tours of the township, and in addition relevant statistical information.

Additional focused interviews cover a range of subjects such as local and regional

history, planning policies, warehouse development, shopping patterns, affordable housing policies, types of housing and housing developments, and recollections of an earlier schools era. All interviews were confidential. The names of interviewees and identifying information have been altered. Except for names that appear in cited references, including “New Jersey,” “South Brunswick,” “New Jersey Turnpike,” “New Brunswick,” “Princeton,” and so on, names of places and of people have been changed.

Chapter Outline

This work is divided into five chapters.

In Chapter One I present the decentered and spatially fragmented region in which South Brunswick is located in light of characterizations of other such regions in relevant literature. Is this sprawling space a problem that has to be solved, as New Urbanists propose, or is it a desirable destination point for a great number of Americans, as demographic trends indicate? I propose a turn from urbanist prognoses and/or solutions to the experience and perspectives of homeowners.

Chapter Two links three periods of South Brunswick history: a presuburban period of some 200 years ending with the arrival of the first suburbanites in the late 1950's, a transitional suburban period compelling local and former urbanite-cum-suburbanite residents to adapt to new life ways, and a “new city” period emerging in the late 1980's seeing an influx of “recent arrivals.” Interviewees represent different settlement layers. Some exhibit a relation to space that is local. They regard South Brunswick as their community. The relation of others to space is more likely to be

nonlocal. They are not attached to a traditionally defined civic entity.

Chapter Three relies on interview data to explore what place is for “new city” homeowners. The subject of housing and its multifaceted meanings and uses is foregrounded as a means of understanding what place is for interviewees. Homeowners are differentiated as “stayers” or “move ups,” the two groups displaying distinct housing ideologies as would be found in any community.

Chapter Four details a bitterly contested, years-long zoning board case compelling “stayers” and “move ups” to defend their place in a space undergoing rapid reconfiguration.

Chapter Five examines a local or a nonlocal relation to space as this conditions type of school engagement.

The Placeless “New City”

What is “place” for residents of sprawling, rapidly expanding regions extending beyond metropolitan perimeters, and why should this question be raised in the first place? As a relatively new phenomenon seeing explosive population growth and booming economies, yet bearing little resemblance to an urban core, these regions attract attention as cities in their own right. Verdicts are both positive and negative. Some observers see such regions as vital “new cities,” in their best incarnation promising a fusion of work, residence, good schools and recreation in one wide-ranging “new city.” The term “new city” is coined by Fishman (1990) to emphasize development on the urban fringe as the most recent stage in urbanization, and to distinguish “new city” space from the residential

suburb.) Dramatic population growth in these regions suggests that they are at the very least regarded as highly desirable destination points for a majority of Americans. On the other hand, critics of such regions view them as rampant sprawl, as environmentally detrimental, as aesthetic blights, and/or as entirely placeless constructs inimical to civic life and community formation.

Prominent among the critics of so-called sprawl are the New Urbanists, a consortium of planners and architects who treat sprawl as a problem that has to be solved. In their view sprawl is not only unsightly, it is also a social problem, engendering incivility, ruined institutions and social dysfunction. For remediation of this problem, New Urbanism (sometimes referred to as Smart Growth) posits a pedestrian-friendly townscape reminiscent of the small towns of a pre-World War II era. For Dulany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck (2000), key developers and proponents of New Urbanism, a townscape featuring a town center or Main Street and a heterogeneous array of housing and shops promises greater livability and a restored civic life. Yet little thought is paid to what place is for the inhabitants of these sprawling “new city” regions and to what they themselves want.

A Long-Settled Region of the Northeast

South Brunswick, the geographical focal point of this study, is exactly the sort of placeless environment that critics of sprawl seek to remedy. It is a 41-square-mile township located in a multi-county region of New Jersey seeing a thriving economy and explosive population growth, increasing steadily in the last two decades. (See map of

region, Appendix III, Item #1.) The year 2000 U.S. Census reports a population of 37,734 residents. The region is widely acknowledged as one of many such spatial constellations found nationwide.

South Brunswick blends imperceptibly with other municipalities in the region. It is noteworthy more for what it does not feature than what it does. There is no Main Street here, no town center, no pedestrian friendly spaces and no distinguishing history. South Brunswick is in fact so unremarkable, even to its residents, that when I introduced the purpose of this investigation to them they were incredulous that I should have selected their township. “Why did you choose South Brunswick?,” they would query, sufficiently reassured only when I emphasized that it was precisely because their township resembled so many others that it drew my interest.

Settlement History: From the 18th Century to the Present

The seeming placelessness of South Brunswick and much of the wider region is in fact a relatively recent phenomenon. Accelerated residential and commercial development of the wider region in which South Brunswick is located belies the fact of a long settlement history dating back to the 18th century. This being the northeastern United States, the region consists of layers of settlement which have evolved from a variety of forms. These include village hubs, towns and cities---all well established before post-World War II suburbanization of the late 1950's. New Brunswick, a stellar city of the Industrial era, incorporated in 1736, and the town of Princeton, site of Princeton University (then The College of New Jersey), chartered in 1746, number

among the many long-settled municipalities in this region.

Located in the vicinity of New Brunswick and Princeton, South Brunswick was a rural backwater featuring a few village hubs having their origins dating back some 200 years. The construction in 1957 of the township's first tract housing development catapulted the township into the suburban era. Housing construction slowed from the mid-1960's through the 1970's, picking up in the mid-1980's with the acceleration of New Jersey's post-industrial economy. The development of a "corporate corridor" transecting several municipalities between New Brunswick and Princeton, and in addition the development, in the southern portion of this corridor, of an "edge city," characterized by Garreau (1991) as commercially-spawned development concentrated around transportation arteries, spurred a population surge. Starting in the mid-1980's commercial and residential development began to fill in the open space once separating South Brunswick's earlier settlement forms---the rural hubs of the presuburban era and a few scattered housing developments.

Up until the mid-1980's the small or moderate-sized single family house was the prevalent housing type. Since then, a greater variety of housing has been built, geared to attract a white collar workforce drawn to the region in increasing numbers. This includes apartment complexes, townhouses and condos, and single family houses of greater square footage. The result of such development is archetypical sprawl, a seemingly placeless space of heterogeneous uses and design with no overall state or county plan to guide its growth.

Settlement Layers

Given the region's long history and its pattern of layered settlements, interview data point to distinctions among white middle class homeowners that are related to their settlement histories. Take for instance the early suburban, post World War II, period. Reflecting a well-documented pattern found in other suburbanizing regions, the residents of this period were politically and culturally divided along "local" and "cosmopolitan" lines. (In his study of Levittown, Gans (1967, 18-19) distinguishes the intellectual values of upper middle class "cosmopolitan" residents from local middle and lower middle class values of the established rural residents. Dobriner (1963, 33) notes a cultural divide between the middle and upper middle class values of the established residents (the old settlers) from the values of high-income, upwardly mobile suburbanites.)

Homeowner Groups

For the "locals" of South Brunswick who trace their roots back to the township's presuburban past, place was something quite different in the transitional rural-to-suburban period than it was for the "recent arrivals" at the time. For "locals," small hubs were distinct places. For the recently arrived suburbanites, many of whom were urban progressives from New York City, their housing development was a community, an island in the middle of what seemed to be a "Sahara Desert" (Weingartner, 1998). In a well-documented pattern, many of these residents moved out and up. However, in a surprising contradiction to this "move up" pattern not previously documented in the literature on early suburban life, many of the urban progressives or "cosmopolitans"

chose to stay on, even though they had the financial resources to move up. These self-styled “flaming liberals were not a “deviant minority” of “mobiles” (Gans, 1967, 132) destined to move on, but might more aptly be viewed as a “deviant majority.” Existing in numbers sufficient to form a supportive and politically well-organized network, they opted to stay on. Moreover, in a turn that even these homeowners say that they had never anticipated, they have found the same slab construction ranches in which they first settled preferable to any other supposedly superior housing style.

This present work, which can be viewed as a sequel to studies of early suburban life, also reports an additional finding. Studies of early suburban life delineated “locals” and “cosmopolitans” as radically polarized. It appeared at that time that these fractions in the population would persist. In the new suburban community of Levittown, N.J. Gans (1967, 132) foresaw the emergence of a “multinucleated” class structure of separate working class, lower middle class and upper middle class (managerial class) sectors. In South Brunswick, the “locals” and the “cosmopolitans” were indeed polarized in the early suburban period. Over time, however, class fractions and cultural differences have blurred. Now self-declared “old timers,” these former “locals” and “cosmopolitans” regard themselves as members of a single township-wide community.

“Old Timers” and a Local Relation to Space

The township’s dramatic growth in the last two decades finds “recent arrivals,” as they are termed by the “old timers,” far outnumbering “old timers.” The “old timers” are not isolates, however. Some younger generation residents regard themselves as “old

timers,” or are at least sympathetic with many of the “community” values of the “old timers.” “Old timers” and younger-generation allies are firmly entrenched in South Brunswick. Highly civic minded, they write letters to the editor of the local paper, serve on township boards and get out votes on local issues. They are joiners, members of fire and rescue squads, the library board of directors, and the local Republican and Democratic parties. For these residents, South Brunswick is a distinct place, a community where everyone is more or less on the same footing. (“People here aren’t rich, but they’re not poor either,” observes a second generation resident (interview, March 30, 1996).) The “old timers” and other like-minded residents are not always in agreement. But whatever the position they assume on a given issue, they value South Brunswick as unique for the possibility it offers people to “get involved and speak out.”

“Recent Arrivals” and a Nonlocal Relation to Space

For residents who have settled in South Brunswick since the mid-1980’s, during the region’s accelerated development, place is something entirely different than what it is for the “old timers.” The relation of these residents to space is likely to be nonlocal. That is, these residents show an absence of any particular affinity for a traditionally-defined civic entity. Their social networks are likely to be widespread and scattered. That they do not participate in South Brunswick’s civic life is not to say that they are not joiners. Indeed, they may participate in various interest groups and/or organizations located beyond township borders. (One resident details extensive volunteer work he carries out for a social service organization serving county residents. Another resident, a

member of a church in a neighboring municipality, dedicates a few hours each month working in its outreach programs.)

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the “recent arrivals,” particularly first-time homeowners with young children may be forming neighborhood ties. If they stay on in South Brunswick, and if they are joiners, these residents may form township-wide networks. Interview data suggests, however, that for a greater number of “recent arrivals” the township is little more than a tax-collecting entity. It does not correspond to anything that looks like a residential concentration or a political entity. It is certainly not experienced as a geographically-bounded community whose members enter into relations of mutual responsibility and it is not a place offering residents the opportunity to “get involved and speak out.”

“Recent arrivals” cite central location, relatively low property taxes, more house for the money as they main reasons they preferred South Brunswick to other municipalities. They do not cite “community” as a reason for their choice of location. Many of these residents observe that they barely know or even see their neighbors. However, for those residents whose residency dates back to the presuburban and earlier suburban eras, as well as for a scattering of younger-generation residents who participate in one or more of the township’s institutional centers and who are affiliated with “old timers” networks, remnants of community remain. For this far smaller population, South Brunswick is a unique place, a community that they far prefer to any other.

Characterizing the Indeterminate Space

In *Megalopolis: the Urbanized Northeast Seaboard of the United States*, geographer Jean Gottmann (1961) produced an apt description of the post World War II urban landscape of the northeastern United States as a complex and constantly shifting web of interconnected settlement types, a vast megalopolis. More recent analyses focus on specific regions, their origins of development, their economic independence from the urban core and/or the power of such a spatially fragmented space to condition life ways.

Examining Orange County, California as a “postsuburban” space, a formation which evolves from a low-density suburban region and which is economically independent of the urban core, authors Kling, Olin and Poster (1991, 6) characterize the “postsuburb” as a multicentered, spatially fragmented county unit encompassing miles of housing tracts of homogeneous architectural design, older cities and specialized zones for jobs and commercial space. Authors Gottdiener and Kephart (1991, 31-54) identify 21 counties nationwide, including Orange County and the county in which South Brunswick is located, as new forms of settlement space, or “multinucleated metropolitan regions.” Basing their analysis on the two-decade period from 1960 to 1980, they argue that these counties no longer serve as extensions of a central city but are fully urbanized and independent spaces. They emphasize that these counties have no single origin of development. As they observe,

many social forces—military-related spending...the growth in high technology, the robust real estate market, racism, the flight of the white industrial working class to the hinterland, the construction of traditional (non-high-technology) manufacturing plants, the hypertrophic expansion of service-related industries, the new arrangement in the corporate business structure—have all combined in several distinct ways to produce the new form of settlement space...What remains

constant in this process is not some single economic or technological cause at the level of production but changes in contemporary social organization involving production, circulation, and reproductive relations. (52)

Looking beyond a single county, Fishman (1990) looks to vast multi-county regions as “new cities” offering services and employment once concentrated in the central city. Tracing the rise of the “new city” to technological advances and extensive transportation networks, he observes that this “new city”

is not some fantastic city of towers out of Fritz Lang’s celluloid *Metropolis* (1926)...it is, rather, the familiar decentralized world of highways and tract houses, shopping malls and office parks that Americans have built for themselves since 1945. As exemplified by such areas as the Silicon Valley in northern California, Route 128 outside Boston, The Route One corridor between Princeton and New Brunswick, New Jersey...or the immense region that stretches along the southern California coast from Los Angeles to San Diego, the new city includes the most dynamic elements in our national economy...From coast to coast, the symbol of this new city is not the jagged skyscraper skyline of the 1920’s metropolis but the network of super-highways as seen from the air, crowded in all directions, uniting a whole region into a vast super-city. (27-28)

A Changing Relation to Space

For upper middle class suburbanites of the post-World War II period, work and residential domains were spatially distinct referents. The leafy green suburb, or “bourgeois utopia” (Fishman 1987), was a haven from the urban world. By contrast, the “new city” Fishman depicts (1990) is a diffuse, urbanized space, merging work and residence. There is no civic center, no defining core in this domain. Instead, the family home is center, with the combined trajectories of the members of each household unit forming a highly individualized “city.”

In this “new city” the person’s relation to space is nonlocal, with the daily trajectories of the members of each household delineating separate realities. “Jim and

Delores Bach,” writes Fishman, “live in a redwood contemporary in West Nyack, N.Y.”

Twenty years ago, their cul-de-sac was an apple orchard...

This morning, two of the Bach children will board buses to school and Delores will drive young Alex to a day-care center in nearby Nanuet. Then she will drive 20 minutes down the Garden State Parkway to her job at a medical laboratory...Her husband, meanwhile, will be on the New York State Thruway...to his job with IBM in Westchester County...

The Bachs still make it a point to get to Manhattan once every six months or so...But they have friends who have not been to “the City,” as it is called, in 10 years. Why bother?...virtually anything they could want is within a one-hour radius. All they have to do is get in the car and drive. (25-26)

Place is something quite different for the Bachs and others like them than it is for those residents who are attached to a geographically-defined civic entity. In the following pages I detail how differing conceptions and/or experience of place exacerbate tensions among these makers and users of “new city” space as they confront change of often breathtaking proportions.

South Brunswick: Decentered and Spatially Fragmented

To an outsider, the multi-county region in which South Brunswick is located looks like generic sprawl. However, long-term residents are keenly aware of settlement histories and land use patterns that differentiate one municipality from another. This spatial variation is due in part to New Jersey’s system of “home rule,” which treats each of its municipalities as sovereign and which accords citizen-led boards of its 566 municipalities the power to run their schools and determine zoning policies within their jurisdictions. All powers and responsibilities derive from the state legislature. (In most states the county has more power.)

Among the region’s municipalities, South Brunswick is a decided “rurburbia,”

presenting to view vestiges of presuburban and early suburban days, juxtaposed alongside reminders of a “new city.” The term “rurburbia” was coined by James Hughes, long-term observer of the region and Dean of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University, to characterize a mixed-use rural, exurban and suburban landscape. Drive along many a road and within just a few minutes you may pass remaindered farm fields, abandoned silos, wooded wetlands, strip malls, corporate office buildings and extensive housing developments of different vintages. Extensive residential housing is found along the township’s “feeder” roads. And here, often in regions heretofore considered unbuildable, are clusters of what long-term residents refer to as the “big houses,” known in the popular press as McMansions.

Within the last two decades, build-out in regions closer to transportation links, jobs and services has brought a surge of development in South Brunswick, putting buildable open space at an increasing premium and creating this township as one of New Jersey’s most rapidly growing municipalities in the year 2000. (Planners point out that “build out” is a relative term; municipalities can always reduce lot sizes and create higher density.)

Rapid Change

South Brunswick’s population is expanding so rapidly that township librarians say that they are not able to keep an accurate list of all township organizations, no matter how diligent their efforts. This is not a matter of concern to them, but simply a matter of fact. Their most recent, admittedly incomplete, compilation lists two volunteer fire

departments and first aid rescue squads, three post offices, a senior center and a main library. (Field notes indicate the existence of Lions and Rotary Clubs, a Grange, PTA groups associated with each school and a few homeowners' associations.) The library's compilation of township organizations lists 33 religious organizations, located either in South Brunswick or in the wider region. Of these, nineteen are Protestant, four are Catholic, five are Evangelical, and two are Jewish. The Durga Temple Mandir, the Islamic Society of Central New Jersey and Princeton Glory Presbyterian, a Korean church, are indication of a growing Middle Eastern and Asian population. Membership of these religious organizations draws from a wide-ranging area. (A minister of a South Brunswick church notes, for instance, that little over half of his parishioners are from South Brunswick. He recounts how at group meetings he asks members how many families they have, and they all call out "One!," the church. His congregation is "unusually young," he notes, made of "newcomers in their 30's." They are of all economic brackets. Some are New York commuters; others work in the region. He observes that they are all "hungry for community" (interview, October 17, 1996).

While South Brunswick does not have a geographic center in the form of a downtown or a Main Street, it features three township-wide institutional centers: a single high school, a library and a local newspaper. (Recognizing a need for a central gathering place, a librarian reports that a café and meeting areas where people could meet and talk were projected for the township's new library but that the budget did not allow for these expenditures.) In addition, "home rule" creates a third "center" or focal point. As a case that I detail in Chapter IV serves to illustrate, "home rule" can turn citizen-led zoning

board hearings into veritable town meetings as residents engage in a heated politics of place, availing themselves of the opportunity to take a stand for the sort of place or places that they envision for themselves.

Shrinking Open Space

That township space is a favored site for real estate entrepreneurs is a fact bemoaned by longer term residents, seasoned witnesses to the township's changing landscape who are saddened to witness the disappearance of open fields and wetlands.

However the township and the region in which it is located is characterized, the speed with which it is changing is one of its more noteworthy aspects. All residents, whether self-declared "old timers" or "recent arrivals," would agree that they are witnesses to a change so rapid that even the most recent township map fails to record entire neighborhoods. Let a few months pass before taking a drive along one of the many narrow, winding roads threading through the township and a driver may find that a once-bucolic countryside is being replaced by rows upon rows of townhouses, large "executive mansions," or one of the many new, large, windowless industrial plants cropping up in the region. And if the acreage has not already been reconverted, then land-and/or space-for-sale signs announce its imminent transformation.

Spatial Fragmentation

A distinguishing feature of South Brunswick, as well as of other municipalities in the region, is its spatial fragmentation. This is the product, in part, of a maze of road systems, “liberal” zoning policies and conflicting jurisdictional spheres. Route 1, nicknamed “the Great Divide” by long-term residents, separates the township into east and west “sides.” The names of the lateral east-west “feeder” roads change at Route 1, thereby accentuating the sense of a “divide” while also confounding the uninitiated driver. The New Jersey Turnpike is located at an eastern edge of the township. Here truck drivers picking up or delivering cargo at state-of-the-art mega warehouses frequently lose their way along the maze of former country roads lacing through this area. A mixed use assemblage of visually-unsynchronized commercial establishments border other main conduits. Compounding rather than alleviating traffic congestion are the countless residential streets and former country roads motorists use to circumvent more congested roads en route to other transportation arteries.

South Brunswick’s Spatial Indeterminacy

Typical of other municipalities in the region, South Brunswick exhibits no clear-cut spatial definition. Motorists driving along Route 1, the central, traffic-clogged artery running along a north-south axis from New Brunswick to Princeton and further south to Trenton, would most probably be unable to distinguish this township from others through which they were passing, for there are no easily discernible boundary markers. Expanses of woods, juxtaposed with what appear to be a haphazard assortment of office plazas,

motels, gas stations, derelict buildings and fast food outlets form a meaningless blur. The announcement of “Princeton” on roadside signage is the one decipherable place marker.

Determinations made over the years by members of South Brunswick’s citizen-led zoning board contribute to a decidedly mixed-use space. The heterogeneous juxtaposition of housing types, lot sizes and commercial space that results is not an automatic or predictable response to rapid growth. The varied histories and resources of New Jersey’s 566 municipalities, coupled with differing planning and zoning policies, have produced differing spatial configurations. One township in close proximity to South Brunswick, for instance, is visually homogeneous, exhibiting a preponderance of large suburban houses on large lots. But South Brunswick is another story. As one loyal but frustrated resident puts it, “This town bastardizes all its communities. It mixes liquor stores next to schools and Burger Kings next to churches” (interview, December 4, 1996). As for the cause of the phenomenon, he believes that it has to do with South Brunswick being “a transient community,....one where people have no long-term commitment, no tradition to fall back onto or refer to” (Ibid.). A town planner puts it another way: “There is the tendency to grant variances based on unforeseen circumstances,” he comments. “Variance requests get ‘yes’ votes unless there is an objection. The result of this liberal zoning policy is that it may reduce taxes but it can create visual havoc. In certain neighboring townships people may pay some \$100,000 more for the same house, and higher taxes, and things don’t change there as much. People there,” he suggests, “are not as interested in growth but in maintaining the status quo” (interview, November 20, 1996). What they are buying, it seems, is spatial

predictability and visual homogeneity. The result? In the words of this planner, “you have plain vanilla suburban sprawl” (Ibid.).

Certainly many a setting in South Brunswick provides a counterbalance to the “plain vanilla” look. Approaching the intersection of one thruway, and taking an immediate right turn onto a “feeder” road, a driver will find a fast food outlet to be the brightest, most prominent feature of this road segment. But just a few feet from its parking lot, separated by a low-lying chain link fence, scraggly bushes and trees, sits a cemetery with gravestones in varying states of disrepair, the most dilapidated of which bear mid-19th century inscriptions. Prominently displayed to the farther side of this cemetery is a realtor’s sign implanted in the yard of a 50’s-era Cape Cod, advertising this to be a “Prime Residential Site, R 2 Zone.” Take this same feeder road back across the thruway, and in less than a quarter of a mile along the road a sign announcing “Society Hills Estates, True Custom Luxury Homes” claims attention. Beyond this announcement lies a cul-de-sac of houses with brick, faux marble and columned facades, three-car garages and far-reaching “cathedral”-height entrance ways. By all appearances these seem to be truly large houses, at least by comparison to the neighboring single-story ranches and aluminum-sided capes with single-car garages fronting the entry road to these “luxury homes.”

Jurisdictional spheres further contribute to the seeming incoherence of South Brunswick space. The Postal Service, for instance, has divided South Brunswick into several zip codes which are associated with neighboring municipalities or separate unincorporated regions within the township. For some, this has created a phantom

township. As if this subdivision by zip codes were not enough, the telephone company has assigned different areas codes within South Brunswick. Even township schools, proverbial centers of community, are inadvertent agents of spatial fragmentation. Overcrowding, and New Jersey State requirements that every school be demographically balanced, necessitates a system of redistricting which can find children who might actually live within walking distance of one school bussed to another school miles away in order that the district achieve a mandated balance.

That this township is undergoing staggering change is a point that cannot be emphasized enough. This is a space, it seems, where there are no constants. While there always seems to be some push for change---from developers, from legislative authorities advocating the merging of services, or, for example, from transportation officials attempting to install a new road or rail transit line---there is also a counterbalancing “pull” to maintain the status quo. Those residents of New Jersey’s 566 municipalities who care enough to speak out are tenacious in holding out for “home rule,” despite many of its obvious drawbacks. These concerns with maintaining jurisdictional autonomy and identity of place can on occasion extend to the upper reaches of state governance. A few years ago politicians, business leaders and the general public were stunned to learn of a proposal by the Federal Office of Management and Budget that the northern half of New Jersey be lumped into a “New York Metropolitan Area” designation and that most of the southern part of New Jersey be included in a “Philadelphia Metropolitan Area” designation. “Statistically speaking,” wrote authors of a local paper, “New Jersey would no longer exist... “We’d disappear,” said the president of the NJ Chamber of Commerce,

and given a ten-days' response time, officials and business leaders pledged a "full-scale effort" to block the committee's proposal (Home News, 10 January, 2000).

It is perhaps understandable that, finding themselves confronting this highly decentered, spatially fragmented region, residents should attempt to construe an anchor for themselves in what New Urbanism proponent James Kunstler (1994) terms a "geography of nowhere." This was the intent of a few residents who, spurred by an upcoming commemoration of the township, volunteered to compile a history of South Brunswick. However, as the following examination of township and regional history suggests, this was a daunting project, for nearly all material evidence of things past---even the rich agricultural soils that had sustained a farm culture for 200 years---were nearly obliterated.

CHAPTER TWO

A Rural/Suburban Hinterland Spawns the “New City”

In the winter of 1996 a few South Brunswick residents met to make plans for a bicentennial commemoration of the township. A turn to township history seemed a fitting start for such a project. However, they found themselves hard pressed to come up with any material. Although this was a long-settled region dating back to the colonial era, the majority of residents were relatively recent arrivals with little sense of the township's past. Moreover, almost no historical records were available. Farm folk notoriously leave few records, the evidence of their labors incised upon the land rather than upon paper. Certain documents had apparently been destroyed in a fire and secondary accounts, stored in a slim binder in the township library labeled “Various Histories of South Brunswick...Arranged from short to long,” had been excerpted from more comprehensive volumes on county histories.

At this preliminary meeting attendees brain stormed over where they might find historical data or artifacts. The convener of the meeting did in fact have one historic item, an old map of South Brunswick that someone had found in their attic. But clearly there had to be something more. Meeting attenders decided that a public announcement should be posted in the local paper asking people to clean out their attics and garages to find anything historical that they might have---even old recipes. One person mentioned an old farm tool they had found in their garage.

It is not surprising that these local history buffs were stymied over how to put

together a history of the township. Created by an act of the New Jersey State legislature in 1798, South Brunswick's designation as one of several jurisdictions within the county was purely a legal and political convenience. No doubt of greater significance to 18th and 19th century inhabitants of this rural landscape were the semi-autonomous locales encompassed within township boundaries. These included the village of Kingston, smaller hamlets and an integrated white and African American neighborhood situated for a number of years along one of the township's side roads. (There is no further information about this neighborhood other than residents' knowledge that it existed.) With the exception of Kingston, positioned along a main northeastern route for trade and communication dating back to the colonial period, the hamlets yielded scant historical material. Consisting typically of a few houses, a general store, a tavern, mill, schoolhouse and, in addition, local business concerns aimed at attracting the traveler trade, these nodes were but tiny protuberances, most often situated at cross roads, in a flat landscape of woods, fields and occasional farm houses. The semi-autonomy of the hamlets and the absence of a township center meant that there was no single story of origin and development. Moreover, over the course of 200 years, the township locales had flourished and waned in different periods, in the process producing a patchwork of land usage as well as a patchwork history---mere "Moments in History," as bicentennial volunteers aptly titled a column which they eventually produced for the local newspaper.

What bicentennial planners neglected to note in their earliest investigations were two features of pre-suburban South Brunswick and the surrounding region which played a most significant part in shaping the historical development of the entire township.

These were its rich agricultural soils and its proximity a constellation of northeastern city centers. The qualities of the astounding fertile, rock-free soils of this Central New Jersey region attracted farmers as far back as the late 17th century. Indeed, so tillable were these soils that an old joke has it that a farmer running away from an Indian couldn't find a rock to defend himself (interview, May 24, 1999). The viability of these soils, combined with the easy access truck farms had to the Northern New Jersey cities of South Amboy and Newark—distribution points for the New York market—enabled families to maintain a classic old-style farming tradition midway into the 20th century. Inadvertently, these flat open farm fields were preserved for suburban and eventual “new city” development.

Within an astoundingly four decade period, starting from the first stages of construction, in 1957, of Hamilton Acres---South Brunswick's first housing development---much of the township's rich agricultural land, tilled for some 200 years, has either been converted into space for mammoth high-tech warehouses, commercial office space and suburban back yards or is maintained in a holding pattern by corporate interests. Neighboring municipalities have undergone a similar transformation. By the year 2000 the township landscape which, as late as the mid-1970's, was regarded as a sleepy backwater, largely unshaped by 20th century events, has morphed into an indistinguishable part of a “new city” landscape. South Brunswick's geographical location, rendering it a heavily trafficked transit zone between New York City and Philadelphia and a locus of intersecting roads and waterway systems connecting urban centers as far back as the Revolutionary War period, continues to be critical to its definition. This centrality is an attractive inducement to homeowners who negotiate a

complex transportation network within a multi-county region on a daily basis.

The Presuburban World

Late-18th century travelers making the arduous two or three-day trip from Philadelphia to New York City were first required to make a connection by ferry from Philadelphia to Trenton. From there they journeyed by stage wagon along the King's Highway through Princeton, Kingston and New Brunswick on their way to Elizabeth or Newark. In Newark they boarded a stage boat for New York City.

Highlights for travelers passing through this region were the college towns of Princeton and New Brunswick. (Chartered as the College of New Jersey, Queen's College, more recently Rutgers University, was founded in 1776. Princeton University was founded in 1746) With its flat, treeless expanses, its marsh land and open fields, the region encompassing South Brunswick which lay between these two hubs of culture, entertainment and commerce must certainly have seemed a desolate, nondescript backwater. One traveler, making his way between Princeton and New Brunswick in 1776, was disgusted by the "exhorbitansey of the inn keepers" between these two towns (John E. Brush, annotated map, "The County of Middlesex in the Province of New Jersey during the American Revolution, Cultural and Heritage Commission, Middlesex County, 1976). A century and a half later little else could be said of a region which to Princeton University student F. Scott Fitzgerald, writing in the 1920's, seemed to be "a ring of silence" (Spano, 1996). Even in the 1950's and 1960's the township's early suburbanites found their new domicile a barren "Sahara Desert" (Weingartner, 1998).

However barren this place-in-between may have seemed, it offered opportunity to local entrepreneurs who capitalized on the traveler trade by establishing inns and taverns at the most frequented crossroads. Whatever the central means of transport over the decades---whether it was stagecoach, barge, trolley, train or automobile---and wherever the greater frequency of travelers or freight was to be found, there were also appropriate roadside services. These businesses expanded and further defined the township's rural hamlets. In a common formation foreshadowing early strip malls, later enclosed malls, big box outlets and the region's corporate-headquarters-as-showpieces which began to proliferate in the late 1980's, these businesses tended to spread laterally along roadsides rather than develop in cluster formation, the better to attract the traffic in passengers and freight.

When the township's first suburbanites began to arrive in 1957 they landed in a presuburban world requiring trips north to New Brunswick or south to Princeton or Trenton for basic goods, services and entertainment. (Those residents who predated the suburbanites report that they tended to avoid Princeton. It seemed to them "high hat," and the shops too expensive.) In these early suburban days municipal services were so minimal that the township's police department was run by a part-time constable who also worked as a school bus driver, and students were required to travel out of the township to attend high school.

Hamilton Acres eventually became a 1500-unit development. Before the construction of Hamilton Acres, the township's population had remained at a remarkably steady low for nearly 200 years, despite its location in the Northeastern corridor, in the

most densely populated state in the United States. (See Appendix III, Item 2.) As sparsely populated as it was, however, the township had seen some in-migration. In the 1930's and 1940's Eastern European immigrants of Jewish ancestry from New York City had been relocated in a rural pocket of the township under the auspices of a settlement program. Raising chickens and produce, these farm families contributed to the on-going rural economy. While this in-migration did not result in a significant population increase, it did contribute to greater cultural diversity.

The Early Suburban World

With the construction of Hamilton Acres, South Brunswick residents were in fact witnesses to the post-World War II housing boom, a common national and state-wide trend. The New Jersey of the 1950's and 1960's was a prime site for Levittown-style houses, built at the rate of 1,000 a week for some 1,000 weeks (Hughes and Seneca, 1996). Township residents were undoubtedly familiar with suburban development that had taken place in New Jersey and elsewhere before World War II. Llewelyn Park, built on the outskirts of New York City in West Orange, New Jersey in 1853 ranks as the country's first suburb (Wilson 1979). Unlike post-World War II suburbs, however, this was a quintessential "bourgeois utopia" (Fishman 1987) catering to the wealthy, a leafy-green domain set apart from the urban world, featuring palatial villas in a picturesque park-like setting. (The "bourgeois utopia" is a low density middle class enclave of privilege featuring single family houses in a park-like setting. Its inhabitants are dependent upon the urban core for jobs and cultural amenities.)

Several decades later, when the automobile began to reduce the necessity for rail transit in the 1920's, suburban towns accommodating a wider cross section of the middle class began to proliferate. Most of these suburbs were still situated in relatively close proximity to New York City. Others were also built at the periphery of New Jersey cities. Until the 1950's, however, suburban housing construction was small scale and had not spread as far inland along the New York City/Philadelphia axis to less accessible regions such as South Brunswick.

The Lure of Affordable Housing

How is it that what was once a rural backwater, so unremarkable to presuburban-era observers, should become a favored site for a suburban housing market? First, scarcity of post-World War II housing and the expense of housing in established suburbs further north drove prospective buyers further from New York City. Housing affordability was an important selling point to these first-time homeowners, just as it was for their counterparts in other suburbanizing regions. Land this far from New York City was cheaper and cheaper land translated into lower production costs passed on to consumers on shoe-string budgets. Low, government-insured mortgage rates made tract housing a phenomenal deal (Jackson 1985, chap. 11). In addition, the local political climate favored real estate development. The notion of inexpensive housing for returning war veterans appealed to local residents. Moreover, for farmers suffering from the impact of a recent five-year drought and competition from long distance trucking of California produce, a new-found market for agricultural land was welcome.

Convenient access for commuters to jobs, located either to New York City or in New Jersey's burgeoning post-World War II job market, was an additional drawing card for Hamilton Acres householders. "It's just 10 minutes from New Brunswick," goes a developer's ad for Hamilton Acres, "another 25 minutes from Newark and only 40 minutes from Penn Station, New York City" (newspaper advertisement, clipped by resident, n.d.). These lengths of time-in-transit may have been understated. However, these "one-car" families with a single commuting wage earner could use a commuter bus line located within a few minutes walking distance from their development. Train service was just a few minutes drive away. (Analysis of a survey of 100 residents conducted by a Hamilton Acres resident in 1961 and published in the Hamilton Acres News, a newsletter produced by Hamilton Acres volunteers from 1959 to 1964, suggests that fewer wage earners commuted to New York City and northern New Jersey than did wage earners who worked closer to home. "Surprisingly," the surveyor writes, "only about 40% of the men commute to either New York or Northern New Jersey...the others are employed closer to their homes. Hamilton Acres is thus different from her sister suburbs in the Metropolitan Area, where as high as 80% of the working population commutes to the center city to work" ((Hamilton Acres) News, 1961).

A Backwater Becomes an Appealing Countryside Setting

For presuburban era travelers, South Brunswick and the surrounding environs was a barren place-in-between the booming cities of Philadelphia and New York City. For the new suburbanites this landscape was an appealing alternative to urban life. Not only did

it offer affordable housing, it promised everything they associated with “country” living: fresh air, space, and a wholesome environment for rearing children. “Country” living was “the cultural next step,” as one of these early homeowners observes (interview, February 2, 1996). In addition, it came with the added plus of proximity to cultural amenities available in the university towns of New Brunswick and Princeton. These new suburbanites, former urbanites who had, for the most part, grown up in New York City were avid attenders of all varieties of cultural events in these two towns. (A detailed calendar of events listed in the Hamilton Acres News is indication of the wide variety of cultural offerings which these residents enjoyed. Among the many events listed in a “Calendar” of December, 1961, for instance, there is a concert by Pete Seeger at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, a talk entitled “Whatever Happened to Rugged Individualism,” part of a University Lecture Series at Rutgers University, “Les Mains Sales,” part of a French Film Series at McCarter Theater and Leopold Stokowski conducting the American Symphony Orchestra on the Rutgers University campus. (See Appendix III, Item #3.)

Hamilton Acres Suburbanites: An Atypical Group

A substantial number of Hamilton Acres residents differed from homeowners in other suburbanizing regions of the post World War II period according to socio-economic status. A majority of residents of tract housing developments, as documented by Gans in his study of a Levittown in Willingboro N.J. (1967) were of the skilled working class and lower middle class. Some were white collar professionals. They were often the first in

their families to own a house. In her study of homeowners' housing renovations in Long Island's Levittown Kelly (1993, 45) reports that residents were mainly blue-collar workers but that also a number of these residents were of a "recently emerged white-collar middle class, wage-earning people whose work was clean, but not well-remunerated, and whose prewar status would not typically have included home ownership." In contrast to these Levittown populations, an unspecified number of Hamilton Acres homeowners were already of the propertied middle class. Home ownership was not regarded by them as a step up from working to middle class status. Rather, their pleasure was in owning their *own* single family house, its contemporary ranch-style design a statement of independence from the "stuffy" old colonial-style houses or cramped row houses in which they had grown up. "We didn't want a house which was old and dark and stuffed with furniture," explains one of these homeowners (interview, January 10, 1998).

A Desire for Community

Hamilton Acres homeowners are further distinguished from other groups of suburbanites of the period by their desire for community. In her summary of studies of early suburbanites O'Connor (1985, 390-391) notes that suburbanites were not looking for a new social environment but because they wanted a house. And as Gans (1967, 37-41) observes of the Levittowners he studied: "They were not looking for roots or a rural idyll, not for a social ethic or a consumption-centered life, not for civic participation or for "sense of community...mainly they came "for a house and not a social environment."

One exception to this pattern is noted by Keller (2003, 78) whose study of residents who settled in the first planned unit development in New Jersey finds that community related factors were one of the primary reasons for their move.

Hamilton Acres residents who have stayed on report that their purchase of a house was motivated by a desire for community. Several of these residents relate how they were attracted to Hamilton Acres by word of mouth in what one resident terms an “elastic band effect” (interview, January 10, 1998). While it is not possible to document the sentiments of those homeowners who moved on, it is readily apparent that at least those who have stayed on were looking for a particular type of community, made up of liberal, progressive-minded residents who saw in the ranch-style house not the just the best alternative but possibilities for a new, informal life style. They were indeed self-selected according to architectural style, opting for neighbors who viewed slab construction ranch style housing as a modernist statement of a new order.

Religious Affiliation

The in-house survey of 100 Hamilton Acres residents, cited previously, indicates that among religions represented Protestant groups were in the majority, followed by Catholics, with about 15% of the population Jewish. In what the author of this study notes to be a deviation from a general pattern of religious observance in suburbs, about 25% of the sample had no religious affiliation ((Hamilton Acres) News, 1961).

Educational Level

In further differentiation from other suburbanite groups of the period, many of the Hamilton Acres residents were highly educated. “(Hamilton Acresers) are extraordinarily well educated,” remarks the author of the in-house survey (Ibid.). “Of those interviewed, 48.5% possessed the equivalent of a college bachelor’s degree or a higher degree. “This figure was quite startling,” he notes, “for there seems to have been some sort of attraction to the community for these people” (Ibid.). In support of this finding, a review of all available issues of the Hamilton Acres News, particularly of articles and “bios” of candidates running for local office, indicates degrees earned by residents at the following institutions: Douglass College, New Brunswick; Brooklyn College, Smith College, Columbia University, Mount Holyoke College, University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, New York University, Fairleigh Dickinson University and Antioch College. A review of issues of the Hamilton Acres News indicates advanced degrees earned by residents as follows: MSW, University of Pennsylvania; PhD Mathematics, Rutgers University; PhD History, Brown University; MA Social Work and PhD, Political Science (institutions unspecified).

Political Differences

Although Hamilton Acres residents may have felt themselves united in a common home-owning experience, they were not necessarily in political accord. Politically conservative residents and “flaming liberals” coexisted side by side. (Residents recall that a few residents were members of a small John Birch Society. These residents were

adamantly opposed to the progressive school programs endorsed by the “flaming liberals” but were such a minority as to be easily squelched.)

The most politically effective residents of Hamilton Acres were the “flaming liberals.” Several of these residents hailed from socialist backgrounds. “All my friends’ parents were in the labor movement,” recalls one woman of Italian ancestry who grew up in Greenwich Village (interview, November 7, 1996). Another recounts how her socialist father insisted on employing African Americans in managerial positions in his business. The father of another resident was a writer of national stature and a member of the American Communist Party (interview, November 27, 1995).

Housing as Induction into a Taste Culture

So keen was their sense of confronting unforged territory and so challenging did Hamilton Acres homeowners find their circumstances that they styled themselves “pioneers,” a term used as well by residents of other suburbanizing regions (Baxandall and Ewen 2000; Kelly 1993). Confronted with the project of settling in, these “pioneers” set to work improving their yards and redesigning and decorating their houses. They offered each other support in these endeavors, if not through actual physical labor, then through mutual advice. Opting for a new, modern lifestyle and housing of an entirely different style from that of their parents’ generation, these “pioneers” rejected the old housing styles and stuffy furniture they had grown up with. But while they rejected old styles, they had no stylistic precedents for their Frank Lloyd Wright knock downs. Hence they exchanged ideas for interior decoration and remodeling with particular interest and

enthusiasm. In so doing, they solidified a common taste culture among themselves..

That they viewed improvement of their properties as a collective endeavor---a creative and enormously pleasurable one at that, is clearly evident in the articles and columns published in the Hamilton Acres News. There is no indication, either in these articles or in residents' retrospective accounts, that they regarded home improvement as onerous. Rather, their pleasure was in embarking on the adventure of first-time home ownership with their neighbors, with their housing a venue for individualistic expression. Headings of articles about garden improvement which appeared in issues of the Hamilton Acres News in 1961 impart some of this spirit. "Where a spade's a spade," "Sow What!", "Lawns New and Old" and "Down to Earth" (advice on how to produce homegrown corn and how to mulch with hay) are a few of the articles written by a resident with expertise in organic gardening.

New ideas for interior embellishments are equally creative. "Designer's Sketchbook," a feature appearing in frequent issues of the Hamilton Acres News, is as venturesome in spirit as the garden column. Of a wall book-storage unit designed by one resident, an editor writes: "A light, airy feeling is achieved by the open shelving forming various spaces. By painting each shelf a different color, an interesting contrast is formed against the neutral wall" ((Hamilton Acres) News, 1960). The "Sketchbook" features several ideas for landscaping design. In one issue, the drawing and description of a "naturalistic patio" created by one couple is featured. "They have used a variety of textures," writes the author of this piece "...walls of solar brick, posts of natural brick, flooring of flagstone laid on pebbles, plus shrubbery and a garden edged in granite

blocks.” In another issue, drawings are accompanied by a description of an “authentic Japanese garden” with “various shaped rocks and pebbles” containing “attractive outdoor furniture” handmade by the owners. “The yard which would serve as a suitable backdrop for the Kabuki dancers, instead provides the (owners’) dachshund Fritzi with an exotic playground,” writes the author of this piece ((Hamilton Acres) News, 1960). (See Appendix III, Item #4, a-d.)

The House as Showpiece of Creative Expression

Looking back on their early days, those residents who have stayed on recall thinking that their houses were of such poor construction that they probably would not last very long. This did not deter them, and in fact seems to have inspired them, to treat their ranches as malleable objects of creative and individualized expression. It is striking that remodeling and home decorating efforts of the “pioneers” were not carried out with overt thought to resale value. No reference to resale value as a goal of home improvement is made in any issue of the Hamilton Acres News or in any conversations with those residents who have stayed on.

Collaboration with the “Locals”

As they brought in top soil, experimented with organic gardening, removed partitions and took on such projects as converting a single carport into an extra bedroom or study, the “pioneers” were putting down roots, as one of these homeowners explains it. By so doing they were realizing the American Dream or republican ideal (Kelly 1993,

160-161). This dream could not have been achieved, however, without the help of local residents skilled in housing construction and repair and the cultivation of nursery stock. “They made their livings off us, really,” recalls an early Hamilton Acres resident. “We depended on them and they depended on us” (Weingartner, 1998). Indeed, virtually every issue of the Hamilton Acres News features ads placed by local business entrepreneurs for such services and/or products as excavating, delivery of top soil, lawn and garden care, building materials, provision of nursery stock and in addition, home-delivery of dairy products

Establishing Family and Community

“Putting down roots” meant establishing “family” for many of the “pioneers.” New York City, the point of origin for many of them, was a long distance from Central New Jersey in the late 1950's and early 1960's. “My mother broke down and wept when she found out where we would be living,” recalls one resident (interview, November 7, 1996). Indeed, this parent's distress was not unfounded. The highway system was still in its infancy. There was no Verrazano Bridge at the time and their parents were unlikely to be automobile drivers.

The Hamilton Acres “pioneers” recall their new community as a more-than-adequate replacement for the family they had left behind, in the words of one resident, like a “big house with one roof over the entire town” (Central Post, 1998). One of these residents recalls this early community as “an outpost in the wilderness and a little piece of heaven at the same time...the town was barren, no trees or grass anywhere in

sight...You could drive to the heart of North Brunswick and not hit one light” (Garrin, 1998). The newsletter solidified cultural and political bonds among these “pioneers. In addition to do-it-yourself tips, a cultural calendar and ideas for day trips, it offered readers analyses of local ballot issues, profiles of political candidates, and news from the school district. It had an avid following. “I could hardly wait until Tuesday when the newsletter came out,” recalls one resident. “I’d run out to the mailbox to see what had happened at the school board meeting the night before” (interview, January 10, 1998).

Solidifying Roots and Extending an Ethos

Putnam (2000, 25-26) finds that civic engagement and “shared identity and reciprocity” among Americans had never previously been greater than in the period of the fifties and sixties. The experience of Hamilton Acres residents supports this observation. Within a two to three year period, they formed a cooperative swim club (circa 1960), a Hamilton Acres Jewish Community Center (1958), the South Brunswick League of Women Voters (1958) and a volunteer fire and first aid squad (circa 1960). They also established a cooperative preschool (1958), the survival of which became the object, some four decades later, of a bitter township-wide controversy which I discuss in Chapter IV.

Hamilton Acres residents looked to the township’s rudimentary government structure as a means of establishing a place to their liking, forming such offices as a Shade Tree Commission (stretches of flat farm fields perfectly acceptable to “locals” were not acceptable to these new suburbanites) and a mosquito eradication program. In

1963 they formed a Civil Right Council with the goal of assisting in the “harmonious integration of housing in the South Brunswick areas” ((Hamilton Acres) News, 1963). (Census data for 1960 records 4.6% Black residents. The 1970 Census records 3.0% Black residents (Carbone, 1993).

Of the many changes wrought by the new suburbanites, their recruitment of a schools superintendent whose progressive ideas matched their own had the most far-reaching significance. His creation of the district’s progressive school program, in place for 24 years until his retirement, produced an identity for the entire, spatially fragmented township as a distinct place, a forward-looking community.

Mutual Culture Shock

Both local residents and the recently arrived suburbanites report experiencing considerable culture shock in the early suburban period. ““We moved out here from Brooklyn,” recalls a resident, “and my wife got mad at me because she didn’t drive...She said that I put her in the middle of the Sahara Desert. There were no stores around, no malls, no shopping centers. To buy anything, you would d have to go into Princeton or New Brunswick. It was very rural”” (Weingartner, 1998). Indeed, Hamilton Acres was a flat, muddy and treeless expanse, far removed from the services to which the former urbanites had been accustomed. Recalls another early resident, “We all came with babies to seas of mud, It was grim. I wanted to get out of the city, but I didn’t know what I was getting into” (Ibid.).

As these “pioneers” who have stayed on note retrospectively, they were barely

aware of the township's rural residents at that time, despite the fact that these residents were far more deserving of "pioneer" status. In the meantime, local residents, deeply upset by the magnitude of the changes which the construction of Hamilton Acres forced them to confront, experienced their own form of culture shock. (The impact of the arrival of white collar commuting professionals upon the local world is powerfully evoked by Dobriner (1963) in his account of the shock waves created in a small town by this incursion.) Whereas the emergence of the sprawling "new city" does not appear to be of much significance to the former "locals" interviewed for this study, the arrival of the suburbanites was clearly an event of enormous consequence, one harkening an entirely new world. "It was trying times to be invaded with such a mass of units all at one thrust," recalls one of these residents. "...to have the people come en masse was an unbelievable culture shock" (Weingartner, 1998). "This was a nice sleepy community, where everyone knew everyone," recalls another of these residents. "People felt invaded because of the size of the project. We were accustomed to cows, chickens, potato farms. It scared people" (Ibid.). And in the words of another "At first it was like 'War of the Worlds' ...they were like aliens to us. All of a sudden, you had people with suits and ties commuting into New York City. With us, the only time we wore a suit and ties was for a funeral—and you had to go buy that" (Ibid).

To local residents, such amenities as street lights and a mosquito eradication program which the newcomers demanded seemed entirely unnecessary, and costly at that. So, too, the concerted drive by the suburbanites to revamp the school system, not only by interjecting a progressive curriculum but also by mandating more school materials and

lower student/teacher ratios angered local residents who believed their schools to be entirely satisfactory. The cooperative day care center and the cooperative swim club which the suburbanites organized were institutions which local residents neither needed nor were interested in. They already shared common bonds through multi-generational family ties and networks, supported their local churches and were members of New Jersey's first grange. (The grange movement in New Jersey dates back to the post-Civil War period.) Their institutions were intrinsically cooperative without having to be explicitly created as such.

As Hamilton Acres residents settled in and as their population expanded, they became a well-organized majority with the power to assert their visions. It was not only their numbers that made a difference, however. As a former "local" points out, the concentration of the Hamilton Acres households compared to the scattered residential pattern of locals' households, made door-to-door canvassing for ballot issues and elections relatively easy. The lawyers and university professors among them offered guidelines on such matters as how best to win a referendum or how to reorganize the municipal government. Moreover, Hamilton Acres women who had either left early careers, or had the financial resources to forestall plans for eventual careers, had the time otherwise unavailable to working farm women to work on campaigns and to exert their influence on the schools through volunteer efforts. In an editorial entitled "The Sound and the Fury," Hamilton Acres editors detailed an incident which demonstrates how the resources of time and also in this case, equipment, gave Hamilton Acres activists an advantage over local residents:

The School Budget election brought forth a lively interchange of leaflets by township citizens, both for and against. An anonymous leaflet asking voters to reject the budget was distributed in Hamilton Acres on the morning of the first election. The pro-budget forces managed an answer to the first anonymous leaflet by quickly summoning available housewives on the afternoon of February 9th and getting out a signed mimeographed leaflet to Hamilton Acres residents before the 5 PM voting deadline. (A cranky but functioning mimeograph machine is owned and operated by a pro-budget Hamilton Acres resident.) (1960).

A Township-Wide Identity

Before the suburbanites arrived the township was a spatially fragmented space consisting of village hubs. Students traveled to other municipalities for high school. The population explosion brought about the arrival of the suburbanites necessitated the installation of South Brunswick's first high school in 1960. The high school became the basis of a township-wide identity, thereby diminishing the felt-insularity which long-term residents had associated with the township's separate locales.

Soon the township acquired a reputation for having good schools and this had the unintended consequence of attracting more housing consumers. Whereas in the 1950's the township functioned minimally as an ineffectual political entity, by the mid-1970's, little more than a decade after the construction of Hamilton Acres, developers of the second largest housing development in South Brunswick were distributing a sales brochure promoting the township as having a progressive school system. In this brochure (from resident's collection, n.d.) they cite a Saturday Review piece in which the South Brunswick school system as mentioned as one having a "national reputation." (Featuring the title of this article, "Schools Put a Town On The Map" in their brochure, the developers also include a reference in this article to South Brunswick as "...a place

where 75 percent of the administrators and teachers have turned themselves inside out to become better educators and better persons” (Harrison, Saturday Review, 21 February, 1970).

Paying for the Costs of Suburbanization

With the arrival of the early suburbanites the township population increased by almost 150%, putting a sudden and enormous pressure on existing services and schools and catapulting South Brunswick from a presuburban to a suburban world. The township population increased from 4,001 in 1950 to 10,278 in 1960. (See Appendix II, Item #2.) Concerned with how to pay for municipal services, leaders of local and suburbanite contingents established the township’s first Industrial Commission in 1960. By zoning some of the space in the vicinity of main transportation arteries as “Industrial” they were making the township’s first-time bid for industrial ratables ((Hamilton Acres) News, 1960). This laid the groundwork for the mixed rural, commercial and residential spatial configuration of the present.

Back in early suburban days virtually all residents were keenly aware of the seemingly insoluble problems produced by rapid spatial reconfiguration: continuous population growth, growing pressure on existing services, concomitant elevation of property taxes and reduction of open space. In an expression of these concerns, editors of the Hamilton Acres News produced an article that summarized the views of leading urbanists regarding suburban growth. Citing the dramatic growth of the period brought about by “the great outpouring from the cities into the suburbs—and the profound social,

economic, and political problems that result,” these editors refer to South Brunswick as “the heart of a great “city” that is the product of such a migration (1960). Construction of the New Jersey Turnpike in 1951 was a crucial event signaling this transformation.

The New Jersey Turnpike as “Sleeping Giant”

The construction of the New Jersey Turnpike was a momentous undertaking, an event synonymous with the suburbanization of New Jersey. The impetus for the construction of the 148-mile-long Turnpike was found in massive government spending on highways during this period as well as in a New Jersey governor’s grander vision to push his state to the forefront of technological and economic progress which it was generally believed a World War II victory would bring (Strauss, 2000). It was not difficult to produce a rationale for such an undertaking. New Jersey was already a well-established corridor between Philadelphia and New York and rising automobile and truck traffic in the 1940's provided ample justification for a road system built with the goals of speed and efficiency.

From the day of its opening, the Turnpike was an immediate economic success for the State of New Jersey’s Turnpike Authority. However, to the consternation of residents of the local municipalities through which the Turnpike passed, Turnpike planners did not envision the Turnpike as a local income-generator. With Turnpike Exit numbers the dominant identifiers at interchanges, and names of actual places through which it passed minor subheads, the emphasis was on the Turnpike as a highly efficient conduit, an entirely self-supporting, high-revenue-producing venture tapping the flow of commercial

and passenger vehicles through connections to other major road systems and transportation hubs.

South Brunswick needed revenues to offset the meteoritic rise in per capita municipal costs incurred by rapid population growth. Without a Turnpike Exit, however, the actual conversion of land from agricultural to revenue-producing industrial use could not be realized. In residents' estimation, the Turnpike remained a "sleeping giant" (Weingartner, 1997).

Exit 8A

No residents could be more keenly aware of the crucial effect of the placement of Turnpike exits on municipal economies than those living in South Brunswick. The construction of Exit 8A was an extraordinary economic boon for the township, making possible the eventual and on-going conversion of rich agricultural soils into revenue-generating industrial use. From early suburban days to the present day commercial installations termed "clean (supposedly non-polluting) ratables" were and are the most sought-after industry among municipalities. Warehouses rank high on planners' lists of desirable "clean ratables." For warehouse developers South Brunswick's ultra flat farmland, removed from residential development, has proved extremely attractive.

Set amidst still-viable farmland, the few industrial plants built in the vicinity of Exit 8A in the early 1970's must certainly have seemed an incongruity. However, they were but an early extension of Turnpike-spawned warehouse construction further north, driven by the shift from a Fordist to a flexible production system demanding quick turn-

around time of goods (Harvey 1989, 156). By the mid-1970's the first generation of warehouses in the New Jersey Meadowlands outside New York City were considered outmoded. As a warehouse region around a Turnpike Exit further north which had boomed in the 1960's reached build-out, South Brunswick's wide flat farm fields, tilled rock-free for some two centuries, proved highly attractive to commercial developers bent on producing the next generation of warehouses. The township's convenient location along the eastern seaboard, coupled with the quick approval time assured by the township's planning office, were additional inducements. Not until the expansion of the New York and New Jersey seaports for international trade in the late 1980's, however, did a market exist for warehouses of the latest high tech design.

Few if any township residents could find fault with an industry which would reduce their property taxes. However, one point that rankled long-term residents and exacerbated ongoing concerns that South Brunswick was not cited on a Turnpike Exit sign. "People were outraged!," recalls a former township mayor. "They asked 'Why isn't there any mention of South Brunswick?'" and the Turnpike people said, "There is no South Brunswick'" (interview, May 24, 1999). This omission should not have been surprising to residents, for Turnpike planners were interested in speed and efficiency, not in particularities of place. As for the warehouse developers who began to see the commercial potential of this region, exit numbers, not place names, were sufficient for truckers intent on the rapid loading and unloading of goods on this eastern seaboard route.

The Transitional Landscape of the 1970's

The construction of Hamilton Acres foreshadowed a new era. Well into the 1970's this development felt to its residents like an island within a "Sahara Desert." Development was taking place further north in regions in closer proximity to New York City and services were still a distance away. Residents recall that there was only one family restaurant in the vicinity and even then it took half an hour to get to it. Fields and treed wetlands were still a dominant feature of the landscape. New housing had been slowed by a recession as well as by intense opposition to plans presented by the developer of what eventually become the township's second large-scale development. This was a world oriented around still-spatially-decipherable rural hubs. The widespread dispersal of jobs well beyond the perimeters of any recognizable urban centers, a spatial configuration characteristic of the decentered and spatially fragmented "new city," was not yet a reality. Suburbanites commuted between their housing enclaves to work sites in New York City or in established towns and cities in New Jersey, among them Princeton, Newark, Menlo Park and New Brunswick.

Though this landscape may have appeared largely rural, the "reinvention" of New Jersey's economy was already well underway (Hughes, Seneca, 1996). Although residents could not have foreseen it at the time, the 20-mile stretch of Route One running along a north/south axis between New Brunswick and Princeton/Trenton was to become one of New Jersey's booming "growth corridors," its southern portion the eventual site of an "edge city" (Garreau 1991).

The Reinvention of New Jersey's Economy: The Late 1970's

The virtual reinvention of the New Jersey economy, starting in the late 1970's, was spurred by the state-wide expansion of highly-skilled capital intensive jobs and the rapid decline of manufacturing jobs (Hughes, Seneca, 1996.) In urban centers, loss of a manufacturing base, combined with urban racial strife and civil rights legislation, exacerbated social and racial differences in such a way as to hasten the departure of middle class householders and employers. Echoing a national and state-wide pattern, New Brunswick and Trenton---two stellar cities of the industrial era---spiraled into economic decline while the hinterland between them began to flourish.

While municipal services in the suburbs could be sustained with revenues generated by an expanding economic base and middle class wages, these once-thriving cities were drained of necessary revenues. Racial tensions in these cities in the 1960's and 1970's were a deterrent for residents once-accustomed to routine shopping expeditions to these cities. In addition, the growing popularity of national chain stores the enclosed shopping malls which first appeared in New Jersey in the 1970's created a more decentered spatial configuration which all but eliminated the needs of residents of outlying areas to make their customary expeditions to New Brunswick or Trenton. (Residents accustomed to periodic shopping trips to New Brunswick for necessary supplies and services report that in the late 1960's they began to shop in some of the region's early chain discount stores located at the periphery of New Brunswick.) Hamilton Acres residents also shopped at stores along Route 18 and patronized small shops in the region's first strip mall, built by the developer of Hamilton Acres.)

Spatial Reconfiguration in the 1980's: the Route One Corporate Corridor

Some 80% of all commercial office space ever built in New Jersey was in the decade of the 1980's. Much of this space is located in New Jersey's several "growth corridors," among them the Route 1 "growth corridor." Key players in its development are Johnson and Johnson and the City of New Brunswick at its northern end and Princeton University at its southern end.

New Brunswick: In the 1970's, in collaboration with the City of New Brunswick, Johnson and Johnson spearheaded a urban renewal/gentrification campaign to reconfigure downtown New Brunswick. By the 1980's a "revitalized" downtown had emerged, featuring shops and restaurants, a sleek new Hyatt Hotel and expanded corporate offices geared towards tourists and visiting business executives. Meanwhile, some of the region's poorest residents were and are concentrated in neighborhoods at the periphery of this gentrified downtown. Those residents who do not have access to a car must expend scarce monetary resources to hire taxis for periodic trips to supermarkets in the outlying region. Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty in New Brunswick are sites for makeshift offices siphoning workers, often by worker vans, to temporary work well in the expanding "new city" region. The mega-warehouses in South Brunswick are one of their destinations.

Princeton University's Forrestal Center: At the southern end of the "corporate corridor" Princeton University planners initiated Forrestal Center in 1976 with the purchase of 1600 acres of still-extant, locally-owned farmland. Although the town of Princeton is actually a few miles east of Route 1, university planners concerned with

controlling the development of this “backyard” space, set about to preserve “the environmental qualities that distinguish the Princeton community from the characteristic sprawl of the northeastern megalopolis” (Forrestal Center brochure, n.d.). By the late 1980's Forrestal Center had materialized into an “edge city.” By 1990, in an astoundingly brief 14 year period after its inception on working farmland, Forrestal Center featured more than 50 corporations, approximately six million square feet of commercial space, a work force of 10,000 employees, hotels, “patio homes” and townhouses, a retail complex and, in addition, a retirement village.

The Landscape of the 1980's: Impending Sprawl

Such was the pace of regional development that by 1988 the Route 1 corridor region featured an estimated 9 to 12 million square feet of office space (Goldberger, 1988). Drivers negotiating virtually any road during this period--whether a former narrow country road or a main transportation conduit---would invariably find themselves bombarded by signs proclaiming “Land for Sale” and “Space for Lease,” “Future Home of....,” or simply “Available.” Whether positioned in fields of New Jersey’s fabled sweet corn or partially obscured in roadside underbrush, whether implanted in front of a boarded-up diner or a long-since-abandoned 40's-era gas station located at some other seemingly unlikely and undesirable site, these signs were unsettling announcements of the demise of old landmarks and ways of life.

In just a few years time, housing of all varieties aimed to appeal to a diverse white collar work force was implanted on former open space. Innumerable, numbingly

indistinguishable office plazas and office parks emblematic of the reinvented economy seemed to residents to have spring up out of nowhere. With the emergence of the sprawling “new city,” and the obliteration of once-distinct locales, “Princeton” began to emerge as a regional “identity point.” (“Since knowing where an Edge City begins or ends is problematic,” observes Garreau (1991, 452), “planners and developers encourage Identity Points to announce that you have indeed entered the grounds of your destination.”)

“Princeton” As Identity Point

Former “locals” point out that the town of Princeton, high in social and cultural capital and steeped in a proud history, always held allure for newcomers. By way of illustration, one of these residents points out that a small housing development built in the late 1960's offered its residents a Princeton address even though it was actually located in South Brunswick. At that time, borrowing on the name of Princeton was not a common practice. With the heating up of New Jersey's economy in the late 1980's, the attendant filling in of open space and the submergence of once-distinct localities, the use of “Princeton” in office logos and housing developments extended miles beyond the actual Princeton. Indeed, such is the cultural capital of Princeton and such is the apparent need for association with an identifiable place that in the estimation of township residents the incorporation of “Princeton” in a development logo, not to mention the use of a Princeton address (which developers must purchase), elevates housing values by at least \$10,000 to \$15,000. (These are local estimates in 1998.)

“Princeton, if you believe the real-estate developers, now begins at New Brunswick and ends at Trenton,” writes architectural critic Paul Goldberger,

Along Route 1 heading south from New Brunswick there is a development called Princeton Park and another called Princeton Gate, not to mention Princeton Oaks, Princeton Meadows...and on and on....Route 1's old *mélange* has given way to shopping malls, tract housing and, most conspicuously, several million square feet of office space...The boom has come in part because of the area's location...but more because of its proximity to Princeton University which holds out the tempting possibility of research connections for some kinds of businesses and offers cachet for everyone else...The effect of all of this has been to transform a semi-rural, exurban area into...one of the nation's most dramatic examples of suburban development gone wild. (1988)

A Township Wake Up “Call, Circa 1980

For many townspeople the wake-up call to changing times came in 1980 with the proposal by Hasidic developers from Queens to construct Metropark, a 14-story office complex, train station and commercial “center” bordering 420 acres along Route 1. In view of the development of Forrestal Center taking shape further south, the proposal for Metropark should neither have surprised residents nor provoked their animosity. However, visions of a Metropark in their midst, and the extra traffic it might generate, stirred such opposition that for the first time in residents' memories a majority of citizens united in vehement months-long opposition to what they viewed as the incursion of the “city” in their “county” setting. Clearly they saw no need for a developer-designed, shop-lined “center” in their sprawling, spatially fragmented township, and certainly no need for a train station. Zoning board meetings were purportedly packed with protesters. “People were so angry.” recalls one opponent of Metropark, “that one protester had to be carried out of the room. They had to have police there” (interview, November 15, 1999).

Opponents of Metropark succeeded in preventing its construction. According to residents, the developers left town, never to be heard from again. Protesters achieved their goals. However they did not manage to stave off development. With the decade of the 1980's seeing a thriving job market, and with other regions closer to main transportation arteries and services reaching build out, South Brunswick's still-plentiful open space attracted increased real estate speculation.

A Transitional Space

Twenty years after the proposal for Metropark, the township's portion of Route 1 is a decidedly mixed use space, one where a mosque, gas stations, a trailer park, fast food stops, treed wetlands, billboards and "space for lease" signs co-exist in unlikely juxtaposition. The proposed Metropark site itself is a ragged jumble of trees and undergrowth. (On a resident's individually-styled guided tour of the township we followed a footpath into this acreage to find that it led to a small hunter's shack. Here a deer hunter appeared to be preparing for a shoot while just a few yards beyond this presuburban-era scene, screened by underbrush, lay the speeding traffic of the "corporate corridor.")

The Decades of the 1980's and the 1990's: Increasing Deconcentration

From the 1980's to the present a pattern of increasing deconcentration articulates a domain of highly mobile networks which are not connected to geography. Take residents' shopping accounts for instance. A multi-generation resident who grew up on a farm

recalls his family's twice-a-year shopping trips from South Brunswick to New Brunswick, a tradition they carried on through the 1950's. The expedition to New Brunswick was a day-long event. There, his family shopped for necessities, patronized a family-run department store and ate at a favorite restaurant before heading home (interview, May 24, 1999). By the mid-1970's he and his wife shopped in discount stores that were beginning to proliferate in the wider region. New Brunswick had become a site of racial turmoil, old family-run stores had closed and malls were becoming favored shopping destinations. By the 1980's this same resident whose family had made a twice-yearly trip to New Brunswick to shop for essentials reports that he and his wife now enjoy using "entertainment books." These "books" are filled with dozens of discount coupons offered by restaurants and businesses in an ever-expanding region.

By the decade of the 1990's, such is the pattern of deconcentration that residents report shopping anywhere within a multi-county radius, their decision to stop at one or another strip mall, enclosed mall or big box complex often depending on how close they are to a convenient "U Turn" exit off of the freeway. One township resident could be speaking for many when she describes how she ends up shopping in one place over another: "I go anyplace," she says, "Wherever I happen to be. There are four to five supermarkets I can go to...I have no particular favorite. If I'm on this side of Route 1, I go to Shop Rite. If I'm on Route 27 I go to Edwards...The location is where you work. I want to get to the one where I can make the least left turns. Now traffic is a factor. If I go to Grand Union and have to make a U turn where you have to turn around two times I don't go there. It's annoying" (interview, July 20, 2000).

A Changing Population

In the decade ending in 1970 Middlesex County's population growth was 35% (Gottdiener and Kephart 1991, 40). South Brunswick's population correspondingly grew by 37%. Such was the shift in concentration of population due in part to the booming "edge city" and an expanding job market throughout the wider region (including the heretofore less populated southern portion of the county where South Brunswick is located) that by 1980 Middlesex County, slowing to 2%, saw no growth (Gottdiener, Kephart 1991, 40). Meanwhile, South Brunswick's population expanded by 22%.

The decade ending in 1990 continued the same trend. While county population grew by 13%, South Brunswick's population growth was 51%, making it the third most rapidly growing municipality in the State of New Jersey (Middlesex County Statistical Brief). South Brunswick's slightly lower relative growth of 46% from 1990 to 2000 may be correlated with township efforts to stem growth during this period.

The Township Population, Year 2000: Increasingly Diverse

According to year 2000 Census data the median age of township residents was 35 years. 28.4% of residents were under 18 years of age and 16.4% of the residents were 62 years of age and over (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

The following chart shows increasing racial diversity:

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Total population	10,278	14,058	17,127	25,792	37,734
White	95.1%	96.3%	89.9%	84.1%	70.5%
Black	4.6%	3.0%	4.0%	6.2%	7.9%
Asian			5.2%	8.8%	18.0%
Other	0.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	3.6%

(Data is derived from Carbone (1993) and U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000, 1)

Cultural Diversity of Township Residents

Expansion since the 1960's and 1970's in the variety of religious organizations in the region is a measure of expanding cultural diversity among residents. County Yellow Pages of 2004 - 2005 list four Southeast Asian organizations: Ananda Mandir, Baha'i Faith, Eckankar Satsang Society, and Dakshineswas Ramkrishna Sangha Adyapeeth. The Islamic Society of Central Jersey has its own elementary and high schools.

Languages spoken at home are further indication of the diversity among township residents. District Report Card data compiled by the New Jersey Department of Education

indicates that in the 2003-2004 school year, out of a total of 2,374 high school students, 85% of the student body used English as the first language spoken at home (New Jersey Department of Education 2004-2005 Report Card). Of the remaining 15 percent, first

languages spoken at home were: Gujarati, 4.5%; Spanish, 3.9%, Hindi, 2.3%, Arabic, 1.6%, Cantonese, 1.4% and Tamil, 1.3% (Ibid.).

That the district may be seeing increasing cultural and ethnic diversity in its student population is suggested by the fact the elementary school population is showing first languages spoken at home other than English of a wider range than for high school students. First languages spoken in the households of elementary school-age students are, in order of usage: Spanish, Telegu, Gujarati, Mandarin, Hindi, Cantonese, Arabic, Tamil, Marathi and Urdu (Ibid.).

Occupation and Income Distribution

The year 2000 Census shows 53.9% of the township's employed population to have managerial, professional and related occupations and 26.2% of residents to have sales and office occupations (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000, 3). In a region which was once predominantly rural, no farming occupations are listed for township residents.

Household income in 1999 shows that 10.9% of households report an income of \$35,000 to \$49,000, 21.1% of households report incomes of \$50,000 to \$74,999, 18.9 households report income between \$75,000 and \$99,000. 22.3% of households report incomes between \$100,000 to \$149,999. 12.1% of households report incomes ranging from \$150,000 to \$200,000 or more (Ibid.).

A second-generation township resident employed as a manager in the financial services sector reports finding a "huge economic diversity" among the township residents he works with. He recounts how in one day alone, he met with people having a combined

income of \$32,000 who were attempting to lower expenses and also with a resident of one of the new housing developments whose income was over \$200,000. This homeowner had a bonus of \$200,000 which he was trying to shelter (interview, July 26, 1996). Other residents queried on this subject see the South Brunswick population as middle class. ("This isn't a back roads community, its not economically depressed," observes one resident (interview, March 30, 1996). "It's the middle class against the rich," observes another resident, distinguishing owners of "big," comparatively few houses from everyone else (interview, April 10, 1996).

New Housing

The decades of the 1980's and the 1990's saw more new housing construction in South Brunswick than in any other municipality in the county, with 4,470 residential permits issued in the decade beginning 1980 and 3,939 residential permits issued in the decade beginning 1990 (interview with planner, November 10, 2002). The Year 2000 Census indicates that 27.6% of the township's housing units were built between 1980 and 1989 and 34.6% of all housing units were built between 1990 and March, 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000, 4). Between 1988 and 1996, 7,000 building permits were issued by the township for new homes. By contrast, in an effort to slow growth, the township issued only 102 residential permits between 1999 and 2002 (interview with planner, 2002).

The "Big" Houses

Longer term residents take note of what they term the “big” houses that have been cropping up in the township since the mid-1990's. Given that size is somewhat relative, what counts as a small, a medium and a big house? According to a township planner, a “small” house is anything under 1,000 square feet. A medium ranch or smaller cape cod is 1500 to 1600 square feet. The basic bi-level falls within the high end of the medium range at 2,100 square feet. He estimates that up until 1990 houses of 2,200 to 2,500 square feet were considered big. Houses got even bigger between 1990 and 1995, ranging between 3,300 and 4,200 square feet. These were approximately twice the square feet of ranches and capes. By the year 2005 even bigger houses, ranging between 4,000 to 5,000 square feet, are now dwarfing the houses once considered the biggest (interview, February, 2005).

Estimates of housing prices in 2005, as provided by a township planner, indicate the average home price as \$170,000 (interview, February, 2005). (By comparison, a mobile home resident estimates his home to have a valuation, in 1999, of approximately \$50,000.) Townhouses and condominiums are listed as ranging in price between \$80,000 and \$170,000. Detached single family housing ranges in estimated value anywhere between \$200,000 and \$300,000 to \$700,000. Larger “luxury” houses appearing in 2005 are estimated to range in value between \$800,000 and \$1,000,000.

New housing brings in more residents and confronts South Brunswick officials with an ongoing necessity to generate revenues for costly services. To this purpose planners must compete with other municipalities in ongoing efforts to lure “clean ratables” to the township. Among “clean ratables,” high tech warehouses are considered

the most desirable.

A Source of Revenue: The Expanding Warehouse World of the 1980's and 1990's

Local police are well-acquainted with a township commuting pattern. While most South Brunswick wage-earners head beyond township borders weekday mornings, a tide of in-coming commuters from New Brunswick or Trenton, often transported by worker vans, head into the township for work in the warehouse zone at Exit 8A of the New Jersey Turnpike. Termed “accidents waiting to happen,” the vans may have fuel leaks and other serious defects, and are often overloaded with workers (Venugopal, 1999). Barreling towards the same warehouse zone, and in a stark contrast to the dilapidated workers’ vehicles, are sleek 53-foot-long 18-wheelers, their drivers bent on rapid delivery and pick up of goods for intra-state and international markets.

The majority of township residents have most likely never viewed the township’s high-tech warehouses, for they are located in what the few residents who still live in this more remote part of the township, in scattered capes and ranches regard as a forgotten section of the township. Rapidly replacing the once-extensive farmland around Exit 8A, these hulking monoliths, ranging from 200,000 to one million square feet, are less noticeable than the congestion on Route 1 or the newest “big houses.” However, for anyone who happens upon this out-of-the-way landscape, the warehouses speak to the reality of South Brunswick’s place in a global city. According to a township planner this warehouse zone has apparently attained world renown in the freight industry. “I’ve heard that people in other countries (in the freight and storage business) talk about Exit 8A as though it was a country,” he remarks. “It’s one of the largest growing areas for

warehouses in the whole country” (interview, November, 2005).

Farm Land: An Optimal Site for High Tech Warehouse Space

In the 1970's, working farm fields were still dominant features of the Exit 8A landscape. Industrial development that township officials hoped to attract was slowed by fluctuations in the commercial real estate market. By the mid-1980's, however, the market in ever-more technologically advanced warehouses began to pick up. Population growth increased a need for ratables and spurred planners' efforts to attract warehouse developers. As in presuburban days, South Brunswick's centrality proved to be one of its most marketable assets. Former agricultural space rezoned for industrial use attracted warehouse developers seeking easy access along this Boston/North Carolina industrial corridor and proximity to the enlarged sea ports of the New York/New Jersey metropolitan region. South Brunswick's location allows for such efficient delivery of goods that a customer as far away as Boston or Washington D.C. can be guaranteed that an order made by 5 p.m. one day will be at their loading dock early the next morning (Holusha, 1999).

Additional features of the former farm land around Exit 8A prove ideal for developers of high tech warehouse space. Rock-free land tilled flat for 200 years is perfectly suited for the ultra-flat floors required for the operation of sensor-operated forklifts deployed to load and unload goods stacked on steel racks up to 32 feet high, some eight feet higher than a previous generation of warehouses. Farm fields provide ample space necessary for a warehouse “product” requiring wider turning areas in order that, as one developer puts it, “truckers don't have to back their 18-wheelers in nine times

to get in the right position” (Ibid.). In addition, the low population density in this region appeals to developers hoping to avoid the community relations problems that truck-generated noise, diesel emissions and bright night-lit docking areas create in more densely populated areas.

The Warehouse World

The concentration around Exit 8A of windowless, often nameless warehouses, otherwise referred to as “distribution centers,” is an anomaly in a landscape everywhere redolent of the township’s rural past. Here truckers not infrequently lose their way along narrow, winding colonial-era roads. Davidson Mill Road., Deans Rhode Hall Road., Fresh Pond Road---the very names of these colonial-era roads are an incongruity in this landscape. Overshadowing these fields, and replacing a world once-fine tuned to night and day, to seasonal fluctuations and variations in weather patterns, are flood-lit warehouses obliterating all such natural phenomenon. There are still reminders of the presuburban world in this transitional landscape. “I’ve got a spinach field on the east side of the plant, corn on the other and winter wheat in the back,” observes one warehouse developer (Holusha, 1999). However, these fields are typically corporate-owned, warehoused “remainder lots” being farmed for the tax breaks they yield until developers are ready to construct another warehouse.

The Warehouse as Product

With the exception of companies operating their own warehouses such as Canon

and Volkswagen, there is little if any telling detail which indicates either the function or the contents of warehouses. “Forsgate Corporate Center,” (bearing the name of a once-flourishing dairy) Centerpoint,” “Exit 8A Corporate Park,” and “200 Docks Corner Road”---these generic logos are a deliberate marketing device, it turns out, for warehouses are not only repositories of products, they are themselves regarded as products-in-the-offing, ready for utilization by companies needing immediate distribution facilities for national or international markets. (So crucial is distribution time that any break down in logistics can have far-reaching ramifications. A three to four-week slow-down at the Barnes and Noble warehouse, for instance, sent ripples throughout New York City’s publishing world. With books held back from markets for this period, the sales that publishers planned to generate through reviews, tours and talk shows were considered by them to be seriously jeopardized (Kirkpatrick, 2000).

For Residents: “A Kamikaze Run”

It seems to the few residents who live near the warehouses that planners have been too eager to attract warehouses and have forgotten about the adequacy and safety of the roads, not to mention the noise and emissions of the 18-wheelers. “I can’t leave my front door open summer evenings, the trucks make too much noise,” muses one of the areas few residents whose impeccably-maintained Cape Cod faces onto one of these narrow roads (interview, July, 1999). As for motorists living in the vicinity of the warehouses, hazardous traffic conditions are a daily reality. “When they make a turn I just about die. It’s like being on a kamikaze run,” exclaims a driver (Greenblatt, 1999).

For South Brunswick residents who are aware of the warehouses but do not have to live near them, they are welcome “clean ratables,” indispensable revenue-producers reducing the cost of municipal services and contributing to lower property taxes. As seasoned residents point out, however, South Brunswick is caught in a “no win” situation for lower property taxes made possible by the presence by these and other “clean ratables” attract an increasing number of housing consumers, and an expanding population requires costly services.

The “New City” Landscape

This “new city” landscape emerges from a world already highly decentered and spatially fragmented, the prolonged viability of its rich agricultural soils having the effect of preserving open space for rampant commercial and residential development. This is a domain having no unitary history out of which residents might piece together an identity of place and it is a domain having no established land-use traditions which might otherwise forestall haphazard spatial reconfiguration.

In this emergent landscape housing is an anchor, a crucial means by which residents achieve grounding in the midst of rapid change. Homeowners’ accounts, and their testimony in a zoning board case, detailed in the following two chapters, demonstrate how housing, with all its multifaceted uses and meanings, is so essential a means of place in this rapidly changing space.

CHAPTER THREE

Housing Ideologies at Work in the Making of Place

The Inner Sanctum

Drivers turning off of any of the main transportation conduits cutting through South Brunswick---beyond the fringe of strip malls, office buildings and other commercial installations concentrated along those municipal border regions---will likely find themselves confronting a maze of residential streets. For residents, these regions constitute the inner sanctum, the region where life takes place. And it is here in the residential domain that nearly every interviewee has offered their house as their preferred place for the interview.

Even in preliminary conversations with homeowners, it is clear that housing is a complexity of meanings and uses. Housing is not only a shelter, an architectural style and a status; among its many aspects it is also neighborhood, community and a moral stance vis-à-vis the homeowner's relation to their house as well as to others within a wider body politic. Moreover, as a prolonged, bitterly-debated land use case which I discuss in the following chapter suggests, for many homeowners housing is also an "attitude," an ideological stance in space about the use of space extending beyond their property lines. These many aspects of housing are incorporated in what I term residents' housing ideologies.

“Stayers” and “Move Ups”

The white middle class homeowners interviewed for this study show marked differentiation according to their housing ideologies and related taste cultures. I designate one group of homeowners as “stayers” and a second group as “move ups.”

“Stayers:” “Stayers” represent a range of ages, educational levels and occupations. They include many of the self-declared “old timers,” as well as the former “locals” and “cosmopolitans” of earlier settlement layers who have stayed on. “Stayers” also include younger generation homeowners who have lived in the township for a number of years and who profess no desire to move on or up.

“Stayers” far prefer their own housing, typically cape cods, ranches or unembellished colonial styles, to any more recent styles---an innocuous enough distinction, it may seem, but of significance in a consumer-driven world where the house is a crucial identifier and where Capes, ranches and nondescript farm houses are considered out of fashion. “Stayers” accounts, detailed in the following pages, demonstrate that as out-of-style as their housing might appear to be in the marketplace, it is decidedly not a next-best alternative. Rather, it is a proud statement of who they are and what they are not. The “stayers” whose accounts are examined in this study are oriented to a local domain. The township is their “town” or “community.” They participate in and/or support local institutions, engaging in such activities as running for the school board, voting in municipal elections, reading the local paper and writing letters to its editor. They are eminently satisfied with their house as it articulates location in a social space that is neither above nor below others and they profess no desire to move.

“Move Ups:” “Move ups” also represent a range of ages, educational levels and occupations. Operating according to what one “move up” terms a housing “value line,” “move ups” demonstrate willingness to move to housing they deem superior if the opportunity were to arise. Such housing is usually of greater square footage, perhaps closer to recreational facilities and further away from traffic and/or commercial development. It may be regarded as of superior housing construction. A “move up” may also have been prompted by an effort remove themselves from a neighborhood in which there is the appearance of working class presence. (“We started to think about moving when we noticed pickups in our neighborhood,” observes one homeowner (interview, July 9, 2001)).

Some homeowners follow a “move up” trajectory while retaining attachment to local institutions. First, goes a common account, they start in Hamilton Acres, then they move up to Forrest Ponds (the next large development built in the township), and then to Brookhaven Park, a development of larger houses built in the 1980's. These “move ups” admit to some ambivalence when their house of choice seems to them to be in some way superior to those of their friends. (For instance, one “move up” reports that he tells his friends how much he doesn't like the new “big” house he moved into.) Nevertheless, the larger size of their houses does not seem to diminish their status in their local networks.

In this study I do not focus on this intermediary group of locally-connected “move ups.” Rather I focus on what residents who are attached to the local community refer to as “recent arrivals.” Most prominent among these “recent arrivals” are the owners of the new “big” houses. It is this group of “move ups” whose comparatively “big” houses

command “stayers’” attention. The relation to space of these homeowners is nonlocal. Although “move ups” with school-age children may be affiliated in varying degrees with the schools their offspring attend, at the very least by attending parent/teacher conferences and school events, they are more likely to be enmeshed in nonlocal networks and organizations. They show an absence of any particular affinity for South Brunswick as a traditionally defined civic entity and they may not even be acquainted with their neighbors. They are likely to be regarded by the locally-oriented “stayers” as thinking more about themselves and/or their own children than about the township community.

The housing tastes of “move ups” reflect the latest market trends. In recent years classic Georgian and Colonial styles featuring elaborate detailing such as Palladian windows and cathedral ceilings, and such “extras” as three-car garages and jacuzzis in each bathroom are favored. Whereas housing stock built in the early suburban period ranged from approximately 1200 to 1800 square feet, these bigger 2 ½ story houses range from 2200 to 5,000 square feet. For “stayers” this housing is a looming announcement of a new type of homeowner. Yet their assessments are mixed. Some “stayers” are critical of these homeowners, viewing them as claimants to superior status. Other “stayers” are simply amused that the owners of these bigger houses should prefer a house which in their estimation is not even desirable.

The housing accounts of “stayers” and “move ups” show these two groups of middle class homeowners to be sharply distinguished according to housing ideologies and related taste cultures.

The “Stayers:” A Hamilton Acres Couple

Numbering among some of the early “pioneering” residents of Hamilton Acres who have stayed on, Mark and Nancy Caldwell have lived in the same house they originally purchased for nearly 40 years. On the afternoon of my first of two visits to the Caldwell’s house, and my first foray into Hamilton Acres, I follow Nancy’s directions carefully so as not to lose my way along the meandering streets.

The Hamilton Acres Landscape: Built with commuters in mind, one edge of Hamilton Acres abuts a main two-lane road, along which a New Jersey transit bus line carries passengers to points north, ending in New York City. Some four decades after its inception this development blurs indistinguishably into other housing developments built over ensuing years. Built at a time when its mere presence in the rural landscape was a more-than sufficient announcement of singularity, there is no logo differentiating this development from any of the others which have cropped up in later years.

Driving along winding streets to the Caldwell’s house reveals a Hamilton Acres that is anything but the “Sahara Desert” that it was for its early residents. Unlike the layouts of more recent developments there are no closed dead ends or cul-de-sacs to discourage pedestrian and vehicular flow. Full growth trees shade sidewalks. Wide swathes of lawn fronting each house are spacious by comparison to the minuscule front yards of recent housing. (In the late 1950’s, township land was cheap enough that 1/3 acres lots were the norm. One eighth of an acre lots are now typical for the more modest of the new houses going up in the township.) Sidewalks invite pedestrian use, serving as a buffer between street and lawnscape. Cars parked in driveways and at curbside.

announce this to be a lived, peopled space. (This is in contrast to layouts of newer housing developments where cars are usually tucked out of sight in two- and three-car garages situated at the side or the back of the house. The image produced is of a privatized, emptied-out landscape in which a visitor's lone car stands out as a glaring intrusion.)

After four decades, the Hamilton Acres ranches show considerable individualization. While the split-level and colonial-style houses which were built in later phases of construction show very little, if any, modification, the ranches show considerable variation according to exterior siding treatments and landscaping. For the most part, however, relatively few major structural modifications are evident. At twelve of twenty houses on one block, for instance, the single-car garage has been retained. Three other houses, the cheapest ranches built by Mr. Hamilton (termed the "car port houses" by residents), retain the original car port. The car port of a fourth house has been converted into a breeze way, alongside which a detached one-car garage has been installed. At four other houses the single car garage has been converted into an extra room, producing a spill-over of vehicles in driveways and at curbside.

House facades show some variation. Siding is predominantly aluminum and of muted color motifs, with no two houses on the block of the same color combination. One house features white siding with beige trim and shutters, another house feature forest green siding with white trim and yet another house features pale blue siding with black trim. Less standard exterior treatments feature combined brick and white clapboard at two houses and a stone facade at another. More personal embellishments are on display

at some houses. A wooden star, an Amish folk art motif, is affixed at the front of one house, a ship's wheel decorates another. At most of these houses the picture glass window associated with ranch-style architecture of the late 1950's and 1960's has been retained. Diamond-shaped panes replace clear glass in the window of one house, and long, narrow, vertically-positioned windows border each side of the front door of another house. Only one house on this block shows dramatic structural modification. This ranch has been converted into a two-story colonial, complete with a two-car garage which extends from the front of the house to curbside.

House and Home

Viewed from curbside, the front-side view of the Caldwell's property appears to be object of minimal attention. An expanse of barely-green lawn fronting their house is broken by low-lying bushes demarcating the edge of house and lawn and drawing attention to the quintessential picture window characteristic of the ranch-style house.

On this, my first of two visits to the Caldwell's house, Nancy warmly welcomes me into her house, front door already ajar in anticipation of my visit. An impeccably-maintained, artfully-arranged interior presents itself to view, producing an impression quite the opposite of that produced by the exterior. One portion of the space into which Nancy invites me serves as living room. Here hand-loomed wall hangings in bright hues are vivid accents in an area of light beige sectional sofas, rug and walls. Beyond this region lies a kitchen and eating area which Nancy says that she and husband Mark have recently renovated. Comfortable chairs set around a pot bellied stove create this as a

central gathering and food preparation space with a skylight allowing for ample light. A dining table and chairs define an adjoining portion of this space as a sit-down eating area beyond which full-length glass doors extend the view outward towards a glass-enclosed sun porch and the dense green of backyard trees.

Apparent disinterest in housing facade and front yard, contrasted to attentive care and design of housing interiors, is a common pattern among other Hamilton Acres residents in the Caldwell's network. On the subject of front yards, Nancy observes that she and Mark are in fact pleased that in Hamilton Acres "you don't have to have the perfect lawn" (interview, November 28, 1995). At one house the barest hint of a front lawn, bordered by overgrown hedges, frames the front porch of a house. The family room features Indonesian art and artifacts, collected during the homeowners visits to Indonesia, are artfully arranged on back-lit shelves. At yet another house, a front yard bare of any vegetation but lawn serves as counterpoint to an interior dominated by a substantial stone fireplace flanked at either side by floor-to-ceiling shelves of books. This contrast between housing exterior and interior is not necessarily found among more recently-arrived residents of Hamilton Acres. In the estimation of one "stayer," "the new people seem to keep up their houses better than the 'academics.'" (interview, November 6, 1996).

Recollections of House, Home and Community

Settled in her comfortable living room, Nancy warmly recounts how she and Mark arrived in Hamilton Acres and how, much to their surprise, they ended up staying on. Mark and Nancy are both 65 years of age and are recently retired. Their daughter and

her family live in northern New Jersey. Nancy taught interior design at a community college and Mark was employed in an accounting firm in northern New Jersey. For the Caldwells, retirement does not mean that their lives are any the less active. They are clearly busy with commitments to family and friends, responsibilities on local boards, volunteer work in the local Democratic party, and regular attendance at cultural events in the region. They enjoy international travel and have recently returned from a trip to Prague. Their daily schedules are so complex, in fact, that finding a time when all three of us could get together has proved a challenge. Even though they made every effort to find time for this interview, for instance, our conversation has to withstand the interruption of frequent phone calls. (Such interruptions were common occurrences with other “stayers” as well.)

Looking back on their early days, Nancy recalls how she and Mark were immediately attracted to Hamilton Acres. It satisfied three things they were looking for in a house: affordability, modernist design and community. They had been looking for a house they could afford for quite some time. Compared to the houses they had looked at in northern New Jersey in the late 1950's, ranging from \$25,000 to \$30,000, the Hamilton Acres model they selected, one of the larger models, was only \$18,000. On a GI mortgage they needed to put only \$50 down and make monthly mortgage payments of \$99. This was less than the rent they had been paying for a house further north.

Among the several models then available the Caldwells selected one featuring 6 rooms and two full baths on one third of an acre. The developer offered homeowners were offered a choice of eight different exteriors. The more expensive models featured a

garage instead of a car port. The developer's wife designed furnishings for the display models. In addition, free decorating consultation was offered for at least some of the models.)

Beyond the affordable asking price, Nancy found the model which they eventually selected---furnished, she recalls, in '50's modern---immensely appealing. "I was an art and architecture major in college," she relates, "and when I saw this house I loved the avant garde design, the open space, the glass, the low rambling prairie-style feeling to it. I knew we couldn't have a Frank Lloyd Wright or a Mies Van der Rohe but we could have this house, done with freedom and thought" (interview, November 28, 1995). For Nancy this ranch style house was a welcome relief from the old, stuffy colonial-style house in which she had grown up. She found its simple lines of the ranch far preferable to what she regarded as "flashier" housing with "cathedral ceilings" that she and Mark had viewed in a neighboring township.

Beyond affordability and architectural style, however, and at least as important an aspect of the development for the Caldwells were the people who were attracted to Hamilton Acres. (They already knew one of these early homeowners who had in fact urged them to consider living there.) Whereas the owners of the "flashier" houses they had looked at seemed to Nancy to be "more New York stereotypical and pushy," she found the Hamilton Acres homeowners "young, varied and congenial." She recalls how "simpatico" she and Mark were with their neighbors, among them "Rutgers teachers, people working for R and D, for Sarnoff, journalists, a film editor, two editors, a half dozen architects and several FBI agents" (interview, November 28, 1995).

On a second visit to the Caldwell's house, arranged by Nancy so that I can meet with Mark as well as herself, the Caldwell's recount how they and their neighbors threw themselves into the project of making their surroundings more comfortable. They explain that unlike housing of later developments, people could build on to their houses in Hamilton Acres. The slab-construction ranch-style house they had purchased, on a bare, muddy, third-of-an-acre lot stripped of top soil, left much to the imagination but Mark says that he and Nancy actually liked it this way. Along with their neighbors they brought in top soil (one "stayer" notes that she is still replenishing her top soil, some 40 years later) and got to work putting in lawns and gardens. Mark adds that with the double trussed roof of the ranch and few major walls it was easy for people to modify their houses. One of the first changes that they decided to make was to have a sun porch added on to their ranch. ("Designer's Sketchbook," one of the features of the Hamilton Acres News showcases some of the design innovations that homeowners carried out. Homeowner alterations tended to be minor and more decorative. More substantial structural modifications, such as the construction of the sun porch or the conversion of a car port into an extra room, were usually hired out. (See Appendix III, Item #4, a – d.)

As the Caldwell's recount their early years in Hamilton Acres it is clear that they maintain close ties with other residents who arrived in the same period and who have stayed on. (When queried on the subject, residents estimate that as many as seven to eight householders on their blocks (out of approximately 20 houses per block) arrived in the early suburban period. The development has a total of 1500 houses.) These residents raised their now-adult children in Hamilton Acres and are intimately acquainted with

each other's personal histories. As was their custom in earlier days, a number of them take in cultural events in New Brunswick and Princeton, and they continue to participate in civic affairs. They lobbied the township successfully for a now-flourishing senior center, for instance, they prove capable of mounting successful political campaigns in the township and they are adept at rallying younger generation residents in support of local causes.

Hamilton Acres: The "Mature" Suburb in the "New City"

The Hamilton Acres that the Caldwells and other "stayers" recall, at such a distance from necessities that once-weekly, half-hour-long trips to the grocery store were the norm, has melded into an indistinguishable part of the "new city" region offering a full-range of services. Over a four-decade period Hamilton Acres has become a "mature" suburb, homeowners have moved out, new residents have moved in, houses have undergone alterations and outsiders' opinions about Hamilton Acres have undergone considerable modification as well.

From its inception, Hamilton Acres provoked strong reactions. In early days "locals" were alarmed at the scope of the Hamilton Acres development and what it implied for the continuation of their rural life. They deemed the houses shabbily built and didn't expect them to last long. Recent assessments of Hamilton Acres have more to do with the status of homeowners and their supposed life style. "There's a good side of South Brunswick and a bad side," observes one homeowner, a self-declared amateur sociologist who was born and reared in a section of the township which he describes as

located “on the wrong side of the tracks.” “The good side is where I’m building my house right now...it’s going to have 5,000 square feet...the bad side is Hamilton Acres. But we (his wife and family) like the Hamilton Acres side better for the lifestyle. People can sit on their front porches. You might find a cat sitting on the hood of a car, and people might help each other repair their cars. It’s more relaxed. On the good side people might walk their dogs and carry poop shovels to pick up their poop. No one sits on their porch there” (interview, July 26, 1996).

As for why this “move up” prefers South Brunswick when he could clearly afford to live in a municipality of higher status such as Princeton he remarks that he himself sometimes wonders why he has made such a choice. “I could certainly live in Princeton,” he muses, “but I hate Princeton. I dislike the milk-faced plasticity of the Princeton types. People there overpay \$100,000 to \$150,000 just so they can live in ordinary houses in Princeton” (interview, December 4, 1996).

Nostalgic for his working class origins in South Brunswick, this resident views Hamilton Acres as offering an enviable life style. Indeed, Hamilton Acres has reportedly attracted more working class residents in recent years, an in-migration that is part of a growing trend whereby “mature” New Jersey suburbs are undergoing rejuvenation by homeowners looking for something affordable which they can fix up. “Stayers” agree that whereas Hamilton Acres used to attract professionals, it has now become more working class. (Whether or not the new residents are working class, Hamilton Acres does offer housing consumers on shoestring budgets some of the least expensive housing in the township.)

The “working class” presence “stayers” note is not due solely to an influx of new residents. Residents’ offspring, young adults whose trajectories have not followed a expected path, sometimes return home during rocky periods. The daughter of one householder, for instance, works part time in a retail outlet and her husband works in the trades. This householder does not like the look of their combined three vehicles parked outside their house, one of which is her daughter’s battered old Chevy, but her dissatisfaction is not pronounced enough to motivate her to demand any changes in the status quo. “People might think it’s working class, to have so many vehicles,” she explains, “But in our house there’s a mingling of life styles” (interview, November 6, 1996). Just as these “stayers” enjoy a place where they do not have to worry about having a perfect lawn, so too, they do not feel obliged to maintain the appearance of a middle class life style.

In its incarnation as a “mature suburb,” Hamilton Acres housing is put to many uses. For some Hamilton Acres homeowners, those who have moved into Hamilton Acres in recent years and who have no association with its earlier history, it is a way station to superior housing. This was the experience for Dora, a homeowner who established brief residency in Hamilton Acres before moving out and up. For Dora, Hamilton Acres was a place to get a start. She grew up in what she felt was a crime-ridden older city in northern New Jersey. Married, and with two children, she works as a clerk in a 7/11. Her husband is an officer for a mortgage lending company in northern New Jersey, a job requiring a daily 3 hour commute. After an extensive search, Dora and her husband finally located a house they could afford with the intention of fixing it up for

resale. As Dora puts it, she was already moving out of this “starter” house---a Hamilton Acres ranch---before they moved in, her sights set on an eventual purchase of a larger house in a new housing development.

As a comparative newcomer, Dora was most certainly unaware of any qualitatively better life style among neighbors in Hamilton Acres. She never made any friends there. In fact, she found the Hamilton Acres address stigmatizing, for it seemed to her that she was shunned by women who lived in a development of larger houses next to Hamilton Acres. “There was a development of large houses nearby,” she recalls, “and my children had some friends who lived in these houses. But the parents there wouldn’t let their kids play with my kids and this was because of where we lived” (interview, April, 1996). Eventually she and her husband did move into a more spacious colonial-style house in a new development, a model which she describes as “second from the bottom.” So steep are their mortgage payments that she says they can barely afford any furniture. . (Some long term residents who on occasion have reason to glimpse the interiors of some of the “big” houses---through work on the rescue squad, for instance---note that some of these homeowners often have very few furnishings. They surmise that their mortgage payments absorb all of their financial resources, as is the case for Dora and her husband.) Still, Dora is pleased is pleased to report that when she gives people her new address it seems to her that they treat her with respect.

It is easy to see how Hamilton Acres is ideal for older-generation “stayers.” They have mortgage-free housing with relatively low taxes, close and supportive networks effective at lobbying the municipality for desired services and neighborhoods that do not

demand a particular level of upkeep. In anticipation of eventual infirmities, Mark Caldwell observes that his ranch will be easy to modify. “For wheel chairs,” he comments, “all you need to do is put in a wider doorway” (interview, November 28, 1995). Apart from these amenities, “stayers” can invariably appreciate a radical escalation in housing value if they ever had to sell.

Housing Ideologies: “Stayers”

“Stayers” are remarkably adaptable both to changing demographics in their immediate neighborhoods and the spatial reconfiguration going on everywhere about them. Their satisfaction with where they live and their desire to remain where they are overshadows circumstances which motivate other homeowners to move up and out such as, for instance, the age and style of their houses, an increasing working class presence in their neighborhood or new commercial real estate ventures springing up beyond their property lines. “My son-in-law says that the houses here in Hamilton Acres are cheese boxes,” recounts one “stayer,” “and I tell him ‘They may be cheese boxes, but they’re ours!’...We could afford to live somewhere nicer than this, but we aren’t movers....We moved here to put down some roots....sometimes when my husband and I are in the garden I joke about how tangled all the roots are” (interview, November 6, 1996).

Whether “stayers” are Hamilton Acres “pioneers” or homeowners who represent later settlement layers, they profess absolutely no desire for the new and/or “big” houses. They show no preferences for what homeowners who share Dora’s “move up” sentiments regard as “upscale” neighborhoods. They far prefer their own housing. In part, their

architectural preferences are but an extension of their images of their “town” as a very special sort of place where everyone is “down to earth and all are equal” (July 9, 2001). Whether their house is a Frank Lloyd Wright-style ranch, a Cape Cod or an unornamented colonial, they view their housing as a permanent locator, grounding them in a social space that is neither above nor below others. They view what they refer to as the “big” houses going up in recent years with combined amusement and distaste, for it seems to “stayers” that these houses are “cookie cutter” in design, and that their owners seem to be claiming a higher social status.

“Stayers” do not privilege property value over quality of life considerations. They simply do not understand why owners of the “big” houses would be willing to work long hours to pay off large mortgages if it means that they cannot adequately furnish their houses or spend more time with their children. “...those people work to own the house that they live in and sleep in,” comments a “stayer” of multi-generation lineage in the township. “I notice that the people who volunteer come from lower-priced housing. It doesn’t have to do with their educational level...it’s because people who live in the big houses have to spend full time paying them off. They don’t have time to volunteer” (interview, May 7, 1997).

“Stayers” display a practical, utilitarian orientation. They value the user-friendly adaptability of their houses and the freedom to modify their houses as they please. They prefer a house which is economical to heat and easy to clean. “I’m happy where I’m at,” exclaims the homeowner of multi-generational lineage, “I don’t want four to five bedrooms for my wife to have to clean. I like my neighborhood. I like my house. Those

cathedral ceilings look like a lot of work to clean...big squares...way up in the air...how would you clean them?" (March 7, 1996). Employed as a manager of a public works department, this homeowner has added a family room to his ranch in order to accommodate his extended family during their frequent get-togethers. He and his wife enjoy on-going work on their impeccably-maintained house and yard. At the time of my visit they were contemplating putting on new shingle siding not because of any practical necessity but simply because it looked more attractive to them. For a younger-generation couple who intend to stay on in South Brunswick and who grew up in families where home improvement was a norm, fixing up the house is a weekend hobby.

Finally, for "stayers" the house is something on-going. It is not something to trade in on the way through life conceived as a series of separate stages, but something lending itself to the owner's changing needs and interests, and even to pass on to the next generation. One Hamilton Acres couple are pleased to relate in the course of one of our conversations how one of their daughters is in fact looking forward to inheriting their "heirloom" house someday (interview, July 2000).

Housing as a "No Walls Attitude"

"Stayers'" housing ideologies encompass what they refer to as a "no walls attitude." This is a moral stance or "attitude" which figures with considerable import in "stayers'" censure of the owners of the "big" houses. For "stayers" a "no walls attitude insists that the door be kept open to successive waves of homeowners, no matter that this entails the consumption of more open space. This "no walls" attitude privileges home

ownership over the preservation of open space and insists that no homeowner has the right to deny others the opportunity to enjoy what they themselves were allowed to enjoy.

For the Caldwells and other “stayers” a “no walls attitude” entails acceptance of homeowners of greater socio-economic diversity, even if this finds “big” houses dwarfing other housing, an increasing working class presence or additional affordable housing units. Although application of this “no walls attitude” does not result in the incorporation of recently-arrived residents into “stayers” various networks (the more recent homeowners are enmeshed in their own networks), “stayers” go on record as accepting their presence. “I like the diversity here,” Nancy exclaims with enthusiasm, “and I love to drive along the streets to see what people have done with their houses...it’s the variety that’s interesting. I wouldn’t want to live in one of those developments where every house looks the same” (interview, November 28, 1995). For a “stayer” with roots in South Brunswick’s rural past, acceptance takes the form of offering home-grown produce to a homeowner whose 2 ½ story house with cathedral ceiling shadows his Cape Cod. “I brought over some fish I caught at the Shore,” he recollects, “and a few days later he gave me some string beans from his garden...It’s inevitable that South Brunswick grows,” he says. “I don’t see that development is destroying the whole township as some people do. People have to be given a chance to get a start or pretty soon they’ll be interviewing people at the township border” (interview, March 7, 1996).

A “no walls attitude” not only calls for acceptance of changing social space, namely as this entails greater socio-economic diversity, it also accepts changes in physical space beyond owners’ property lines. Nancy, for instance, likes the diversity of

the housing in Hamilton Acres, in her estimation making it anything but “cookie cutter.” John not only extends himself to his new neighbor, he also accepts the fact that this neighbor’s house, as part of a new development, consumes the country fields that once surrounded his house---fields in which, as he fondly recalls, his children once played. Another couple doesn’t particularly appreciate the office plaza which is under construction in an open field that borders their property but they have no plans to protest its presence nor do they view alteration of this space as cause for a move. Instead, they have decided to plant trees at their fence line to shield their view.

Women of the “New City:” Staying On, Looking Back

Accounts of women of the early suburban era depict two worlds. In *The Feminine Mystique* Friedan (1963, ch. 10) depicts a suburban world radically limiting opportunities for women, particularly women of the middle to upper middle class. Other studies show early suburbs to have been realms of possibility for working class women, offering them a middle class foothold through first-time home ownership (Kelly 1993; Baxandall and Ewen 2000). The recollections of Hamilton Acres women who stayed on presents a somewhat different picture. First, these “stayers” note that an unspecified number among them did indeed find early suburban life tedious. This experience is well expressed in an informal memoir by Eliza, a Hamilton Acres woman who found reason to stay on after initially feeling limited in her new suburban milieu:

I had read about suburbia and the infamous, time-wasting kaffeeklatsches with their inane conversations; and I had determined not to become mired in such trivialities...However, I had been without companionship during the day for so long that I couldn’t resist. The gals were nice; they were all college educated and

the prospects for lively and serious conversation seemed to be there. But it never happened. The babies were always present and an endless source of conversation....My frustrations began to grow. With the first flush of motherhood behind me, I was ready to bite into something more solid. (undated manuscript).

What turned her life around, as it did for many other Hamilton Acres women, was the possibility for collaborative work with like minded neighbors. In her case, work as a volunteer staff member of The Hamilton Acres News was the turning point:

that was the beginning of community involvement and commitment and a whole new life for me....We took upon ourselves a task far greater than communicating: we saw ourselves as educators, opinion-makers, shapers of the community that was growing around us. It was an all-encompassing activity. It meant the development of a whole new set of friends and fellow-workers, people who provided endless stimulation and debate on almost any topic, who were anxious to enlarge their worlds and develop their talents, as well as to serve their community. And it was tremendously fun (Ibid.).

Unlike the disaffected middle class women depicted by Friedan, this woman found a niche for herself in the new suburban community, one offering possibilities for stimulating interrelations and engagement with current issues of the day. In Eliza's estimation "the 60's were fantastic" (interview, January 10, 1998). For her and her friends, housing was not a step up from working class to middle class status. Rather, it was location ("the right place at the right time"), offering proximity to other culturally and politically like-minded women and the opportunity to participate in the formation of a new community. Through such efforts these women found themselves better prepared themselves for future vocations. "We were the lucky ones," observes one of these "stayers," a woman who eventually became a college teacher. "We had the chance to raise our families and then start careers." In her estimation she enjoyed a far more satisfactory arrangement than does her daughter. Married and with three small children,

her daughter commutes two hours a day to her job as a physician's assistant. Having no choice but to work to help pay off a steep mortgage, her daughter must juggle child-rearing responsibilities with her in-laws and her husband, also a long distance commuter. This schedule leaves little spare time, even for weekly grocery shopping trips, despite the fact that the supermarket is but 10 minutes away.

In their article *Women, Politics and Place: Spatial Patterns of Representation in New Jersey*, Regulska, Fried and Teifenbacher (1991, 203-221) point out that new centers of economic control as epitomized by New Jersey's "growth corridors" are types of places offering women greater opportunities for political participation. They argue that the social and economic transformation of these "new city" regions finds entrenched "old boys'" networks either non-existent or of negligible strength. They also find that women more readily achieve positions of political leadership in such regions as members of an ascendant group having necessary financial resources

Interview data offer some support for these findings. Several women hold positions on local boards, and two Hamilton Acres women have served as township mayor. None have advanced to positions of political leadership beyond this level. However, interview data suggests that well before the emergence of New Jersey's "growth corridors," the early suburban world offered Hamilton Acres women opportunities for political engagement. Rapid change in the early suburban period tipped an established social and political order and offered a new majority of residents the opportunity to reformulate established institutions and introduce new ones. The "old boys'" network of "locals" was already giving way to a new order before the emergence

of the “growth corridor.” Financial resources freed Hamilton Acres women for time to devote to community activism. And as they themselves note, housing requiring minimal mortgage payments and a lifestyle demanding no more than a single wage meant that they had the time that their daughters do not currently have to solidify social networks, establish organizations and enter into the local political arena.

Princeton Towers: A “Move Up” Domain

Built as a 500-unit development in the mid-1980’s, Princeton Towers materialized when rampant commercial and residential development began to obscure once-distinct localities and when “Princeton” emerged as a preeminent “identity point” (Garreau, 1991). A comparison between Hamilton Acres and Princeton Towers finds both of these developments designed to appeal to commuters seeking a “country” setting and relatively easy access to work via main transportation conduits. However, the presentation and layout of these developments present considerable contrast. Constructed in the middle of a rural landscape, Hamilton Acres was its own unmistakable identity point. By contrast, built at a time when identifiable landmarks were blurring into general sprawl, Princeton Towers offers homeowners an image of country club exclusivity and association with Princeton, the one easily identifiable place in the region.

A Place Apart: Entering a Separate Domain

The following description is drawn from notes taken on three visits to this development in 1992:

To turn off of a main road and drive past a prominent, brass-plated sign announcing Princeton Towers is to enter what appears to be a separate world, the exact obverse of speeding traffic and the motley assortment of aging houses, a car repair shop and a deserted vegetable stand positioned at the roadside border area of this development. Along either side of a road leading through part of this development, dense clusters of housing are interspersed with swathes of lawn, full growth trees, grassy hillocks and occasional artfully-positioned boulders.

A first sighting of Princeton Towers on a sunny weekday afternoon finds it a largely silent, unpeopled landscape. Whereas cars parked curbside offer ample evidence of a human presence in Hamilton Acres, in Princeton Towers cars are concentrated only in a section of townhouses, presumably the least expensive housing in the development having small garages of a single car width. There is an apparent center in this development, a building advertised in the developer's brochure as a members-only club house. Along one side of this building rudimentary play equipment and tennis courts stand empty. The Princeton Towers landscape is designed to produce an impression of overall homogeneity. Basic Georgian and/or Colonial style housing is embellished with decks, Palladian windows and skylights to create a casual "California" look. Housing exteriors are synchronized with stucco and/or gray siding with white trim and/or stone work.

Over a four-year period, while interviewing residents throughout the township, I had the opportunity to interview a very small number of Princeton Towers residents.

These residents refer to the development as a community. This is a community united by a homeowners' association and the common recreational facilities, with architectural and landscape features producing an impression of overall homogeneity. Within this setting, types of housing are ordered into clusters. Three to four models featured in each cluster are also ordered according to such features as the two or three-car capacity of garages size and number of decks, entrance detailing, number of sky lights and whether the housing is detached or attached. The higher-density clusters of attached row or

townhouses feature some of the lowest-priced housing. Here are found shared parking areas for the overflow of vehicles. There are no sidewalks. Clusters of three to four bedroom (detached) houses on 1/8 of an acre lots feature wider set backs, more spacious garages, though no sidewalks. Finally, there are the clusters of 2 ½ story, single family houses with models featuring up to five bedrooms, three car garages and sidewalks. (In Princeton Towers sidewalks are a status. They need not be, however. One urbanite notes that for her Italian-born father, a neighborhood without sidewalks was the ultimate goal. For him, she explains, the absence of sidewalks meant a more exclusive domain, less-easily-accessed by outsiders (conversation with nonresident, circa 2003).)

Housing for the “New City” Work Force

Hamilton Acres was built to appeal to prospective homeowners of the same socio-economic group: first-time homeowners, married and with children. Built three decades later, Princeton Towers housing is geared to a “new city” population of greater socio-economic diversity. Princeton Towers homeowners describe this as a population that includes young families with preschool-age children (concentrated mainly in the least expensive townhouses), singles and older couples without children. They note the near-absence of school-age children in the development, as gauged by the two or three children they see standing at the bus stop. One resident surmises that this may be due to the fact that Princeton Towers housing is more expensive than housing offered in other developments and hence less affordable for families with children.

The Homeowners' Association: Rights and Responsibilities

Princeton Towers homeowners are assured of an owner-proof landscape through deed restrictions enforced by a dues-supported homeowner's association. Maintenance of the Princeton Towers landscape, including housing interiors, is a responsibility accorded to residents who are elected to serve as officers of the association. These officers are entrusted with overseeing such matters as compliance with deed restrictions, the developer's fulfillment of their obligation to housing consumers and the collection of fees necessary for the maintenance of all exterior grounds, housing facades and club house facilities.

Princeton Towers housing is understood by residents as a "product" with a builder's warranty. One resident, a manager of a local office supply company, explains that Princeton Towers is in a "transition phase." "We're in the act of taking the development over from the builder," she says, "but we have to make the builder own up to defective workmanship. Homes start with a warranty, but many buyers are left with a defective product. The immediate funds for the repairs for shoddy roofs and siding come out of the homeowners' association because it's all part of the facade everyone owns, "but eventually the builder will have to compensate the association for this through a lawsuit" (interview, March 31, 1996).

The Appeal of Princeton Towers to "Move Ups"

Princeton Towers is ideal for "move ups" who find this housing superior to previously-owned housing, particularly as it provides a refuge from congestion and

sprawl, easy access to recreational facilities and/or a Princeton address. (Some “move ups” may eventually become “stayers.”) Writing to the editor of the local paper to protest the use of a road running through the development by heavy duty trucks, one resident encapsulates what it is that she and her neighbors value in this landscape:

For us, this was like moving out to the country...we were taken in awe by the clean air, the bright shining stars at night...the cleanliness, the friendliness and pleasantness of the people who live here...surely, one of the main reasons we came here was there was no congestion, no traffic, no waiting for long periods of time to get anywhere, to do anything, no reason to leave one-half hour in advance to get somewhere that was only four or five miles away...(If you allow...trucks to use the county road running through our development) the numerous healthy and energetic joggers...that you see everyday...who are so much a symbol of this community, will vanish...Our beautiful homes will be covered with disgusting black dirt...Our property values will be drastically reduced...Some of the friendliest and most pleasant people...will turn bitter and angry” (letter to the editor, Central Post, November 2, 1995).

Princeton Towers: The Perspectives of Long-Term Residents

Builders and their housing developments develop reputations among the township’s longer-term residents, even before they are occupied. For instance, some housing developments are inhabited almost entirely of homeowners who chose to “move up” from other locations within the township, their move often based on an insider’s knowledge of a builder’s quality workmanship. In the case of Princeton Towers, long-term residents say that, at least at the time of its inception, Princeton Towers had no appeal to anyone they knew. As for why this development was unappealing, these homeowners say that they do not like the high-density arrangement of the housing. Others do not trust the developer. A few others are adverse to what they believe to be the insularity of this development. Some of these residents remark that they are particularly

concerned that the Princeton Towers developer somehow found a way to evade a State of New Jersey's affordable housing mandate, as it apparently existed at the time, decreeing that affordable housing be integrated with other housing in a visually imperceptible manner. The developer built a required number of affordable rental units. However, these townhouse-style units are a separate enclave adjoining Princeton Towers. The rental units are designated by a logo bearing no reference to Princeton. (In the opinion of a standing mayor at the time, a staunch advocate of civil rights and of housing equity, no one knows how the developer was able to separate the housing. However, the editor of the local newspaper suggests that the affordable rental units were actually tied to another development built by the developer.)

Princeton Towers and Affordable Housing

The State of New Jersey requires that all municipalities accept their fair share of affordable housing units. This housing is not for the very poor, but for people whose low incomes would render qualification for a mortgage or a rental at market rates out of reach. Among municipalities in the region, South Brunswick is unusual in that it assumes its full quota of affordable housing, a policy first established by progressive-minded residents of the early suburban era.

Further underscoring a distinction between the affordable rental units and Princeton Towers is an approximately five-foot high wooden fence that was erected between the two housing complexes. Citing a problem of car headlights from the affordable rental complex shining into their houses at night, a Princeton Towers

homeowner relates how the homeowner association requested that the developer erect this fence.

Years after its installation the fence is clearly not the object of undue attention and is in fact showing signs of disrepair. It is imperceptible from the main thoroughfare that fronts the development. On the Princeton Towers side the fence is shielded by bushes. In all probability a majority of homeowners are unaware of its existence. On the side of the affordable housing rentals, however, it gives the impression of being a boundary marker.

For Princeton Towers residents, the separation of the affordable housing units from the main development is fully justified. “(The mayor) wanted us to have affordable housing,” explains a homeowner. “But how could you subsidize a \$200,000 house? The builder wouldn’t be able to sell a \$300,000 house next to subsidized housing. No one would buy. Houses would look about the same on the outside, but would be different on the inside. And people in the subsidized housing would be poor (interview, March 31, 1996).” “We (housing association members) were shocked to learn that affordable housing works across the whole state,” another homeowner observes, “that it’s not just for people in the area but for people who have never lived in the community and who are not a part of the community...Eventually they will get integrated into the community,” he adds, “but not for now.” As for whether or not the affordable housing residents can use the indoor recreational facilities, this homeowner says that they cannot use them because they are not paying dues but they do use the basketball and tennis courts (Ibid.). (The affordable housing office maintains confidentiality for all clients. Occupants of the

affordable rental units have not responded to indirect requests for interviews.)

The “Move Ups:” A Princeton Towers Householder

Diana Garzon, a Princeton Towers householder, was recommended to me by an officer of the homeowners’ association as someone who seemed friendly and who might possibly be willing to sit down and talk about life in Princeton Towers. In our initial phone conversation Diana expresses interest in getting together and arranges for us to meet at her house.

Diana and her husband live in a cluster of middle range single family housing. Hers is a next-to-most-expensive model in this housing cluster. “I sometimes wish I could live in a (Washington),” (the largest and most elaborate of the models in this cluster) she remarks, “but then I remind myself that I chose this house” (interview, June 3, 1996).

To my outsider’s view, despite what Diana views as glaringly obvious distinctions among the models in this village, the houses along her street appear to be part of a perfectly synchronized stage set. Here “perfect lawns,” that the Caldwells and their Hamilton Acres neighbors are happy not to have to worry about maintaining, are in full display. Weedless and recently-mown, these lawnscape are unbroken by any fence lines between the houses. Curbside trees shade curving walkways leading to recessed front doors framed at either side by stone and wood facades.

On the morning of our visit Diana welcomes me into the main living space of her house, clearly enjoying an opportunity to show it off. A light-suffused two story foyer

featuring a cathedral ceiling opens into a step-down living room. Sliding glass doors at the far end of this space extending the view outward to a deck beyond which lies the deck of another house just a few feet distant. A shag rug of bold modernist design rug delineates one region of the spacious living room. A baby grand piano, a Scandinavian-style cabinet, leather couch and a television are further accents. Wing chairs flank either side of a fireplace. Explaining that she had already used these furnishings in the houses that she and her husband previously owned, Diana observes that what people like in furniture they also like in houses. She is lucky, she says, that the furniture that she had already accumulated turned out to be a perfect fit for this house.

Diana describes herself and her husband Joe as “empty nesters.” Ages 56 and 64, they moved to Princeton Towers three years earlier from southern New Jersey shortly after the youngest of their two offspring graduated from high school. Joe works as a manager of a temp employment agency and Diana works part time in retail sales. She grew up in Albany, New York and earned a college degree there. Joe’s family migrated from eastern Europe to a city in northern New Jersey when he was young. Their youngest son is attending a local junior college. When I ask Diana if she thinks that her son might return home after college for a brief stint, she says that she assumes that he will probably not be doing so. She points out that Princeton Towers is mainly for older residents. There is very little to do for young adults and there is not much privacy in the houses. “I don’t think people expect their kids to come back because there’s not enough privacy in their houses,” Diana muses. “In our house there is one enclosed bedroom and one loft. The loft wouldn’t be right for him, although we could put up a screen for him if we had

to” (interview, June 3, 1996).

As we talk over tea and cookies, Diana details what it is that appeals to her about Princeton Towers and why she and Joe chose to live here. Lower taxes, the open style of the houses and the recreational facilities were the main selling points. “We wanted a house with lower taxes, and this house had taxes half those of our previous house,” she explains. “I love my house...the open feel of it...I’ve always enjoyed playing tennis, and here was a recreation center I could walk to” (Ibid.).

Housing as a Life-Style

For Diana, as for other homeowners, tennis courts, recreational facilities, jogging trails, and the architecture itself produce Princeton Towers as a landscape of leisure, an improvement upon lives in their previous neighborhoods. One woman who moved from a development having what she describes as more “closed in” colonial-style houses, could be speaking for other residents when she describes how much she loves the “light and airy” feel of her house created by the cathedral ceiling and the sky lights. The stand of full growth trees bordering her back yard give her the feeling, she says, of being “set apart in the woods” (interview, November 28, 1995). But what she most enjoys is the easy walking distance to the recreational facilities.

The Owner-Proof Landscape

An owner-proof landscape is a attractive feature for Princeton Towers homeowners. A majority of these residents, it seems, are already seasoned homeowners

well acquainted with the time- and labor-intensive responsibilities of home ownership. They appreciate the convenience of not having to worry about mowing their lawns or carrying out house repairs is a tremendous bonus. As one of these residents points out, assured maintenance of the space surrounding their house is a highly valued amenity for professional singles whose work requires sometimes long periods of time away from home. So, too, the assurance that the owner-proof landscape will remain “as is,” impervious to individual owner’s tastes, frees residents of any necessity to concern themselves with their neighbors and any obligation to enter into relations with their neighbors. “You can be as friendly as you want here,” says Diana, “but some people don’t even wave when they drive by” (interview, April 3, 1996).

Not all “move ups” like such neighborhoods. One “move up,” better regarded as a recalcitrant “move up,” lives in a housing development similar to that of Princeton Towers out of deference to her husband. She says that whereas she would far prefer living in a place where she knew her neighbors, her husband likes a neighborhood where people keep to themselves. For him, their present neighborhood is a step up from the crowded apartment building in Philadelphia where he grew up. He never liked the closeness of the neighbors, the arguments over parking spaces, and the smells coming from different ethnic kitchens that wafted through the apartment buildings he visited. In South Brunswick he enjoys pre-existing and ongoing ties to friends and acquaintances, she says, which he developed as a young adult. He feels no need for new friendships (interview March 21, 1996).

A Place That Looks Like Community

Community is something very different for Princeton Towers homeowners than it is for Hamilton Acres residents. Hamilton Acres “stayers” were young first-time homeowners with young children. Many of them shared similar cultural and political interests. They sought community. They raised their children together. The challenging circumstances they faced made it easier to forge friendships.

By contrast, many of the Princeton Towers homeowners arrive already having established community ties in previous locales. They may be engaged in existing networks beyond township borders. Some of these homeowners are single and, with the exception of householders living in the townhouses, some are beyond the child-rearing years. These residents are less likely to have something in common. They may appreciate a place that looks like community but may not have the time or interest in establishing a new geographically-based community. “I moved here because this looked like the sort of place where people would help someone out if they needed it,” remarks a homeowner (interview, July 15, 2000). Yet in the five years that she and her husband have lived in Princeton Towers they have never establishing anything more than a nodding acquaintance with neighbors. This woman admits to having neither the time nor the inclination to get to know her neighbors and views this condition as normal. Retaining a memory of the close-knit community in which she grew up, and the community in which she raised her three children, living in a place that looks like community suffices. With her children grown and with a demanding job requiring a long commute, she has neither the time nor the interest in forming new ties.

For other residents, Princeton Towers is a stop-over point in a series of life stages. Diana relates how one of her acquaintances lives in one of the most expensive models. Her husband is a retired seafood distributor. “This is one of three houses which she and her husband own and it seems that she’s moving” Diana observes. “I asked her if she minded moving and she said that she didn’t mind because she never put love into her house, just money. The only home she ever had was where she raised her kids” (interview April 3, 1996).

The Possibility for Community

Among Princeton Towers “move ups” Diana appears to be an anomaly, for she says that what she most appreciates about Princeton Towers is the possibility for community. “This is first place I have ever lived as a married adult where I’ve felt like I was part of a community,” she explains. “When we were first married, we settled near my sister. Every afternoon she and I would get together to cook dinner. She was the main person I saw. In the next town we moved to I had one contact. All of the other people around there were Hassidic Jews. I didn’t fit in. Then when we moved to our last house there were younger families and they never appealed to me” (interview, April 3, 1996).

For Diana, Princeton Towers is clearly more than something that looks like community; it offers the possibility for social interrelations that she has never before enjoyed. How is this the case? First, Princeton Towers offers the possibility for scheduled encounters with other residents, self-selected according to their desire for a

leisurely life style. Second, Diana has for the first time found a few other residents whose life stage closely approximates her own. As she points out, Princeton Towers housing is relatively expensive compared to other housing in other developments. Because homeowners can afford more expensive housing, most of the homeowners are generally an older group.

To date, Diana is embarked on forging community among women who gather for exercise at the recreational facilities and have lunch afterwards. Diana is pleased to be one of the women in this group who help make it happen.

The Project of Maintaining the Homogeneous Landscape: The “Ban Trucks” Movement

However homeowners may vary in their expectations of Princeton Towers, they are certainly invested in maintaining the appearance of a homogeneous community. This leaves only one glaring incongruity in this picture-perfect setting, and that is the unavoidable presence of owners’ vehicles at curbside. The owner-proof landscape of Princeton Towers yields scant evidence of homeowners’ tastes or economic status. Perhaps for this reason the type of vehicles homeowners drive assume extra-significance as the one variable in this micro-managed landscape. “Those neighbors are the sort of people who drive a BMW,” a resident observes when I asked him to describe some of his neighbors, “and that fits with their hostile attitude” (interview, June 3, 1996).

For other residents, vehicles are not associated with personality type as much as they are with working class status and for them this is particularly problematic. One homeowner recounts how his neighbors do not want vehicles with lettering on them

parked at curbside. “There isn’t much space in guest parking,” he explains, “and it is illegal to park on the street, but sometimes there is nowhere else to park. The problem is, people don’t want commercial-looking vehicles around. It looks too working class to them, so there’s a ‘ban trucks’ movement” (interview, March 31, 1996). I ask him where he stands on this issue. Clearly he does not support a “ban trucks” movement. “I have a car with the name of the company I work for on it,” he says, “and I don’t see this as bad. Ford Ranger pick up trucks are very popular cars, but when you see one, what does it mean? Is he blue collar? Is he an urban cowboy? I know someone with a pickup which has a company name on it, but he’s the owner of a franchise” (interview, March 31, 1966).

Some “move ups” would, in fact, welcome the presence of any vehicles parked at curbside, no matter what model or make. The reluctant “move up” mentioned earlier finds it disturbing that vehicles in her development are tucked entirely out of sight in the three car garages which are located at the back of each house. She recalls that in the townhouse complex where she once lived, cars were parked in numbered slots on the street. In this way she always knew who was home and this made it easier to get together with people. In her new development, however, she doesn’t know her neighbors and she never knows if they are home or not. She recounts a terrible fright she had one day when she could not locate her son. He had gone to someone’s house after school, but she didn’t know which house he was in. She searched frantically from door to door. Finally she finally her son, but with no cars on the street, she had no idea where to look first (interview, February 5, 1996).

A Separate Domain

In Princeton Towers, “move ups” have purchased a distinct, spatially homogeneous place for themselves. For at least some of these residents, at least the most recently arrived, South Brunswick is an impersonal tax-collecting entity against which they occasionally find themselves in adversarial relation. In view of the correlation between good schools and property values, and the importance of property value to Princeton Towers residents, I ask Diana in one of our telephone conversations if she ever votes on school issues. “I’m an “atheist” when it comes to voting, and my friends are all like myself!,” she declares vehemently. “The quality of the schools has nothing to do with our property values. We came out to vote for a councilman when we thought that he would vote against allowing those noisy trucks to drive through our community. But even though the councilman won, the road went through anyway” (interview, July 2000).

While the township does not figure with much significance to Princeton Towers “move ups,” the town of Princeton a few miles distant would seem to be a desirable destination. After all, “Princeton” is incorporated in the development logo and homeowners use a Princeton address, as was purchased by the developer. Yet when I ask Diana if she spends much time in Princeton, she declares that she and her friends studiously avoid it. “Our Princeton address adds at least \$10,000 to our property values, but I avoid driving into Princeton,” she says. “The shops are too expensive and the parking is terrible. I shop once a week and I always go north to malls. The further away things are from Princeton, the cheaper the prices” (interview, July 2000). As for what she tells people when they ask where she lives, she says, “I tell people that I live in

Princeton, but they're confused when I give them my telephone number because it doesn't have a Princeton area code" (Ibid.).

Housing Ideologies: "Move Ups"

Most "move ups" do not reside in housing that has a homeowner's association or which is as extensive in scope as Princeton Towers. Nevertheless, "move ups" display similar tastes and related housing ideologies.

Property value is a preeminent concern among "move ups." First, "move ups" prefer a setting that is less likely to be altered in a "disharmonious" manner either through rezoning of adjoining space, for instance, or by neighbors who do not keep up their housing exteriors. (An owner of a 5,500 square foot house located in what some residents regard as the most expensive enclave of houses in the township describes how he attempts to nudge his neighbor, a recent immigrant, into fixing up his front yard. "I tease him about his front yard," he says. "They don't put anything in their front yards...They buy expensive houses but all that counts for them is the inside, not the outside. Their space begins once you open the door. For me, though, the aura starts when you turn into the development. I like the micro-managed look" (interview, December 4, 1996).

Concern with maintenance of property value is tied to the "move up" desire for housing that will remain "as is." When there is no homeowners' association to enforce an owner-proof setting, then "move ups" prefer housing high in market value, presuming that owners of such housing will be less inclined to alter their properties in such a way as

to a produce visual “disharmony” in the overall landscape.

Just as “move ups” seek an aesthetically harmonious space so also do they seek the appearance of middle class homogeneity. The suggestion of a poor or working class presence is to be avoided. This interest is borne out in a stance assumed at least by some residents vis-à-vis affordable housing units, the fence that separates owner-occupied housing from the affordable rental units, and efforts at least by some residents to ban the presence of pickup trucks or of cars displaying business logos.

A Location in Space and Time

For “stayers” the house is malleable, something adaptable to their changing interests and needs over time. For many “move ups” the house is something to pass through on the way to the next life stage and/or a commodity to trade in for housing deemed superior, as measured according to housing “value line.”

Princeton Towers developers structure a housing “value line” as a stark “move up” trajectory starting from the least expensive townhouses to the large single family houses in the most expensive housing cluster. This housing structures living arrangements and lifestyle in such a way as to seem perfectly normal to residents. The “empty nester” house Diana and her husband occupy marks the termination of child-rearing, its architectural arrangement and square footage limiting their ability to adjust to an unanticipated familial event such as, for instance, a possibility that one of their sons might return home. (Diana can think of only one neighbor with children in her complex, and she is firm in her conviction that it is not the right house for them. These neighbors

have to store their things in the garage, she observes, and this means that they must park their cars on the street (interview, June 3, 1996).

“Stayers” and “Move Ups” Compared

Similarities: While the “stayers” of Hamilton Acres and the “move ups” of Princeton Towers would likely disclaim any similarities between themselves, they do in fact share certain commonalities. Both groups of homeowners demonstrate an affinity for architecturally synchronized housing. These homeowners were also drawn to a “country” setting, for them the obverse of the urban and/or sprawling “new city” landscape.

For both groups of homeowners, life style and architectural style are closely linked. They favor modern or contemporary housing styles to traditional Georgian and Colonial styles. They associate light, airy architectural styles with a more relaxed life style. Sliding glass doors leading out to a backyard featuring a patio, lounge chairs and an outdoor grill, as enjoyed by many a Hamilton Acres resident, are not far removed from expanses of window in houses with cathedral ceilings, jacuzzis in the master bath, and decks featuring the omnipresent grill. Moreover, members of both groups are attracted to organized recreational pursuits. It is no coincidence that the only two homeowner-maintained recreational clubs in the township, though differing in their organization, were initiated by and/or are sustained by each of these two homeowners groups. (The swim club organized by the Hamilton Acres “pioneers” is cooperative in its management structure and accepts membership from any resident in the township. The recreational

center at Princeton Towers, conceived as part of the theme-based package by the developers, is for “members only.”)

Both Hamilton Acres “stayers” and Princeton Towers “move ups” use housing as a means of political organization. Early in their residency Hamilton Acres residents campaigned for causes through door-to-door campaigns and through their newspaper. So, too, Princeton Towers residents are well aware that were they to vote en masse for an issue, they could easily sway an election. However, some of them view themselves as a separate entity from the township and in fact are inclined toward an antagonistic attitude toward the township on occasions when it seems that the township’s programs and/or policies are antithetical to their interests.

Differences: While “stayers” and “move ups” exhibit certain commonalities, they also display significant differences according to taste cultures and related housing ideologies. This study finds housing to be imbued with such distinct meanings for these two groups of middle class that no member of either group would as much as consider adopting either the housing or the implied life style and spatial politics of the other.

For both “stayers” and “move ups” housing is an announcement of place and position in separate social worlds. Social egalitarians, “stayers” are uncomfortable or at least disinterested in housing that proclaims a higher social status, whether through square footage or architectural style. Their preferences are for housing as a social space that is neither above nor below others. On the other hand, while “move ups” do not object to location in a neighborhood where some housing is superior to their own, they are less likely to accept evidence of a working class presence.

For “stayers,” and this includes the self-declared “old timers” as well as younger-generation homeowners who are similarly inclined, the house is a malleable object inviting their on-going ministrations. It is a source of pride, a showpiece of their skill, ingenuity and imagination. Ultimate utilitarians, “stayers’” preferences are for housing that is easily adapted to life stages, whether that involves the transformation of a car port into an extra bedroom for a child or an elderly parent, the conversion of a bedroom into a study upon the departure of the last child, or the widening of the front door for wheel chairs

Princeton Towers “move ups” enjoy an owner-proof landscape, one satisfying their desire for freedom from responsibility for the upkeep of house and yard and freedom from any concern over neighbor’s proclivities. No “disharmonious” use mars the Princeton Towers landscape, no yard shows want of care and the outdoor drying of laundry is prohibited, as is (at the time of this fieldwork) the display of “For Sale” signs.

There is one anomaly in this comparison between “stayers” and “move ups.” Curiously, while some of the most vocal “stayers” emerge as urban progressives, styling themselves as “flaming liberals” who shun pretensions to higher status, their *modus vivendi* is as individual property owners. On the other hand, while Princeton Towers residents may appear to other residents to be elitists who have bought into a country club lifestyle, they do so as part of a collectivity. What could be more expressive of a socialist spirit than the collective ownership of housing exteriors and landscape, and the requirement that all residents must assume financial responsibility for the maintenance of all housing exteriors, no matter that some houses are more costly to repair than others?

Forging Place in the “New City” Landscape

Differing housing ideologies and taste cultures inform the place-making strategies of “stayers” and “move ups.” “Stayers” take a stand for social and spatial heterogeneity. This may mean acceptance of the consumption of open space for commercial use, an owner’s modification of their house and/or an increasing racial diversity and/or working class presence. “Move ups” attempt to wall themselves off from the rapid and unpredictable spatial reconfiguration of the “new city” domain.

Will “move ups” become “stayers?” Undoubtedly many “move ups” will stay on, particularly if they succeed in preserving the homogeneous space they deem essential to quality of life and maintenance of their property values. However, as a fierce struggle over a small parcel of land between “move ups” and “stayers,” detailed in the following chapter, suggests, those “move ups” who stay on seem highly unlikely to adopt the taste cultures and housing ideologies of the current “stayers.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Beyond Property Lines: A “No Walls” or a “Walls” Space

The Significance of a Quarter Acre Parcel

In 1995 leaders of St. Thomas, a rustic little church, brought a petition before the township’s citizen-led zoning board requesting permission for a zoning variance. Church board members wanted to install a 3600-square-foot modular unit in a forested glade at the back of church property. The church itself is situated along a two-lane winding road of slight elevation (the township’s highest) shaded along either side by full growth trees. They hoped to use this modular unit for church events and in addition to rent out its space for use by a cooperative preschool founded 37 years earlier by Hamilton Acres residents. Getting a variance in a region zoned R1 (one acre per residence) seemed simple enough. Given the frequency with which township land is rezoned, they assumed that approval for a zoning variance would be automatic. “Who could be against motherhood and apple pie?” Reverend Williams, the minister of St. Thomas, recalls thinking (interview, October 17, 1996). Yet this petition to rezone what amounted to a quarter acre of space raised a firestorm of debate among township residents, igniting a years-long struggle between a great number of petitioners rooting for the preschool and 13 homeowner who objected to the petition.

Who were the enactants in this drama and what images of place found them bitterly divided? The petitioners were members of St. Thomas Church and of the cooperative preschool. Among them, the Hamilton Acres “activists” who had stayed on

were the most vocal and best organized. The objectors were 13 homeowners whose backyards abutted one length of the forested property at the back of the church.

For both petitioners and objectors the particular site was an indispensable fulfillment of their images of place. Forced to relocate the preschool from another location, and after a futile year-long search for an alternative space, petitioners viewed the zoning variance as the one means by which they could secure a site for their community institution, in their estimation an “endangered species.” On the other hand, objectors felt that they had gone to considerable effort and cost to find properties abutting this forested setting, one which they felt offered them treasured privacy and quiet.

During ensuing zoning board debates petitioners and objectors were compelled to present their separate cases for this space. At issue was whether the rights of a “community” or the rights of private property owners should prevail. The debates galvanized township residents. Coverage in three regional newspapers as well as on the cable TV network made it all too clear that this was no ordinary zoning board case but, in the estimation of a township planner, one serving as a “lightning rod” among township residents (interview, May 5, 1995). “I started getting contributions from tourists who had seen the hearings on cable TV station,” observed Reverend Williams as we walked around the church grounds one day. “...it was the biggest hit on Channel 50. They came by to see the site and talk with me and now our church has received a lot more notice. They’re even offering donations to help with our cause. The only other case around producing a similar hysteria was Metroplex” (interview, October, 17, 1996).

Ultimately, those petitioning for the zoning variance lost their case. Debates and

hearings dragged on for four years, during which time the cooperative preschool was forced to close for lack of funds. However the arguments presented by the petitioners and the objectors retain relevance, illuminating what is at stake for homeowners, who, as users and makers of space, struggle to secure a place for themselves in a region undergoing rapid change. Their housing ideologies are both a means of group solidarity and a source of intra-group conflict, exposing a fault line among white middle class homeowners who would otherwise appear to be united as property owners.

A Highly Significant Case

How could residents' successful fight to prevent the construction of Metroplex, the proposed 7.8 million square feet of office space which provoked such furor 15 years earlier, be likened to the controversy over a small parcel of land? In part, the high visibility of the case had to do with the fact that the petitioners were residents of long standing, among them some of the "flaming liberals" of Hamilton Acres, skilled at generating support for causes. Petitioners' depiction of the cooperative preschool as an "endangered species" compelled support for their cause among those residents who viewed the township as a community. In operation for 35 years, the cooperative preschool had earned the support and approval of these residents. Even if many of these residents had never availed themselves of its services they were still supportive of a grass roots organization with origins in township history which was structured cooperatively. Widespread interest in the case was also due to the fact that the zoning board debates offered longer-term residents a first-time opportunity to hear what some of the owners of

the new “big” houses that had been going up in recent years had to say for themselves. But in addition, as residents weighed the rights of a community over and against the rights of private property owners, not only in the hearings but in letters to the editor of the local paper and in private conversation, they were struggling with overriding questions of concern to any resident confronting a rapidly changing landscape. “What sort of place are we making for ourselves?,” these makers and users of “new city” space seemed to be asking as they presented their testimony before the zoning board. “Whose interests should prevail in such a land use decision---the interests of private property owners or of a community?” and, “What do these choices say about who we are and where we are headed?”

A Quarter Acre Parcel

The object of the heated debate among residents was a parcel of land which, by earlier presuburban and suburban days when space seemed unlimited, was entirely unremarkable. Here I draw on notes amalgamated from visits to this parcel:

The controversial quarter acre parcel lies towards the back of a rectangular plot of land owned by St. Thomas. This is a simple, rough-hewn little church with steeple in slight disrepair and dark red wooden siding. The church, located on a slight hill, fronts a curving, wooded two-lane road used as a short cut by speeding motorists intent on cutting transit time between two main transportation arteries. The parcel features swathes of full-growth trees, remainders of what residents recall as a once-heavily wooded area.

Positioned along one length of this rectangular plot of land are the properties of the 13 homeowners objecting to the zoning variance. The backyards of their two-and-a-half story colonial and Tudor-style houses, built in the mid-1980's, border the quarter acre. Featuring synchronized architectural styles and landscape designs, these houses form one portion of a cul-de-sac of thirty houses.

Along the northern side of church property lies a spacious treed lot featuring a solid brick owner-built ranch, built in all probability in the early

1960's when land was plentiful and inexpensive. At the far end of church property a scattering of trees barely camouflage what appears to be a new large house of angular, jutting modernistic design, positioned at an elevation higher than that of the church and the houses at either side of the church.

This comparatively spacious setting is surprisingly quiet, given that it is only half a mile or less from a six-lane thoroughfare and fast food outlets. This is a calm, quiet space which seems set apart.

Petitioners and Objectors

The Petitioners: The petitioners and their supporters were embedded in local networks spanning generations and political affiliations. A majority of those who lobbied on its behalf were a cross-generational group of women. These residents were owners of Hamilton Acres ranches and colonials, Cape Cods, and otherwise nondescript colonial-style houses of indeterminate vintage scattered throughout the township. Among them were the once-polarized “locals” and “cosmopolitans,” now self-styled “old timers.” Joining the ranks of these residents were others who had settled in the township in later years and who were former or current members of the cooperative preschool.

Many of the older generation residents who supported the petition had lived in the township long enough to have participated in the same organizations, served on township boards, steered their children through the township school system, subscribed to the local paper and numbered among its frequent letter writers. While younger generation supporters may not have had the time nor the inclination to immerse themselves in such civic pursuits, they joined up with the more entrenched of the locally-oriented in full endorsement of all that the cooperative preschool stood for: community, children and collective endeavor. For the older-generation residents in particular, the cooperative

preschool epitomized the values of the township population, notwithstanding the fact that South Brunswick had become an indecipherable part of the “new city” and that a majority of residents were recent arrivals. “This is the sort of place where all are equal,” they might say when I would ask them how they characterized the township. “It’s a place where you can speak out and get involved.”

For the “activists” of Hamilton Acres the case demanded a concerted effort to speak out and get involved, something that their younger-generation counterparts were not accustomed to. One of these younger-generation women relates how these “activists” served as self-appointed mentors, urging her and others to write letters to the editor of the local paper and to speak out at the zoning board meetings. (This cross-generational tutelage is found in the efforts of senior members of a township watchdog group which attempts to curb unnecessary development. One of the leaders of this group describes how she cautions younger members not to let the school district manipulate them by assigning them to work on ineffectual committees but instead to fight what she deems to be the district’s impractical plans for expansion.)

Planners’ Principles: A use variance requires demonstration of why the use is good for the property. In the zoning board hearings petitioners drew on the planners’ principle of “beneficial use,” presenting the installation of the modular unit as being of a “beneficial use” for residents of the township community. A modular unit would accommodate the expanding membership of St. Thomas Church, they argued, and in addition it would allow the cooperative preschool to sustain its operations. They emphasized that the preschool was an institution of particular importance on several

counts. They emphasized that the cooperative preschool was of extra-significance as an institutional center in a place having no town center. As one of the founders of the cooperative preschool testified:

If co-op is forced to close, (we) will lose more than just another nursery school,” testified one of the founders of the preschool. “It would be a very large tear in the fabric of our community. We are a large suburban township divided by major highways. Our community organizations, churches and schools are the closest thing we have to a town center. The loss of any one of them would be felt. But the loss of co-op would be much worse. (Zoning Board Hearing, 2 February, 1995)

Petitioners presented the preschool as a socializing experience for adults as well as for children, a means of entry into social interrelations supportive of a collective ethos. “The co op is an entry point for newcomers,” observed Reverend Williams during one of our conversations. “People (are required) to be involved in the co op...It’s the way they get to know each other” (interview, October 7, 1996). “I’ve been associated with co op on and off since 1977,” testified another resident at a zoning board hearing,

and the most memorable comment I have ever heard about the school came from a woman whose child attended the co op in the early 1960’s. She said that what she enjoyed most about the experience was the community aspect of the organization. She felt as I do that co op was as much a socializing experience for her as it was for her child. She said, ‘You haven’t really had the true South Brunswick experience unless you’ve been a part of the co op family.’” (Zoning Board Hearing, February 2, 1995)

For petitioners this was also an institution rich in a form of social capital having a highly important “bridging” function (Putnam 2000, 22), an institution connecting people who would otherwise not have the opportunity to develop face-to-face interrelations in a sprawling landscape offering few places to meet, let alone forge relationships and connect generations over time. They emphasized that the cooperative preschool

engendered a quality of social interrelations among township residents, launching them towards broadly-focused civic pursuits. Testified a cooperative preschool member:

The co-op nursery school is an institution that really shaped this township. The very existence of the fine schools that we have, that attracted some of these people, (is) due in very large part to the activities and the level of activity of nursery school parents who learn to do that by being part of a cooperative system...it would be a mistake I think, and a great waste to the township's political activity, never mind just the children, to interfere (with) or eliminate this old institution...I know that the way that we as a community, as members of a community, learned to work together as such members came out of that. This was a training ground not just for our children but for ourselves. I hear people say, well, I don't care, I don't have kids. But some of us remember the time when most people thought not about their own special interests but what the town needed in order to grow and be prosperous. (Zoning Board Hearing, February 2 1995)

In petitioners' estimation, the preschool also served as a preparation for women's eventual careers. "The co-op nursery school was my first experience as a community activist," one of these women testified. "Our family found long-time friends through the co-op and I was inspired by the skilled teachers of the co-op to return to my teaching career" (Zoning Board Hearing, February 2, 1995).

As evidence that the cooperative preschool served an ongoing need, petitioners called attention to the fact that the preschool employed three full-time teachers and had an enrollment of approximately 150 2-, 3- and 4-year olds with frequent waiting lists.

The Objectors: All but one of the 13 objectors had moved to the township in recent years. They were deeply concerned lest they lose the forested setting which complemented their housing styles, augmented their abbreviated back yards and ensured them privacy and quiet. They argued that the forested glade was indispensable to the sense of the private tucked-away ambience of their cul-de-sac, a feature motivating them

to purchase their houses in the first place. Moreover, they emphasized that this was a landscape for which they had paid a premium price, its R1 zoning registered in their comparatively high property taxes.

So bitter did the debate over the parcel of land eventually become, and so maligned did the 13 homeowners feel themselves to be, that they refused to talk with anyone about the case. However, zoning board testimony, in addition to letters and articles in the local paper, generated some personal data. As revealed in zoning board testimony their occupations were as follows: attorney, physician, owners of a restaurant franchise and co-owners of a real estate business. Their Colonial and Tudor-style houses, with prices ranging between approximately \$350,000 and \$400,000 (estimated value in 1995), were clearly not “starter” houses. The 13 homeowners appeared to be enmeshed in networks separate from the township community extolled by the petitioners, for they seemed to be unaware, previous to the debates, of a community that they now found themselves opposing.

The 13 homeowners faced one dilemma that those settling in the township before its rapid growth in the mid 1980's had not faced: limited space. Although the region in which their cul-de-sac was located was zoned R1, calling for one acre per house, the builder of these houses had been permitted to build on proportionately small quarter-acre lots, in the common practice of “cluster zoning.” (In consideration of the increasing scarcity and cost of buildable open space, “cluster zoning” permits small lot size if builders compensate by leaving portions of space undeveloped. However, this practice produces housing which is often disproportionately large in volume by comparison to lot

size.) For the 13 homeowners this zoning rendered the parcel belonging to St. Thomas Church a crucial component of their properties, creating for them an “extremely private...valuable backyard” (Zoning Board Hearing, June 22, 1995).

The objectors posed a strong argument against the proposed variance. Beyond their desire to preserve the region beyond their backyards they were concerned that if the modular unit were installed, the noise and activity of a preschool would destroy the ambience they treasured and would result in the depreciation of their property values. They cited the noise and exhaust generated by up to 90 inbound and outbound car trips a day for drop off and pick up of children, the safety on the outer road for cars turning in and out of the church driveway, close to a sharp turn, and in addition possible drainage problems. (One homeowner testified that her house was next to a swamp and water already flowed onto her property.)

Objectors’ points were not unreasonable, yet such was the support for “community” that no one came out in public support of the 13 homeowners. (A number of township residents probably sympathized with the objectors. In private conversations after this case concluded, one resident who had vehemently sided with the petitioners confided to me that she was relieved that the variance was not granted. Voicing concern over the safety of the outer road, she said that she could not have lived with herself if there had ever been an accident. Another resident confided with me that she agreed with many of the points that the homeowners had made but was afraid to make her views known (telephone conversations, n.d.).

The Harmonious or Inharmonious Use of Space

What rendered the objectors particularly unpopular among petitioners was the stand they made for the planners' principle of the "harmonious use" of space. The objectors' lawyer argued that a modular unit would be a most "inharmonious" use of the forested parcel. The modular unit would have a "negative impact" on their properties, he stated, inserted as it would be in such close proximity to the houses of the 13 objectors. For petitioners, a "beneficial" use of space overrode any possible visual disharmony of the landscape. Moreover, they viewed objectors' insistence on "harmonious use" as tied to efforts to maintain what in petitioners' views was an elite space. Petitioners were not without grounds in this suspicion. Noting the presence of custom built houses even larger than objectors' houses that had been built on a treed ridge overlooking the cul-de-sac, the petitioners' lawyer asked if these larger houses, the "large, looming structures" looking down on the 13 houses, did not but have a negative impact (Zoning Board Hearings, March 2, 1995).

Compelled to elaborate on what they meant by the "harmonious" use of space, an appraiser who had been hired as one of the objectors' witnesses explained that not all new construction was objectionable, and that while the newer houses had reduced some of the forest and the privacy it offered, it would not result in a lowering of property values. In his estimation this was because "the large looming structures" were "a higher and better use" of the space than the modular unit (Zoning Board Hearing, March 2, 1995).

Petitioners Respond

Petitioners and their supporters were outraged that the perpetuation of their prized community institution could be jeopardized by what they felt to be the self-serving attitudes of moneyed homeowners overly concerned with property values. “It’s 13 owners of expensive homes...whining over property values...against hundreds...” wrote a letter writer to the editor of a regional paper (Home News, June 28, 1995). “The arrogance of those people!” exclaimed one supporter during one of our conversations about the case. “They have very expensive homes and they’re defending the value of their property against the nursery school” (interview, October 17, 1996). In the view of a writer of a letter appearing in the local paper, the 13 homeowners were selfish, mean-spirited despoilers of the landscape as well as of a community institution. By extension, it seemed to this letter writer that the 13 homeowners must certainly look down on Hamilton Acres housing:

Destroying a part of our history because of the selfishness of a handful of residents is unconscionable. The construction of the homes of the “Co op Killer Thirteen” has destroyed the lovely woods along Sand Hill Road. Co op (is a)...higher and better use than the self-serving, avaricious and mean-spirited purpose of the “Co op Killer Thirteen”....if we allow these recent arrivals to destroy the co op will they some day band together again, hire a lawyer and persuade our government to raze the original Hamilton Acres development...it is around the corner and its presence might devalue their property...we must not allow greed to triumph over the welfare of our community. (Central Post, March 23, 1995)

Resentment against homeowners who appear to presume extra rights to determine the use of space beyond their property lines on the basis of their ownership of “upscale” houses is consistent with the housing ideologies of “stayers.” To homeowners, many of whom had long-since paid off their mortgages and who were witnessing the steep

valuation of their housing, property value was insignificant when compared to the preservation of what they viewed as an institution which engendered a collaborative spirit, joined generations over time and served as a training ground for civic engagement. Petitioners were outraged that, when it came to rights to determine the use of the open space, objectors should presume entitlement purely on the basis of their ownership of “big” houses, as though this housing conferred upon them a higher social status which was not actually theirs. It seemed to petitioners that the application of “harmonious use” was being deployed to create an elitist social domain of self-serving property owners.

“These people are fairly comfortable,” observed a cooperative preschool petitioner during one of our conversations. “They’re all people who have acquired something, but they don’t have any more class than I have. They’re average kind of people, middle class people who have come into some comfort in their lives. They’re all transplanted...this isn’t their family home” (interview, January 23, 1997).

Petitioners were further put off by the style of presentation of the objectors’ lawyer. “They have no feeling, they’re so calculated. Their awful snarly lawyer is out for blood,” commented a preschool supporter (Ibid.). “Hearings usually do have a more casual style,” remarked a township planner (interview, November 20, 1996). Of course, the objectors’ lawyer had been retained to win a case, and he presumably chose to use a style that he felt would most likely succeed.

Objectors Respond

Objectors were incredulous that the rezoning of the parcel of land should even be a consideration, and that a modular unit in their backyards might become a reality. That the innumerable objections they had cited could be overridden on the basis of the “rights” of a “community” about which they had previously been unaware was preposterous to them. “...the idea that nice people with nice ideas are immune from the law just doesn’t apply...they are not entitled to build where they are proposing to build,” wrote one of the homeowners in a letter to the editor of the local paper (Central Post, February 9, 1995). Feeling beleaguered, objectors stressed that they were not attacking the cooperative preschool, but the modular unit. “They thought we were doing this solely for greed and because we hated children,” one of the homeowners complained, “but this is something that just doesn’t fit in the neighborhood” (Sastry, 1995). “We are victims of an odious campaign that the Hamilton Acres co op is waging,” stated this homeowner on another occasion. In objectors’ estimation it was their neighborhood which created an ambience rendering the parcel of land an especially attractive preschool site. “They are entitled to nothing,” wrote one of the homeowners, “...They are the ones wanting to infringe on us” (letter to the editor, Central Post, March 2, 1995).

A Once-Commonplace Setting Turns Prized Asset

Up through the 1970’s, when wide expanses of the township were still rural and the township could be regarded by residents as a small town, forested land such as the quarter-acre parcel was in such abundance as to appear inconsequential. Over the next

two decades such space it had become a highly valued commodity. As both petitioners and the objectors emphasized, the quarter acre offered amenities rapidly becoming sought-after rarities: quiet, privacy and enough undeveloped space as to induce the sense of removal from traffic and high density commercial and residential development. As one of the 13 homeowners testified:

My choice of property was not casual...I spent a lot of time...calling the township people, doing as much as I possibly could to insure myself that where I would move to this time would be the right location. My idea of right is to have as much privacy as possible...I made the best possible decision. I chose a location that had a house on the other side, a nice little church in the back. I thought it was perfect. And for that I paid very dearly. I paid a very premium price for that lot and for that I have every right to expect that it remains that way” (Zoning Board Hearing, June 22, 1995).

“If you see it when it snows,” testified a homeowner, voicing his appreciation for the church property, “it looks like a Christmas Card...a little red church, nestled in the snow” (Zoning Board Hearing, 1995).

The 13 homeowners stated in the hearings that when they purchased their properties they assumed that the R1 zoning would remain unchanged, despite the fact that they resided in one of the mostly rapidly expanding regions in the State of New Jersey. Wrote one homeowner in a letter to the editor of the local paper: “When you buy into a neighborhood, I think there are certain things you can expect. It’s not unreasonable to expect that the zone remains residential” (Sastry, 1995).

“I wanted a house in a wooded rural setting,” testified another homeowner,...and the realtor told me, “The property behind you belongs to a church, so you can have peace of mind knowing that your children will never play in your backyard and look at a building or town houses or anything like that”” (Zoning Board Hearing, 1995).

Arguments presented by the petitioners offered even more nuanced reasons than those offered by the objectors as to precisely why this quarter acre parcel was of singular worth. While those petitioners who testified did not themselves appear to place high value on extra privacy, low density residential space or quiet in their own neighborhoods, they obviously regarded these landscape features as critical features of a preschool setting. In their view the success of their operations necessitated that certain landscape features satisfy parents' imagery of an appropriate and safe place for young children. In addition, they argued that a central location in the township was crucial drawing card for cooperative preschool families. They emphasized that a space having these characteristics was very hard to find.

How it should be difficult to find a suitable site in a township having considerable open space? Mary, a member of the cooperative preschool's search committee, considered many possible sites but found that none of them were acceptable. "One of the first sites we investigated was the cooperative swim club" (founded by early Hamilton Acres residents), she explains. "This site was not possible because of environmental regulations that had to be met. Commercial areas were too expensive. Then, too, some areas of the township would be undesirable to parents" (interview, October 28, 1996). As for what sort of site parents would find acceptable, Mary observes that it should be, "one that's in a residential community just like a back yard. Something too isolated wouldn't do and a strip mall with lots of traffic wouldn't do either. People imagine things like someone coming in and taking their child or a car accident. Then, too, a geographic location that feels central to people is important. It's a mental thing" (Ibid.).

Beyond the Backyard Fence: Whose Space Is It?

“I grew up in an area that got built up,” Sara explains as we sat around her kitchen table discussing the zoning board case, in progress at the time (interview, October 30, 1996). She goes on to explain how it is that she thinks that the 13 homeowners have an unrealistic attitude.

We knew that our open land (a field extending beyond the backyard property line of their current house) couldn't last forever...We always thought that the land is not really ours, that the property didn't belong to us. We thought that when we start to see houses through the trees at the back of our property that we'll start planting our own trees. But I think that these homeowners (the 13 objectors) look out from their windows and say or think, 'this land is mine,' when actually it isn't. (Ibid.).

Sara's position perfectly encapsulates petitioners' attitudes towards shrinking portions of still-buildable open space extending beyond their property lines. Ultimate utilitarians, they assume the consumption of this open space, much as they might treasure it, to be a foregone conclusion. This is not to say that they do not enjoy “nature,” as wide open, undeveloped space. Rather, theirs is the sensibility of those for whom a “country” landscape is an entirely separate sphere from the “new city” region they inhabit. One resident describes how much she savors her solitude in a cabin in the Adirondacks every summer. Another resident tells of his great pleasure in spending weekends at a cabin he and his wife own in a more remote part of the New Jersey shore. For these seasoned homeowners, South Brunswick is part of a “city.” Country retreats are to be found elsewhere. Moreover, conditioned by years of witnessing the rezoning of township space to suit developers' interests, these residents are well adapted to rampant spatial

reconfiguration. Hence their incredulity that objectors had ever assumed that the wooded glade beyond their property lines would remain as is, even if it was zoned R1.

During the zoning board hearings petitioners' adaptive wisdom, garnered from life in a highly impermanent domain, found expression in their stance vis-à-vis the changeability not only of space but of institutions. "People don't realize that there's more to a church than people coming on Sunday and going home again," Reverend Williams explained in his critique of the objectors' views (interview, October 17, 1996). "They have an image that the church is a living postcard with people singing Christmas carols and snow that fluffs down...an empty picture post card" (Ibid.). According to him, since his church had been rebuilt in 1970 for a capacity for 155 people, it had expanded over a three decade period to include 134 households, and this required a necessary expansion of facilities.

Ultimate Outcome: No Winners

After four years of debates neither the petitioners nor the objectors achieved their goals. Zoning board members initially voted in favor of a zoning variance permitting the installation of the modular unit. Casting their vote for "community," they drew upon the planners principle of the "beneficial use" of space, extending its usual definition as a use which is "good for the property" to mean a use which is "good for society as a whole," one benefiting social interaction. By voting in favor of a zoning variance the citizen-led zoning board contradicted what is widely acknowledged to be a national trend in zoning and planning board decisions favoring property owners' efforts to achieve a

“harmonious” use of space. In the estimation of a long term resident, and in contradiction of this trend, zoning boards exist to do what is best for the township, that it’s “not a matter of an individual’s gain winning over another individual’s gain” (Zoning Board Hearing, March 9, 1995). (By “township” this resident is referring to the South Brunswick community that petitioners are defending.) “If this township doesn’t have the control of the zoning board,” he observes,

...this group doesn’t have to be here tonight, but it does have the control...to make the right decision. All I’m asking is that we get to the level of debate into what does (South Brunswick) gain or lose by this decisions...not personalities, not individuals, not small groups versus large groups. (Ibid.).

The 13 homeowners were deeply distressed by this initial ruling. Legal objections that they filed extended the conflict over the use of the quarter-acre parcel for four years, a period during which the cooperative preschool was forced to close. The school’s funds had been expended in legal fees and a more remote temporary location had reduced enrollment below the numbers required to continue operations. Petitioners were angry, resentful and deeply saddened by this loss.

Eventually the objectors lost out as well, for while they were able to prevent the installation of the modular unit they could not preserve the wooded space. A few years later a large two-story addition was built onto the back of St. Thomas for use by its own expanding membership. This construction, allowable according to planning (as opposed to zoning) board regulations, meant the reduction of much of the forested privacy the homeowners cherished. The once-rustic little church had morphed into a larger space to accommodate its expanding membership.

“No Walls” or “Walls” Attitudes and the Making of Place

The zoning board debates found petitioners and objectors struggling to secure a place for themselves in a region undergoing rapid change. Both homeowner groups assumed a moral stance vis-à-vis how space extending beyond their property lines should be utilized, stances encapsulated in what they referred to in their arguments as “no walls” or “walls” attitudes.

“Stayers” Housing Ideologies and a “No Walls Attitude”

Petitioners’ arguments bear close correspondence to “stayer” housing ideologies. Ultimate utilitarians, “stayers” appreciate the efficiency and adaptability of housing. They are comfortable with housing as a social space which is neither above nor below others. They would not want any house “bigger” than a socially acceptable norm in the township, viewing such housing not only impractical but also as socially pretentious. Beyond the house itself, “stayers” endorse what they conceive as a socially and spatially heterogeneous landscape over the “plain vanilla” landscape produced by the application of a planners’ principle of “harmonious space.” Just as “stayers” adapt to the changes in space extending beyond their property lines, so also do petitioners see no problem in the installation of the modular unit.

A “No Walls Attitude”

For petitioners, a “no walls attitude” demands that the door remain open to subsequent waves of homeowners, enabling them to enjoy the same “rights” to home ownership that were extended to those arriving in earlier periods. (In keeping with this “no walls attitude” many long-term residents, including “stayers,” are instrumental in overseeing the township’s affordable housing program, one which accepts its full quota of affordable housing as mandated by the State of New Jersey.) Just as a “no walls” space privileges the rights of home ownership over the preservation of open space, it also privileges the rights of a community to such space, no matter that this use might consume open space. A “no walls” space is not necessarily a pretty space. A socially utilitarian space, it can appear messy and ill-planned, the antithesis of a “country” space. This “no walls attitude” is well expressed by a Hamilton Acres pioneer in her testimony before the zoning board:

The former tax assessor speaks to the heart of the matter when he describes as he sees it the expectations of Hamilton Acres homeowners with the expectations of so-called upscale homeowners. My family and friends used to drive along Sand Hills Road and we always enjoyed the pristine loveliness of the land on both sides of the road. Many of us were terribly dismayed to see the trees disappearing and the houses popping up...these newest homeowners did not know or care if they were spoiling the countryside for others but never mind...it was their right to do so. It is also their right to feel unhappy and to express that unhappiness, if the view from their homes is somewhat changed as the community grows. But is not their right to prevent others from enjoying their rights, even if they live in upscale homes. (Zoning Board Hearing, March 2, 1995)

“Move Up” Housing Ideologies and a “Walls Attitude:”

The housing tastes and related ideologies of the 13 objectors bear close

resemblance to those of the Princeton Towers “move ups.” To recall, “move ups” prefer the spatially homogeneous setting as achieved through synchronization of architectural and landscape features. They seek the appearance of social and spatial homogeneity. Through deed restrictions, homeowner associations and/or through zoning designations, “move ups” attempt to ensure the permanency of such a landscape. This interest is closely tied to their concern with property values. These concerns present “move ups” with a problem: in the “new city” landscape there is very little available open space left. A distinct countryside setting offering upper middle class suburbanites of the pre-World War II era the opportunity to establish havens from the industrialized urban core no longer exists. The only recourse for these “new city” inhabitants is to attempt to secure a haven within, rather than beyond, the “new city” and this effort necessitates a “walls” attitude.

A “Walls Attitude”

A “walls attitude” is not uncommon among homeowners attempting to prevent the “disharmonious use” of a landscape which they have selected as a complement to their housing. While objectors viewed the presence of a cooperative preschool as an “inharmonious” use, they viewed the presence of new houses larger than their own as a “higher and better use” even though it compromised their privacy. So too, the efforts by a few Princeton Towers residents to ban trucks would, if actualized, would produce a more “harmonious” space and have the intended or unintended effect of walling off a working class presence.

Political Affiliation of Little Import

Curiously, while petitioners deplored objectors' "walls attitude," their concern with property values and their apparent presumptions to a higher social status, political affiliation was of little relevance. While one of the 13 homeowners was a Republican and also the township attorney, and while most of the petitioners were Democrats, petitioners emphasized that political affiliation was of little concern to them. Township Democrats and Republican are often opposed, and switching of party allegiance is common. A resident whose letter appeared in the local paper corroborates the relative insignificance of party affiliation for petitioners and their supporters as measured against loyalty to the township "community." As she writes,

I find it necessary to respond to (his) letter in which he (the township attorney) claims that Co-op supporters have attempted to subvert the application for a variance into a political one. ...nothing can be further from the truth. It was not a political issue and it has never been one for the supporters. In fact, it has been very much a non-partisan issue which received the support of Republicans and Democrats in town. A statement to the press supporting the granting of the variance to (St. Thomas) was signed by approximately 300 citizens, including three former Republican mayors and only one Democratic mayor.

...This is not a personal back yard dispute between two neighbors. It affects the existence of two important institutions belonging to our community which has nurtured and grown them, a church and a nursery school. Perhaps the signers were responding to the unfair assertion of one of your own witnesses who spoke to the need for greater considerations for "upscale" (his own term) homeowners. (Central Post, July 18, 1996)

What Sort of Place Is This? Where Are We Headed?

This case finds homeowner groups driven by efforts to secure a place for themselves in the midst of rapid spatial configuration. In a municipality with no Main Street, and little historical, cultural or geographical definition to speak of, homeowners

who might otherwise be regarded as a homogenous group of white middle class property owners found themselves bitterly opposed over the use of a quarter acre forested parcel. Separate taste cultures and related housing ideologies informed the disparate images of place upheld by these two homeowner groups.

The increasing scarcity of open space in the “new city” domain finds these homeowners in bitter conflict. For petitioners the cooperative preschool was one of the few institutional centers in a spatially fragmented landscape. It was an institution enabling its members to learn and sustain communal endeavor, serving as well as preparation for other civic-spirited ventures and/or careers. As such, it was indeed an institution deserving the intense loyalty of its multi-generation membership. For objectors the forested quarter acre was an indispensable complement to their properties, an amenity offering them seclusion from heavily traffic and commercial installations just minutes away. The rustic little church next to their properties, with its barn-red exterior and weather-worn steeple, augmented the tucked-away, picture postcard appearance of a space for which they had paid a premium price.

The case was closely followed by a wide regional audience, addressing as it did certain overriding questions confronting residents of any rapidly changing region. Who are we? And, Where are we headed?, homeowners seemed to be asking as they presented their arguments. Or, from another perspective, What sort of place is this?, and, What will it become? Petitioners and their supporters posed egalitarian ideals of a heterogeneous multi-purpose space, a “community” space inclusive of institutions such as the cooperative preschool. Who do these thirteen homeowners think they are, they queried,

that they feel they have the right to move in and then close the doors behind themselves?

What sort of place is this if we can not support our community institutions? For them, the capital of their township lay in institutions such as the preschool which benefited and sustained community. It was of no import that the modular unit would not have been particularly attractive or that its installation would have produced an “inharmonious” space.

The thirteen homeowners took a stand for the protection of “homogeneous” spaces such as theirs. They had not only invested in a house, they had also invested in a setting offering some respite within the “new city.” For them the capital of their neighborhood lay in its private, wooded setting. Why then, they queried, shouldn’t it remain that way? Weren’t their rights as a minority of property owners supposed to be protected against the majority? They had explicitly sought property protected by the township’s highest residential zoning classification and their taxes reflected this. Their call for the “harmonious” use of space, coupled with their defense of even bigger houses going up in the vicinity as “a higher and better use,” provoked the ire of township residents who saw in their efforts the defense of an elitist “walls” attitude.

This case finds housing to be a means by which residents of the spatially fragmented “new city” struggle to assert identities of place through claims to the use of dwindling open space. In so doing, however, residents can overlook the broader implications of their positions. In this debate advocates for the cooperative preschool came out in full support of a “no walls” position. As for the thirteen homeowners, they themselves were the only people arguing in support of their position. It seems that

membership in this township “community” requires a “no walls” attitude. Yet while a “no walls” attitude serves more egalitarian “community” interests it also leads to higher housing densities and the sort of mixed-use landscape from which many homeowners are trying to escape. On the other hand, a “walls” attitude, while it can produce what appear to some residents to be elitist enclaves, can also end up supporting preservation of natural landscape features and open space. Such an outcome is not unjustifiable in a “new city” landscape finding the next generation of mega-warehouses implanted upon once-fertile farmland and new housing developments being constructed on forested wetlands which were once considered unbuildable.

Likened in significance by township residents to the resident-led fight to stave off the construction of the 500-acre Metroplex 15 years earlier, the zoning board case raised questions of high relevance for residents. In early years, when space seemed unlimited, the “rights” either of a community or of private property owners to open space were not contested. Instead, school programs, policies and budgets were the focal point of bitter disputes among residents who saw in the school system a means of determining the township’s future direction. As long-term residents remark, the township schools, particularly its single high school, WAS the community, the focal point of township-wide interest and a venue for addressing “larger” issues. Yet in the four-year course of the zoning board debates no school-based issue aroused public attention remotely comparable in intensity or substance as that which transpired between petitioners and objectors. School-based issues covered in the local newspaper during this period which, according to its editor, would once have stirred controversy, barely received notice. In

the following chapter I consider patterns of school engagement in the early suburban and recent periods by way of understanding the shift in types of school engagement.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Local or Nonlocal Relation to Space, and Type of School Engagement

In 1999 the school board sponsored a “Town Meeting” at South Brunswick’s new high school. Members of a panel, including high school students, teachers, parents, the high school principal and outside commentators, were asked to respond to eight questions, the intent being to stimulate a dialogue between panelists and audience members. Among these questions were the following: “Have we lost our sense of identity/community as we have grown so rapidly?,” “How can we regain the trust we used to have?,” “How can we ensure that everyone gets the information necessary to feel part of the common effort and to make informed decisions?,” “What defines excellence in our district?,” “Is it a shared definition in the community?,” and “What is our vision for the next decade?” (Yannacci 1999).

The “Town Meeting” was well advertised, the questions posed provocative. School administrators had advertised the event well ahead of time. A private foundation that awards grants for innovative education practices had provided funding. Yet a mere nine people attended the event on the Saturday morning it was convened, leaving empty the dozens of chairs that had been set up in the high school’s large auditorium, and an elaborate buffet barely touched. What conditions prompted school administrators to convene a “Town Meeting,” and how is the disinterest in this event to be understood?

Rapid population growth, increasing by 46% in the last decade, and in addition, the increasing socioeconomic diversity of the school population that this school system

was seeing would certainly seem cause for efforts to unify constituents of the school community around common goals. District enrollment had expanded from 5,042 in 1994 to over 6,000 by 1999. Such was the increasing diversity of the rapidly growing high school student population that a teacher could observe that there had not been time to adjust. "I see (Asian) Indians, farm kids, kids from inner cities, kids from big houses, old timers' kids...you name it," she remarked during a break she had carved out from her schedule one afternoon. "I don't see any two or more relevant categories" (interview, November 4, 1995).

Change of similar, if not greater, magnitude also confronted residents of the early suburban period. Yet there was then no need for a "Town Meeting." "Locals" and "cosmopolitans" were intensely engaged in school matters, frequently clashing over such issues as the content of school programs and the rationale for budget allocations. Members of these groups upheld strong ideas about how children should be organized and taught and what sorts of school resources were needed for this endeavor. "Locals," for instance, regarded anything beyond a basic architectural design to be an unnecessary frill. When confronted with another school bond issue, a former school board member recalls that the "locals" would say, 'we want a Chevy, we don't need a Cadillac.' We're not Princeton'" (interview, July 7, 1995).

In this early suburban period there was no need to worry about a lost sense of identity or community. Looking back on these early years, residents who have stayed on recall this as a time when there was no doubt that the high school was the very essence of the township community. Place and community were one and the same thing.

Here I examine types of school engagement as displayed in the township's early suburban and "new city" periods. I start with a short-lived yet impassioned debate carried out in 1995, through public pronouncements and letters to the editor of the local paper, between residents defending an "old South Brunswick" and those defending a "new South Brunswick." Interview data are elicited from residents whose offspring either were previously or are currently enrolled in the public schools. I do not consider "withdrawals," the comparatively few residents who send their children to scattered private schools, among these a Catholic school in the township, or those few families who do home schooling, I do not consider those residents who have no attachment to the schools, even as a property value. So also, I omit those whose interest in the public school system has terminated with the graduation of their children from high school. (Anecdotal data suggest that there are many such instances. A resident who grew up in the township describes how his parents' interest in civic affairs dwindled to such an extent after his high school graduation that they went so far as to cancel their subscription to the township newspaper. Eventually they moved away (interview, November, 6, 2007).)

"Old South Brunswick" Versus "New South Brunswick"

No township resident questions the irrefutable evidence of changing times. Nevertheless at least a few residents were startled and even angry at comments made by a school official in 1995. Speaking at a press conference, he announced that the school board was going to make high academic achievement a priority for the first time.

“A lot of (new home) construction in the town is geared more toward the high-income end,” he stated, and he went on to elaborate:

More professionals are moving in, and what used to be a rural community is becoming a highly-dense suburban area. The people moving in now have different expectations for their children.

I see a culture clash in this town...There is a lot about the history and traditions and accomplishments of South Brunswick that we're proud of, that we'll preserve and maintain. But we're going to add to that this high academic focus. (Zeller, 2005)

The official's remarks provoked a letter to the editor of the local paper from Hamilton Acres “pioneers,” clearly outraged at what they regarded as his “elitist” attitudes.

“...Mr. (Jackson) states,” they write,

that there is ‘new home construction geared to the high income end.’ It escapes Mr. Jackson that there are low and moderate priced homes being built here as well. Mr. (Jackson)’s statement infers that the cost of a home is the determinant of what its owners expect from a school system. This is a shamelessly elitist attitude.” (Letter to editor, South Brunswick Sentinel, 1995)

These letter writers further objected to another of the school official's points:

Mr. (Jackson) is quoted as saying ‘more professionals are moving in.’ Obviously Mr. (Jackson) is not aware that before the current wave of residential growth...our community was already home to esteemed professors, artists, teachers, writers, farmers, physicists, clergy, engineers and many other occupations...Professionals aren't moving in, Mr. (Jackson), they have been here all along. We ask, does one's occupation have a bearing upon a family's aspirations for their children's education? We think not, and Mr. (Jackson)'s assumption is unthinking arrogance. (Ibid.).

“Most condescending of all,” they note,

(Jackson) tells us that ‘the people moving in have different expectations for their children.’ What does Mr. (Jackson) think the difference is between the new folks in town and our longer term residents? We need to remind (Jackson) that the long time residents helped – insisted – on creating a school system that was obviously attractive enough to induce him and others to select (this township)...(we) have

worked diligently to build a nationally recognized public education system....we supported the campaigns for budget and referenda approval (an enviable record in Middlesex County)...we encouraged and embraced innovative programs that have brought our schools to prominence, and we have not wavered in that support..." (Ibid.).

Protesting what in their view was Mr. (Jackson)'s divisive characterization of the township population as culturally divided according to an "old South Brunswick" and a "new South Brunswick," these letter writers made an additional point. "Finally," they write,

Mr. (Jackson) is quoted as saying, "If there is a culture clash, it is Mr. (Jackson) who has manufactured it by his divisive and irresponsible pronouncements. When growth began here in the 1950's, both the long-term residents and the new residents worked hard, together, trying to promote a unified and solid community, free of the divisiveness which (Jackson) is promoting....We all have the same goals for our children---We want them to become self-confident, well-rounded, well-educated, successful adults. To suggest that we were not interested in high academic achievement is pure nonsense. (Ibid.)

Speaking for "old South Brunswick," the letter writers were outraged that this school official should imply that owners of housing "on the high income end"---the "big" houses---should have higher academic expectations than other homeowners. Calling attention to the considerable number of "professionals" who populated the township in the early suburban period and to the high educational standards upheld by these residents, they emphasized that their generation was also interested in high academic achievement.

Residents of "Old South Brunswick:" A Local Relation to Space

Those representative of "old South Brunswick" have settlement histories dating back to the township's presuburban and early suburban periods. These self-styled "old timers" view the high school as one of the last vestiges of their community and they want

to defend it. In the estimation of a school official, they are “loud, connected and entrenched” (interview, July 13, 1995). They raised their children in the township and they stay on in the township on purpose. Their defense of what was once in their view a “nationally recognized public education system,” initiated by the urban progressives of Hamilton Acres and eventually endorsed by “locals,” is the last gasp of this shrinking minority of residents.

Forging a School System

In early suburban days the Hamilton Acres “pioneers” arrived to find themselves in a veritable “Sahara Desert.” The rural school system was highly localized. Each board member was assigned as overseer to small grade schools serving the rural hubs. School authorities worked to satisfy the State of New Jersey’s mandate to provide a “thorough and efficient education” by ensuring that they knew where every child in the district was academically, down to the particular page of the particular text. Confronted with what seemed to them to be backward school practices, and the necessity to accommodate a rapidly expanding school population, the progressive-minded activists of Hamilton Acres (estimated by one “old timer” to be a relatively small but well-organized and vocal group) embarked on an effort to revamp the schools.

“The most important of our efforts has been directed toward improving the local school system,” observe authors of an editorial entitled “Pilgrim’s Progress” that was featured in an issue of the Hamilton Acres News.

A rapid increase in the school population has brought urgent problems. To avoid the overcrowded classrooms and double sessions so often a concomitant

of this kind of growth, we have supported building programs designed to maintain class sizes at recommended levels. We have urged higher teachers' salaries and programs for improving and broadening educational services to our youngsters. To reinforce these goals, we have supported (board) candidates who we felt shared these objectives. ((Hamilton Acres) News, June, 1962)

Proud advocates of decidedly nontraditional views, the new suburban activists had not only opted for a new lifestyle and modernist architecture, they also endorsed progressive school ideologies and practices then considered to be cutting edge. "We were way on the edge...from the city, liberal, and we put a great value on education," explains one of these residents (interview, January 10, 1998). These suburbanites believed that children should be availed of the best possible education, as did their parents' generation, but in addition they insisted that learning should be fun. Moreover, they were convinced that students would learn more readily through direct hands-on manipulation of materials in the classroom. "Our parents wanted the three R's," observes Ms. Higgins, a retired principal of one of the township's elementary schools and one of the "pioneers" who stayed on, "but we expected children to like school, for it to be fun. We didn't fuss about test scores. We were interested in positive attitudes" (interview, February 7, 1996).

Looking back on these years, these residents differentiate themselves from the next waves of suburbanites. Ms. Higgins points out that whereas Hamilton Acres parents got to work at "improving" the schools, those following in their wake expected the schools to perform a service. As she puts it:

The attitude was, 'Let's get together to improve the schools.' We didn't expect before-and after-school programs, buses and baby care. We had the idea that we had to put up with teachers that might not be great. But parents would offer to supplement school programs by doing things in school. And they also had classes

in their houses after school like dance and gymnastics. (Ibid.)

The Schools Put the Town on the Map

South Brunswick's first high school was constructed in 1960. After what one Hamilton Acres resident recalls as a "strong fight" with the "locals" for majority representation on the school board, the newcomers succeeded in installing a school superintendent in 1962 whose progressive ideals matched their own. Eventually, a unified, ideologically cohesive school system was forged, replacing the once-scattered and highly localized mini-schools of the presuburban era. In a seemingly placeless place with no distinguishing history and no Main Street, township schools produced a first-time reputation for South Brunswick as a forward-looking community. The school district was selected as a training site for student teachers, for instance. Some elementary classrooms were restructured as ungraded (meaning that children of different ages and grouped in the same classroom worked through three years of curriculum at their own speed), the district had a program for children of migrant families who came from Florida every year, and the school had an outdoors program that took a few high school students to Utah in the summer.

By 1975 the developer of the next large-scale housing development capitalized on this reputation by citing the township schools in his promotional material. In a folio advertising "masterfully crafted, architecturally superior homes," a Saturday Review article is cited praising the township's "superior school system" and declaring the township to be a place where education "is exciting, daring and fun" (Harrison 1970, 66).

Commonality Between "Locals" and "Cosmopolitans"

The early suburbanites recall depending upon local residents for needed services such a house repair, landscaping and delivery of vegetables and dairy products. Nevertheless, the cultural and political divide between these two groups was pronounced. (A former “local,” a member of a farming family, recalls how the early suburbanites displayed the same elitist attitudes that they themselves now criticize the “recent arrivals” as having. In his estimation these “pseudo intellectuals” regarded themselves as the “intelligentsia” and the farmers as “land rich but dumb” (interview, May 24, 1999). When he was running for a township office, he relates how some of these homeowners “slammed the door” in his face and he recounts with amusement all the new ideas they had about education. Implying that they had some growing up to do, he recalls how in later years one of the advocates of then-cutting-edge educational practices admitted to him that some of these ideas were “not so great” (Ibid.).

Despite their initial polarization, the “locals” and “cosmopolitans” did share certain things in common, although they did not realize it at the time. Both of these homeowner groups were joiners. They came out to vote on school bonds and referendums. They served together on fire departments and rescue squads. After much debate and at considerable cost they established the township’s first high school. They lived through the 24-year “fiefdom” of a charismatic school superintendent, a person they describe as someone who was either “loved or hated” but who cared deeply about children. Finally, these eventual “stayers” held little regard for people they considered to be upwardly mobile status seekers.

When these “stayers” compare the South Brunswick as they knew it to its present-

day incarnation they point out that this was a small town community. One of the superintendent's recollections, offered during one of our lengthy conversations, underscores how small and personalized this community was. "I knew practically every kid in the system," he recalls with amusement. "One time a principal told me about a problem with a boy who missed a lot of school. I drove to the boy's house, found him in bed...picked him up and drove him to school!" (Interview, April 21, 2004).

The School System as a Bridging Institution

The high school that took shape in the early suburban period was envisioned by residents as offering a niche for everyone and desisting from privileging one group over another. It was a bridging institution, its programs epitomizing a "no walls" attitude, articulated with such clarity by petitioners in the zoning board case. When the new progressive-minded superintendent took charge, tracking, as practiced in the presuburban era, was eliminated. Advanced placement classes were only gradually introduced, and then at the behest of residents arriving in later years. For younger students, Gifted and Talented classes were not introduced, and they exist in a current minimal form only by state mandate. In addition, this school district was among New Jersey's first to fund a full-day Kindergarten program, an expensive budgetary allocation, which, as one parent explains it, was deemed acceptable because it benefited all children and not just a few.

A Standard of Excellence

Excellence had specific meaning in this school era. It was explicitly *not* regarded as something measurable by test scores or college admission but rather by the extent to which students were able to realize their individual talents. As the now-retired superintendent of this period notes,

The schools are responsible for the physical, emotional, social and educational needs of every youngster to their full capacity. If they did that then there wouldn't be any question about excellence. Excellence should be helping youngsters to become whatever they want to become. Each student has some innate ability. The job of the school is to determine what that ability is, to work with the child to determine their strengths. College is not essential. It's not the beginning and the end of everything.
(interview, April 21, 2004)

College As One Option Among Many

College was not considered essential by members of this school community. Neither was it ruled out. Some "locals" still had farms and small businesses to pass on to their children. Others, seeing an end to these livelihoods, were beginning to accept college as a next step. They valued practical, hands-on acquisition of skills, such as the ability to repair cars. Residents note, however, that these skills were more often used to further hobbies than as preparation for a future vocation. On the other hand, "bios" of local candidates running for township offices (all of them male) appearing in issues of *The Hamilton Acres News* from 1957 to 1964 suggest that a number of "locals" had attended institutions of higher learning, most of which were located in New Jersey.

For the highly educated "cosmopolitans," a de-emphasis on college, particularly a "name" college or university, was in keeping with a stance common among "way on the

edge” liberals of the 1960's and 1970's. Adamant egalitarians and anti-elitists, these “cosmopolitans” insisted on the co-equal value of vocational and academic directions, even though a number of these “professionals” had themselves acquired advanced degrees at “name” colleges. “The upwardly mobile want more status,” explained a Hamilton Acres “pioneer” during one of our visits, by way of explaining distinctions between “old” and “new” South Brunswick. “They want their kids to have high status jobs and education, but actually where people go to school doesn’t really matter much” (interview, July, 2000). In this woman’s opinion it is the absence of a drive for status and upward mobility that distinguishes “old South Brunswick” from “new South Brunswick.” Proudly pointing out that she and her friends were decidedly not upwardly mobile, she emphasizes that it is not that she and her neighbors were under-educated and had no recourse but to stay put. She has a master’s degree from Columbia University and is a public health consultant. Her husband is a history professor. They find their work immensely satisfying, she says, but not, she emphasizes, for any status it might bestow.

Unintended Inequities

“Ranking and tracking contributes to a ‘no one else counts but myself’ attitude,” observes the former superintendent during one of our conversations. Still, despite efforts to create an equitable space, it seems that there were unintended inequities. A work/study program at the high school initiated as a solution for chronic over-crowding had students working one day a week at off-school sites. Some students were launched toward their future vocations in fields such as accounting and journalism. Resourceful parents were

sometimes able to arrange stimulating internships for their offspring by tapping into their own networks. Parents of one student, for example, arranged a rudimentary research position for their daughter at a pharmaceutical company. In the meantime, other students sometimes ended up in less rewarding, even menial, jobs. “Someone worked on a horse farm changing manure,” grumbles an “old timer,” “...someone else pumped gas at a gas station and this happened rather than giving in to double sessions” (interview, November 15, 1999).

Foreshadowing the School Expectations of “New South Brunswick”

Sentiments fueling the drive for “high academic achievement” that are found among those representative of “new South Brunswick” were foreshadowed in the expectations of homeowners drawn to the township’s second large-scale housing development, launched in 1975. To recall, developers had enticed housing consumers with the promise of “architecturally superior homes” and an “innovative school system.” Unlike the Hamilton Acres homeowners, they arrived at a time when the school system was already well established. In the estimation of Ms. Higgins, the retired principal previously quoted, this wave of “recent arrivals” differed from Hamilton Acres residents. They were “two-car families,” she says. “They purchased (comparatively) big houses on decent sized lots, and they came from places other than New York City” (interview, February 7, 1996). (A bigger house in this period was approximately 1600 square feet as opposed to a basic 1400-square-foot ranch.) Of colonial and split-level design, this housing appealed to homeowners of more conventional tastes than those displayed by the

owners of the Hamilton Acres ranches.

While homeowners of this next settlement layer were attracted to the idea of educational programs that were “exciting, innovative and fun,” they proved unwilling to deviate from the academic goals and teaching styles of a more conventional education. In 1975 a new elementary school opened, meant to accommodate the expanding student population. “This was the height of the ‘open education’ movement,” Ms. Higgins recalls, “and the school was created as a ‘no walls’ school having the most progressive-minded teachers...

The classrooms were a mess. The teachers were idealistic and often disorganized. The parents were upset. They weren’t there because of cheap housing. Some of them had already owned housing, they didn’t come directly from New York City as had the Hamilton Acres people. These were two car families. They had a little more money. They were more upwardly mobile, more concerned about high school and college...and whereas Hamilton Acres people wanted their kids to have proper jobs, the newer people wanted them to earn good money and go to the best prep schools and colleges.” (Interview, February 7, 1996)

As are the “recent arrivals” of the “new city,” this earlier wave of “recent arrivals” was not integrated into the community forged by “locals” and “cosmopolitans.” (Some of these residents stayed on and did become integrated into the network of “old timers.” Others who have stayed on maintained the small network of friends they established when they first moved to South Brunswick.) At least in the early years of their residency, the school expectations and type of participation displayed by these “recent arrivals” were not modulated by the norms of the township community. More often approaching the school as individuals advocating for their own offspring, they viewed excellence as the ability of the schools to provide a strong academic program, with admission to highly rated colleges and universities the goal.

To Hamilton Acres residents it seemed that this next wave of homeowners consisted of status seekers who cared only about themselves and not the community. “When I was at Hawthorne Elementary,” Ms. Higgins observes, “the (new) parents acted with only themselves in mind. When they’d come to me with a request for their child I’d say, ‘We have to think of the whole community.’ But these parents would say, ‘I don’t care about the others!’” (Ibid.).

The observations of Ms. Higgins find corroboration in the recollections of a parent who moved to the township from Brooklyn in 1979. She recalls going into the principal’s office “all the time” during the period that her younger son was in second through eighth grades (interview, spring, 1996). She describes herself as a stay-at-home mom at the time. Her husband has a managerial position with a market research company. Her children attended the school with open classrooms, and this parent is still clearly exasperated at the memory of the disorder that she felt she found there. As for what she did about this problem, she recounts how parents in her housing development first talked together about what they viewed as problems with the school and then went in individually to complain to the principal, mainly about various teachers or work levels which they considered too low. (By contrast, the accounts of former “cosmopolitans” who stayed on suggest that they were engaged in more collaborative efforts to effect change, through such activities as volunteering in the classrooms, disseminating progressive educational ideas in their newsletter, and bringing in the progressive-minded school superintendent.) “The principal would ‘yes’ you,” this parent exclaims with annoyance, “and then she’d do what she wanted.” She tells of her frequent phone calls to

high school counselors in frustrated efforts to get her younger son transferred into an Advanced Placement class and of her futile efforts to get her older high school-aged son's classroom misbehavior pardoned during the time her children progressed through high school (Ibid.). As she recounts these episodes she clearly finds it acceptable and even necessary to have put her interests first.

Transition to a "New City" School Era: The Late 1980's

The retirement, in 1986, of the superintendent brought in by Hamilton Acres residents marked the end of the township's progressive school era. Its 24-year duration is a testament to the close correspondence of its programs to constituents' values. "It can take twenty years to build up a district and two years to destroy it," observes this superintendent (interview, April 21, 2004). Yet he also acknowledges that many of the programs he instituted would have been nearly impossible to implement given the growing competition among school districts and the constraints of state regulation which materialized after his retirement. "The superintendent can still be up and around," he muses, "but now he has far less decision-making power" (Ibid.).

By the late 1980's, several events converged to distinguish a new era for township schools. A surge in housing construction and an expansion of the job market in the wider region found the township population expanding 51% from 1980 to 1990 and 46% in the following decade. South Brunswick was no longer a small town. A post-industrial economy challenged schools to prepare students for less assured futures in a competitive market place. "The world that our children will be entering has changed," stated a board

member during her defense of the district's goal of academic excellence, noting that when she grew up in Hamilton Acres "the high school students worked on their family's farm or in 'Mom and Pop' shops after graduation" (Central Post, 1995). (Projecting an image of "old South Brunswick" conforming to "new South Brunswick" perceptions, this board member obscured the fact that farmers were already seeing an end to the viability of family-run farms in the late 1950s and that the former "cosmopolitans," most of whose offspring went on to college, are also representative of "old South Brunswick.")

Residents of "New South Brunswick:" A Nonlocal Relation to Space

For residents who moved to the township starting in the mid-1980's, South Brunswick is an indistinguishable part of a sprawling landscape. The stretches of open space and farmland that formed what Hamilton Acres residents experienced as a "Sahara Desert" have given way to all varieties of housing developments and commercial installations. South Brunswick does not look like a distinct place to these residents. So also, for those whose relation to space is nonlocal, South Brunswick is not a community.

In a milieu where prospective homeowners have no easy access to word-of-mouth knowledge of a municipality, district Report Card data, produced annually by the Department of Education of the State of New Jersey, are an invaluable source of knowledge. Report Card data, including SAT scores, teacher/pupil ratios, languages spoken at home, and college admission and high school drop-out rates, are linked to District Factor Group (DFG) data, which groups districts in the state according to socio-

economic characteristics. Comparisons can then be drawn between similar districts. For a municipality such as South Brunswick that has no outstanding historical or cultural characteristics, Report Card provide a singular means of identity. The achievement of its students is its one “product.”

Report Card Data as a Measure of Place

Township officials are keenly aware of the significance of Report Card and DFG data. “If the Report Card scores were too low the community would be outraged because the desirability of the community is related to the schools,” explains a school administrator (interview, March 30, 2004). “People ask us, ‘Why aren’t the SAT scores of our students as high as the SAT scores in these other districts?’” says a school administrator. “The state compares you to other districts like you, not equivalent to you, for purposes of gathering socio-economic data on school districts throughout the state” (Ibid.). “According to these measures, South Brunswick ranks in the second to highest group of districts in New Jersey,” he adds. “Within this group of 101 districts our district is second from the bottom in terms of per capita income (\$150,000 in 2004), and the top district in this same group has a per capita income of \$750,000.” The schools have no say in this” (Ibid.). (While his numbers are too high, his comment reflects his perception.) (Year 2000 DFG data show 6.7% of residents having no high school education, 72.5% of residents having some college, a median family income of \$86,891, and a poverty rate of 3.1%.)

Types of School Engagement

Early Suburban Period: Those residents who were around when the high school was regarded as virtually synonymous with community continue to refer to the large, geographically amorphous township as a “town,” their designation clearly reflecting a strong local orientation. This was a time when the high school was envisioned not as a launching pad but as a place that held onto its own, a time when the school district was regarded by residents as a “fiefdom” and members of this school community seized the opportunity available to them to push for programs befitting what they believed their community, and their students, were about. In keeping with the vision of an inclusive “no walls” space, tracking had been abolished in the early suburban era. Gifted and Talented programs were not introduced, and a costly all-day Kindergarten was initiated with the intention of benefiting all children and not a few. The spirit of this period is imparted in an editorial appearing in an edition of the Hamilton Acres News in 1963. Referring to a high school evaluation, an editor wrote:

The purpose of the (evaluation) program is not to rate the school against a hypothetical ‘ideal’ school. Instead, our administration and faculty work out their own philosophy and objectives in accordance with the needs of the students of our community. The evaluation determines how well the school meets those needs. ((Hamilton Acres) News, September 10, 1963).

This sense of a single overarching community and emphasis on the importance of a philosophy and objectives tailored to the specific needs of South Brunswick’s own high school students encapsulates a spirit informing the type of engagement found among residents of “old South Brunswick.” It is this level of engagement that the organizers of the “Town Meeting” were attempting to generate. The questions they raised were in fact

similar to those underlying the zoning board debates: Who are we? Where are we headed, and What sort of place is this? But whereas the zoning board debates galvanized a wide spectrum of residents for a prolonged period, the “Town Meeting” was a non-event.

“New City” Period: Joe Turner, the editor of a local newspaper does not find the minimal turnout at the “Town Meeting” surprising. He himself is a product of the school system and is intimately acquainted with the schools and the township. “People are not focused on South Brunswick as a community,” he observes, “and this is partly because the town is more diverse (interview, November 6, 2007). He points out that while the population has grown, his newspaper circulation has not grown. As he sees it, this is because people are not connected enough to see the need to buy a paper.

In Joe’s estimation the high school is not a center for a lot of people and there is no reason for it to be a center. People are engaged with school issues, he says, but they only get involved “for selfish reasons,” when their kids are directly involved. He finds this pattern playing out with other issues. “No one shows up to discuss the master plan for the township, the projection of what the community is supposed to look like,” he points out. “The council writes up the plans. When they turn into a reality then 60 people show up” (Ibid.). He finds this pattern playing out in residents’ struggle several years earlier against a developer’s proposed plans to build Metroplex, billed by the developer as a town center which was to include a train station. When it seemed that these plans might turn into a reality, three to four hundred people showed up at the hearings. He also sees parallels to the zoning board case as another instance of people coming out only when they are directly involved.

In Joe's experience, people are not as interested in weighing the long-term consequences or the philosophical implications of an issue as they were in earlier years. He recollects a time when a police-in-the-schools program which was proposed a few years earlier. He himself felt that this was indoctrination into automatically accepting authority and those distinctions could be blurred between police officer, counselor and teacher. It seems to him that in earlier years residents would have debated this issue (interview, April 7, 2000). But despite his best efforts he was unable to generate a response from the then-current readership.

Through Connections to the Schools; A Pull to Community

While Joe observes that new residents are not focused on a township community, he notes at the same time that through connections to schools there is a "pull to community" (interview, November 6, 2007). However, for those "recent arrivals" whose relation to space is likely to be nonlocal this "pull to community" through the schools is something quite different than it was for the early suburbanites.

For residents of an earlier settlement layer the schools were sites for collaborative engagement. They had time for this level of engagement and they were oriented to a local space as a small town. Neighbors were well acquainted with each other. At the time there were few, if any other, child-focused activities in which residents could have involved them. All residents recognized the need for a school system which would accommodate their dramatically expanding population, and in this period residents had greater latitude to shape a school program which conformed, not to "ideal" standards, but

to community values.

Residents representative of “new South Brunswick” arrive at a time when the schools are well established. They are not focused on South Brunswick as a community and they are more likely to expect that schools should deliver a service. “We don’t have the same constituents,” observes a high school teacher. “The high school is still looked at as a center---there really is no other center here---but it’s a different sort of center. People expect us to provide all the services, to solve drinking problems, depression, and they blame us when it’s not working” (interview, June 12, 2006). Dual income commuters are less likely to have the time to develop neighborhood ties. Given the relatively recent residency of a great number of township dwellers, they may not know their neighbors. Moreover, mandated redistricting, requiring socio-economic balanced school populations, means that children are often bussed out of their neighborhoods to appropriate schools. Friendships made at school are not necessarily reinforced through neighborhood ties, making it more difficult for school families to get to know each other. (For those residents having the time and inclination, participation in the PTA’s can offset this difficulty.)

Given the circumstances in which many parents and caregivers of a recent settlement layer find themselves, a somewhat different type of engagement in the schools is evident. Parents of younger school-age children reportedly turn out in great numbers for school events, particularly those requiring no further commitment, but they are less likely to get involved in long-term, substantive issues as were raised at the “Town Meeting.” Residents note that back-to-school nights are packed with parents, for instance,

and there was standing room only at an arts event (in 2007) featuring the work of 1000 children. This is in contrast to the sparse attendance at the “Town Meeting.”

By contrast to the high interest displayed for events featuring the work of younger students, residents reports that the turnout for high school sports and theatrical events is tepid. While this is not an uncommon pattern it may also reflect the high school’s diminished role as the felt center of a township community, its programs emblematic of a collective identity. Residents note, for instance, that team spirit for South Brunswick’s high school teams is low compared to other municipalities in the region. “At a soccer game we finally made it to the state tournament level,” reports a parent (interview, July 29, 1996). “We played another team. They brought in two bus loads of kids, including cheerleaders. Other teams have a lot of cheerleaders. But we have only six cheerleaders and they’re abysmal. They can hardly cheer. There is a strong spirit for football but in this town sports don’t support each other” (Ibid.). So, too, the audience for high school theatrical events is apparently minimal, composed primarily of the family members of the actors.

The New Main Street

Saturdays at South Brunswick’s athletic fields are “the new Main Street,” residents say, and it is here that through the schools there is a pull to community (interview, April 10, 1995). Referred to as “the dumps” in earlier years, these once-underused fields are now the “big thing” in South Brunswick, teeming with parents and care givers who come out to socialize and root for children’s teams. (Residents remark

that there were no such organized sports activities in the 1970's and that this may be due to the fact that kids could roam around freely then.) At the soccer fields parents meet up with other parents whose children attend the same school. As they socialize around the coffee urns, ties are developed that are often missing in neighborhoods. It is in this way, Joe observes, that people may eventually get involved in a township community.

In this decentered “new city” landscape, the school is a crucial social connector, drawing people together in informal networks and serving as a means of geographically-based friendships and eventual ties to the township as a civic entity. People do not have to be joiners. They can participate in the “new Main Street” whenever they wish. This is an age-specific Main Street, however, limited to those residents whose offspring are eligible for the teams. Parents reportedly feel a tremendous loss when their children are no longer eligible for the teams, to such an extent that some apparently maintain this Saturday ritual long after their children have moved on.

A Comparison of Resident Groups

There is no significant difference between the parents representative of “old South Brunswick” and of “new South Brunswick” in terms of interest in their children’s success, but there are differences in their types of school engagement. For residents of an earlier settlement layer, the defenders of the educational practices of “old South Brunswick,” South Brunswick was and is their community. The high school was its center, envisioned as a non-elitist social world-in-microcosm, offering a niche for all students, “local” and “cosmopolitan” alike. Progressive school ideologies deemphasizing

grades and college trajectories as an ultimate goal were in keeping with national sentiments during this period. School programs expressed the collective values of this township community. Questions bearing on social and philosophical implications of school programs, long-term goals and standards of excellence, as were posed at the “Town Meeting,” were of utmost importance to these residents. By addressing such questions these residents were grappling with the “larger questions” of who they were and where they, as members of a new community, where they were headed. School was central to their definition of place and community as one and the same thing.

For residents of the recent settlement layer, place and community are disconnected. They are not focused on the township as a community and they do not view the high school as its center. There is greater likelihood that these residents are connected to multiple “centers” or communities, and loose affiliations of friends and relatives dispersed throughout the region and beyond. Residents representative of “new South Brunswick” may be members of the PTA, they make every effort to attend school events, and they support their children’s school success as measured by state and national norms. But questions such as those raised at the “Town Meeting,” and the very concept of a “Town Meeting,” are of little relevance.

Life Ways of “New South Brunswick”

The life ways of Ted and Susan Erickson, parents of two children, ages 8 and 12, are not uncommon among those residents representative of “new South Brunswick.” Ted is an editor at a publishing house in New York City. Susan runs a remedial skills

program for high school students in a northern New Jersey city. Ted commutes approximately three hours each day; Susan commutes for about an hour and a half.

The Ericksons moved to South Brunswick four years earlier. They are “recent arrivals” in the township and second-generation residents of the region. Both of the Ericksons grew up in suburban municipalities in New Jersey, as did their parents. They received degrees from Rutgers University and Ryder College. Before marriage they maintained households in different municipalities in New Jersey. The “new city” developed and expanded around them as they came of age. It is nothing “new” for them. Instead it is a taken-for-granted way of life.

In the new development in which they live they exchange occasional friendly greetings with a couple of neighbors. They know the makes of the vehicles their neighbors drive and they know the occupations of some of their neighbors. They have only a vague idea of where some of these neighbors actually work. Otherwise, they barely see their neighbors. This does not mean that the Ericksons are isolates. In fact they are joiners, immersed in long-standing networks in the wider region. They are members of a church located in the township that draws on a regional membership. Once a month Susan joins forces with old friends to volunteer at a homeless shelter in another municipality. As the member of a local branch of a national conservation organization, Tom donates a few hours a month toward the production of a bimonthly newsletter. The Ericksons are beginning to establish friendships with parents of their children’s classmates whom they run into at South Brunswick’s soccer fields every Saturday. Susan attends PTA meetings when she has the time, finding this a valuable way to get to know

teachers on a first-name basis. Disconnection from a civic entity is no loss to the Ericksons.

Other events consume the Ericksons' weekend time, pulling them away from their neighborhood and out of the township. One afternoon they are off to celebrate a great aunt's birthday in northern New Jersey. On another weekend they meet up with Ted's old college friends and their children for a barbecue. Their 12-year-old son shows an increasing interest in hanging out with his own friends. The problem for the Ericksons is that there are no suitable places to hang out that are reasonably close to their house. There is a small music store in the vicinity, but there is no central downtown, no bookstore or the equivalent of a "soda pop shop." Instead their son and his friends head for outlying malls or to Main Streets in Princeton or New Brunswick. They enlist their parents for drop-offs and pick-ups. The Ericksons' younger child and her friends have play dates. Since her classmates live within a wide school catchment area the facilitation of these play dates requires more driving. That the Ericksons spend many hours behind the wheel is not of much consequence to them. These second-generation suburbanites say they are used to this.

South Brunswick itself is not a community for the Ericksons or for a great number of other "recent arrivals." This is a "new city" region undergoing rapid change, one where a majority of residents are "recent arrivals." Attachment to South Brunswick as a civic entity may develop with time for some of these residents. In fact, long-term residents note that the township is never at a loss for new residents who want to fill positions on the school board or the town council.

School achievement is of the utmost importance to the Ericksons. They make sure that their children complete homework assignments and school projects. They attend parent-teacher conferences and rearrange their schedules so as to be able to attend events in which their children's work is showcased. If they have any concerns they approach the school as independents. They are unlikely to put "community" interests before their own, for "community" does not mean anything to them in this context. Their goal is the academic success and well-being of their offspring.

Birthday Parties That Never Happened

Young children's birthday parties are traditionally local neighborhood affairs. Yet instances of birthdays that never happened, reported in passing during the course of this fieldwork, point to a diminishing of local ties, for at least some young children. Until classroom teachers were permitted to compile "birthday lists" of those children whose parents consented to having their addresses and phone numbers distributed, the young birthday child had to pass out birthday invitations in school. With every classroom consisting of a state-mandated socio-economic balance of children from a wide catchment area, and with commuting parents living in different regions of the township less likely to know each other, the birthday child's parents could only hope that the invitations would arrive at their intended destinations.

Given this invitation delivery mode, it is not surprising that some birthday parties never happened. Two separate householders recount just such an occurrence. The party-givers sat waiting for some time before realizing that no one was going to arrive at the

birthday party. Parents surmised that either the invitations never made it home or the other parents did not realize the importance of calling in an R.S.V.P. One parent of a second-grade child recalls a positive experience. Children actually did attend her child's birthday. "My child is very resourceful," she explains. "She goes out and asks her friends for their phone numbers and calls them up" (interview, June 29, 1995). It is striking that the birthday child's parents and those of the invitees did not know each other well enough to communicate directly and it is striking as well that the invitees seem not to have been neighborhood children. These children, it seems, are learning to negotiate the life ways of a nonlocal world.

CONCLUSION

A search for place in a sprawling, spatially fragmented landscape is what first stimulated this inquiry. The seemingly endless hodgepodge of shopping malls, office complexes and housing developments connected by intricately linked transportation networks produced the appearance of an entirely placeless place. Yet contrary to my impressions, the residents I had occasion to meet before I began this study appeared entirely satisfied with and in fact well adapted to this sprawling “new city” space. It was my interest in reconciling my own conceptions of place with the perceptions of these residents, in better understanding the vicissitudes of place and how residents make a place for themselves in such a landscape, that formed my deeper motivation for this exploration.

First, a few words about sprawl. This landscape is not a haphazard jumble of spatial uses, a “geography of nowhere” (Kunstler 1994), as sprawl’s critics would have it. As this examination of South Brunswick suggests, this seemingly impersonal space is fractured into separate political entities, each of which is a work in progress, the object of much deliberation. In New Jersey, where “home rule” empowers residents of its 566 municipalities to make land use determinations, these spatial jurisdictions exhibit distinctions that are not readily apparent to the outside observer but that are glaringly obvious to those residents who concern themselves with such matters. In these municipalities, zoning board meetings stand in for the town meetings of yesteryear, as residents engage in the highly politicized process of balancing one use against another,

and one set of values against another. I emphasize that this is an ongoing process, for as residents debate how to maintain quality of life, how to stem growth and preserve a semblance of place, and how to attract revenue-generating ratables, space gets reworked. An area once zoned agricultural is zoned industrial, an area zoned industrial is reconverted to residential, higher density is designated for one region and lower density for another. (“First my farm was zoned Agricultural,” muses a third generation resident. “Then it was zoned Industrial, and now it’s zoned Residential. We change our requirements to suit developers” (interview, November 29, 1999)). The landscape produced through such a process has a unique story that can be told only by the residents themselves.

Additionally, there exists an aesthetic of sprawl. On their individualized tours of the township, residents have shown off the startling variety to be found in their landscape, a mixed use “rurburbia.” On these tours I have learned to see this spatial heterogeneity as a welcome relief from the “plain vanilla” homogeneity found in certain other neighboring municipalities. I venture to say that in their appreciation of what some of these residents show for the variety to be found in their township landscape they join an aesthetic vanguard, an “anti-anti-sprawl” contingent who see in this indigenous American landscape a lesson to be learned for planners and architects. In *Learning From Las Vegas*, Venturi, Brown and Izenour (1991, 3) urge the casting aside of conventional aesthetics for a nonjudgmental look at the landscape in the spirit of gaining insight from the “commonplace.” In *Sprawl: A Compact History*, Robert Bruegmann (2005, 154) notes that urban change castigated by one generation often ends up as an accepted norm

for the next generation and the “cherished heritage of the one after that.” In corroboration of Bruegmann’s observation, a few Hamilton Acres “stayers” have in fact noted that their offspring are looking forward to inheriting their “vintage” houses someday.

Turning to township space---mammoth windowless warehouses edged by farm fields, a cluster of “big” houses jutting out beyond a fringe of trees, owner-enhanced capes and ranches---these and other features of the landscape bespeak a democratic people’s space-in-progress. Messy and haphazard in appearance perhaps, it is a people’s space nonetheless, the evidence of considerable deliberation and conflict among those upholding “walls” and “no walls” moralities.

Finally, when I have asked township residents how they typify this region, they usually employ the term “sprawl,” but they do so in a non-judgmental fashion. For these residents sprawl is not a problem that has to be solved but a taken-for-granted fact. It is not a “collective bad” (Putnam 2000, 214). They live where they do on purpose. What in fact they do view as problematic is the shrinkage of open space, crucial to the fulfillment of their visions of place. For the locally oriented, space is necessary for the perpetuation of community institutions, both expression and means of place. For householders who are not oriented to a traditionally-defined civic entity, space is necessary for the perpetuation of home base. With time, some of these residents may participate in civic life. For the time being, however, place is this home base.

Urbanist Perspectives

The question of how and to what extent the built environment (or material reality) and/or social reality is determinative of behavior has been a subject of ongoing debate among urban analysts both of early suburban and of “new city” periods. On one hand are those who view the built environment as having a determinative effect on social life, whether positive or negative. On the other hand are those who argue that aspects of social reality have a more direct effect on behavior.

An anti-sprawl stance currently popular recalls a post-World War II position of urban intellectuals who derided tract housing developments as aesthetic blights that bred a conformist life style. Historian and architectural critic Lewis Mumford (1961 486) encapsulated the views of these critics in his description of early post World War II suburbs as “a multitude of uniform unidentifiable houses...”

In the mass movement into suburban areas a new kind of community was produced...a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless prefabricated foods...conforming in every respect to a common mold. (1961, 486)

Studies of upper middle class suburban communities produced in this same period lent credence to the critiques of suburbia and contributed to a “suburban myth” presuming separate urban and suburban life styles. In actuality, influential studies of the period were not, as their authors implied, studies of suburban life ways but rather studies of upper middle class communities. As O’Connor (1985, 391) points out, *Crestwood Heights: A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life* did not, as its authors suggested,

represent a generic suburban culture. So too, William Whyte's *The Organization Man* did not foretell harbingers of the future, but in fact offered a detailed study of residents of an upper middle class community employed in the corporate sector (Ibid.).

Studies of new suburban communities, implemented as rejoinders to the "suburban myth," (Berger 1960; Gans 1967) demonstrated that a supposed suburban culture varied according to the class composition of the population. Emphasizing the varied lower, middle and upper middle class composition of the new suburban community of Levittown, New Jersey, Gans (1982) found that "new towns" such as Levittown were but "old social structures" playing out on new land. Early suburbanites were simply carrying out old ways in a new setting. Countering imagery of a suburban landscape as geographically uniform, geographer Peter Muller (1981) pointed to a suburban "mosaic" including industrial and/or residential, working class, middle class and also upper middle class suburbs. But as Nicolaidis (2006, 97) observes, despite these and other studies pointing to the social and spatial heterogeneity of suburban regions, critics' ideas of early suburbia as a bland, aesthetically tasteless domain and of conformist suburbanites entered public discourse in the late 1950's and 1960's, and persists in current media representations.

The Determinative Effects of the Built Environment or of Social Reality

The "new city" era finds urbanists similarly divided according to their emphasis upon the determinative effects either of the built environment or of social reality. Prominent critics of sprawl are the New Urbanists, a coalition of architects and planners

whose stance bears similarity to the critiques levied by the urban intellectuals who derided tract housing developments. For New Urbanists, sprawl is entirely placeless, a breeding ground for social ills and everything that is wrong with American society. “...for the past fifty years,” observe architects Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck, key proponents of the New Urbanism,

...we Americans have been building a national landscape that is largely devoid of places worth caring about. Soulless subdivisions, residential ‘communities’ utterly lacking in communal life; strip shopping centers, ‘big box’ chain stores, and artificially festive malls set within barren seas of parking; antiseptic office parks...and mile upon mile of clogged collector roads, the only fabric tying our disassociated lives back together. This is growth, and you can find little reason to support it...Once a citizen, you have now become a Nimby (Not In My Backyard). 2000, ix-x)

For New Urbanists “good growth” is realized in the design of a traditional townscape with Main Street that they promote as engendering not only greater livability but also a civic life otherwise missing in the housing subdivision. In this utopian view, the properly designed environment has the power to transform behavior.

The New Urbanism townscape is an owner-proof product of strictly enforced zoning, architectural and planning guidelines. Specifications for type and size of blocks, location of parks and squares, roof pitches, window proportion, porch dimensions and cladding materials are implemented according to principles termed “civic art” (Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck 2000, 134-135), expressive of what New Urbanists assume to be a universal aesthetic. “When buildings fail to define public space at a scale congenial to humans,” observes Kunstler, a proponent of the New Urbanism,

...people cannot *be* there in safety and comfort. They will not walk there. They will not pause and mingle there with other people. They will not communicate there...They will not contribute to a social organism that is larger than

themselves...Such places are therefore profoundly uncivil. They impoverish and diminish us socially and the community pays an enormous price for this incivility in terms of social dysfunction, ruined institutions, and misbehavior. (1996, 39)
 To what extent is the built environment or material reality determinative of

behavior? Countering the premises of those he terms “spatial determinists,” namely, planners and architects, and in an extension of his position vis-à-vis the new suburban communities of the post-World War II era, Gans (2002) argues that the effects brought about by social agents and their actions are more direct than are aspects of physical or “natural” space. Citing for example the dilapidated facilities in which homeless people raise families, he suggests that while this space has behavioral effects, it is because social welfare benefits do not allow homeless people to live in better housing. “Thus,” he concludes, “space almost never has total and direct causal power, but functions as an intervening causal variable” (2002, 330). Additionally, Gans calls for greater attention to the experience of users of space, suggesting that what “model makers” view as distinctive spatial features may vary considerably from the perceptions of its actual users. For users of space, he observes (2002, 336), “economies and politics and locations of relatives, friends and often-used facilities are of greater significance than features observed by spatial researchers.”

User Experience

Gans calls attention to the gap that can exist between the perceptions of “model makers” and those of the actual users of space. Interview data support his observation. For interviewees it is of little significance whether the space they inhabit is a “new city,” a “postsuburb,” or an “edge city.” The space they inhabit is regarded by them as an

expansion of, and even an improvement on, something to which they have long been accustomed. (Looking back on the early suburban period, former “locals” and “cosmopolitans” regard the rural-to-suburban transition as a far more momentous event, signaling entirely new life ways.)

Taking It All into Account

Considering the conditioning power of material or of social realities, I suggest that when it comes to the sorts of places in which people find themselves and/or make for themselves, it may be impossible to suggest a primary determinant. Both the built environment and social space are inseparable aspects of lived reality, deeply implicated in how space becomes place. As Gieryn (2002, 341-343) observes, it all matters. While the spatial configuration of the “new city” encourages a relation to space that is nonlocal and while it depoliticizes, it does not atomize. This same spatial configuration has not diminished ties to a traditionally-defined civic entity for at least some residents, particularly those of earlier settlement layers. Contrary to pronouncements that “community” has become a term largely empty of meaning, a vital local community exists for these residents. Its persistence is due not to minority status, as is often the case, but to institutions that are supported by numbers sufficient to ensure the perpetuation of a common history and a *modus vivendi* of “getting involved and speaking out.” As they demonstrate, Main Street is unnecessary when there are sufficient numbers of locally-oriented residents who are joiners. So, too, Main Street is not necessary for “recent arrivals” whose social networks and group affiliations are distributed in a nonlocal

sphere.

Social reality trumps material reality, it seems. Yet the conditioning power of material reality cannot be discounted. Turning to the case of Princeton Towers, I suggest that the fence between the enclave affordable rentals and the privately-owned housing is no less of a behavioral influence on the occupants of the rental units than are class, economic status, and proximity to or distance from friends and relatives. Asserting a distinction between types of housing, the fence acts as powerfully as any human agent, even though this “effect” may have been unintended by those involved. So, too, I suggest that the “big” houses, the Hamilton Acres ranches and the forested quarter acre are as inseparable an aspect of the social currency between “stayers” and “move ups” as their economic status, (presumed) class backgrounds and personal histories.

The case of the early Hamilton Acres “pioneers” is further demonstration of the power of both social and material reality to condition behavior. These homeowners were self-selected according to architectural style, disposed as urban progressives to see in the ranch-style house possibilities for a socialist version of a modernist life style. As were the Levittowners documented by Gans, they were looking for affordable housing, but in addition they were also looking for community. The stripped-down design of the ranches and the bare lots inspired these homeowners to embark on collective efforts to improve their properties. By so doing they engendered and reinforced a common taste culture among themselves and solidified community ties. As one of South Brunswick’s multi-generation residents observes, the high-density arrangement of Hamilton Acres housing, when compared to the widely dispersed housing of the rural residents, made it easier for

the early suburbanites to mount more effective political campaigns. However, at least several of these suburbanites were already predisposed toward civic action and support of liberal causes through their upbringing in socialist households in New York City. These and countless other aspects of material and social reality conditioned the sort of place these homeowners forged for themselves.

For whom is the New Urbanism Townscape Appealing?

That township residents do not endorse the New Urbanism model is not to deny its widespread appeal. For whom, then, is the New Urbanism model an answer? Discounting those who view such housing primarily as a property value, I suggest that the New Urbanism landscape appeals to housing consumers with some nostalgia for community who do not have preexisting ties in a region and/or who are not joiners. For these residents, the New Urbanism townscape resembles a “real” place. And if they are searching for more than a semblance of place and/or community, the pedestrian-friendly townscape with Main Street beckons with the possibility of casual face-to-face encounters that over time, and with enough regularity, just might develop into long-standing relationships.

Where Does Planning Fit In?

The utopian goals of the New Urbanism model are not easily achieved. Yet this is not to discount the importance of planning and architectural design. But what form would planning take in sprawling landscapes found nationwide, of which South

Brunswick is one example? I offer the following suggestions: Carry out planning not in consultation with a self-selected group but with residents representative of a wide cross-section of the population. In the spirit of learning from the “commonplace,” suspend assumptions of a single best aesthetic. Accept and expand on a heterogeneous mixed-use space as the democratic people’s space that it is. Allow for the affordable fixer-uppers, the mobile homes and the “big” houses without walling them off, even if this does not conform to a conventional application of planners’ principles of “harmonious” and “beneficial” use. Forget any thought toward the design of a single center without first asking the questions, “For whom?” and “For what purpose?” Accept the reality of a multi-centered, spatially fragmented “new city” space, deploying good planning practices and architectural design to augment and enhance preexisting centers of significance to residents. Finally, preserve open space when it is of beneficial use to all residents.

Fundamental Differences in Relation to Space

It all matters. Yet in the “new city” domain, people’s relation to space is fundamentally distinctive. Clearly, space is organized in such a way as to encourage nonlocal ties and discourage local ties. But what difference does this make? Residents may experience greater personal freedom. Freed of pressures to live up to local expectations, freed of ascribed identities and of the necessity to enter into relations with neighbors, a resident can pursue a lifestyle where, as Diana of Princeton Towers puts it, “you can be whatever you want to be.” Such residents may derive satisfaction from social and professional networks extending well beyond the immediate region. But such

freedom comes at the cost of lack of comfort taken from the sense of living in a place where people watch out for each other and where they participate in a civic life.

Interview data suggest that children in particular can be casualties of a nonlocal world. Noting how times have changed, long-term residents remark on the children they see roaming around in housing developments or at nearby strip malls in the evening. They surmise that their commuting parents are not yet home. They themselves do not intervene, as they say they would have in earlier days, because they do not know who the children are or where they live. This scenario is in contrast to the mayoral candidate's recollections of growing up in Hamilton Acres in the 1960's. "...when I was out campaigning for mayor, she muses,

I went door to door...In the evening I could find parents at home and some nannies. Then in my most recent campaign I found mostly nannies and au pairs at the doors. In the evening the parents hadn't come home yet. This is a lot different than when I was growing up (in Hamilton Acres). As soon as things got dark we were all scurrying in. (interview April 26, 2000)

Her experience, of children scurrying home come suppertime after playing with friends, all of whom were clearly anchored in a place-based web of interrelationships, is in dramatic contrast to the experience of children of the "new city" domain for whom some birthday parties never happened.

Nonlocal deployment saps localities of the social capital of the inclusive "bridging" variety (Putnam 2000, 22-23) productive of a common identity around a civic entity. For many residents this is not a loss. They are engaged in their own fulfilling and demanding lives. Interview and anecdotal data suggest that many of these residents are of second- and third-generation lineage in the wider region. Their ties to friends, colleagues

and relatives may easily be more meaningful than any ties they may have in their immediate neighborhood or in South Brunswick. Factor in commuting time and time consumed by participation in ongoing social networks, and these residents are simply not at home very much. “They work to own the houses that they live in and sleep in,” observes an “old timer,” referring to owners of some of the big houses proliferating beyond his property line (interview, May 7, 1997). (As Putnam (2000, 214) observes, “...sprawl takes time. More time spent alone in the car means less time for friends and neighbors, for meetings, for community projects...”) But while this lifestyle may seem alien to the “old timer,” he does not view it as impinging on her own. It is simply noted by him as a novel, and less-than-desirable, way to live. He himself is so deeply embroiled in responsibilities as the member of several community groups that it seems to him that his phone never stops ringing with requests for one thing or another.

Longer term residents see two worlds, one inhabited by an “us” with a “no walls” attitude and the other by a disengaged “them,” some of whom exhibit an emphatic “walls attitude.” The editor of the local paper reports struggling to generate reader response to events that would once have provoked intense scrutiny and letter-writing campaigns. Another resident notes the difficulty in finding recruits for South Brunswick’s volunteer fire departments and rescue squads. It seems to him that when newcomers actually do join up, they are of a different breed than the “regulars,” and that their presence has a destabilizing effect. “The types of people they used to have in town,” he muses, “they lived here all their lives, they worked on farms and they could repair the trucks. The newer people on the squad aren’t as skilled on repairs...they sign up but they’re not

regulars. Now there's not much team spirit. It seems that some of the newer people feel higher than the others. They don't want to do things together" (interview, March 30, 1996).

"Recent arrivals" have an affect on civic life. Nevertheless, a township community persists and will continue to persist as long as there exists a sufficient number of civic minded joiners and institutional centers engendering possibilities for "getting involved and speaking out." Given the rapidity with which this space is changing it is not possible to say whether existing centers will persist or whether they will be replaced by new centers. In the course of this fieldwork, the cooperative preschool, as one such center, has seen its demise. Fire houses and rescue squads are in need of new members and, to judge from the questions raised by the conveners of the "Town Meeting," and the sparse attendance at this event, there is indeed a lost sense of community. Nevertheless, the tenacity with which residents of New Jersey's 566 municipalities hold out for "home rule," despite its budgetary and administrative problems, is evidence of support for local autonomy and identity of place and, at the very least, a sense of (if not engagement in) community as a civic entity. The popularity of the Saturday soccer fields, the new Main Street, is further demonstration of a pull to community.

Place and Community

A common understanding has it that in regions that are suburbanizing, community is largely divorced from place. As Kling, Olin and Poster (1991, 20) observe: "Leisure in Orange County discloses the anonymous face of new social forms in which "community"

is largely a term of real estate advertising, not social reality.” “For suburban dwellers,” Nicolaidis (2006, 97) remarks, “the possibility exists that community has become completely divorced from place.” This indeed is the central assumption of the New Urbanism movement.

Interview data demonstrate that community is indeed divorced from place for an untold number of residents. As observes, “Recent arrivals in any community are less likely to vote, less likely to have supportive networks of friends and neighbors, less likely to belong to civic organizations” Putnam (2000, 204) But those “recent arrivals” interviewed for this study do not view this disconnection from a local entity as problematic. Their lives are not atomized. “Recent arrivals” who are second- and third-generation suburbanites most likely do not have the experience of place, as long-term residents understand it. Interview data also show that in what by all appearances is the most placeless of places, some residents see a town and community that they value above any other. As residents’ rapt engagement in the zoning board case demonstrates, “home rule” offsets the effects of sprawl by creating a public forum centering around local issues. Questions of how dwindling open space should be used, for whom it should be used, and for what purpose, compel people of diverse taste cultures, housing ideologies, and settlement histories to address questions of who “they” are and where they are headed. Those who so involve themselves in such endeavors may well be embarked on early phases of local community formation of a new order in this emergent space.

APPENDIX 1

Methods of Research and Sample Description

The geographical focal point of this study is a municipality selected by reason of an apparent contradiction. While it is exactly the sort of space denounced by critics of sprawl as entirely placeless and in dire need of remediation, a debate featured in the local newspaper, called to my attention when I was searching for a suitable site for field work, indicated this to be a unique and very real place for at least some residents.

As it became evident in later stages of this investigation that municipal units were largely irrelevant for a significant number of residents, I expanded the scope of this inquiry to include reference to a secondary frame of reference---namely, the amorphous “new city.”

Identification of Interviewees

The first of the interviewees I contacted was a defender of “old South Brunswick” who had written a letter to the editor of the local newspaper. This person extended a warm invitation to me to meet with her in her house for further conversation. She turned out to be one of the Hamilton Acres “pioneers,” a self-styled “flaming liberal.” After meeting and conversing with me she recommended to me others of her friends and neighbors. Through snowball sampling I carried out interviews with early Hamilton Acres residents, younger generation residents who participated in the cooperative preschool and/or other civic organizations, and in addition former “locals” (my

designation) of presuburban ancestry. These cross-generational residents were loosely affiliated as members of a township-wide community. By reason of their strong sense of place and position vis-à-vis township history, a township community and its social life, I treated these interviewees as the township's gatekeepers.

Once data collected by snowball sampling reached a point of redundancy, I sought access to other individuals and subgroups in order to develop a broader sense of township life. These included township planners, a member of the zoning board, librarians, two local historians, two leaders of religious organizations, a former principal, a real estate agent, two social workers, a former and a current school board member, the current mayor and two former mayors, a former schools superintendent, a developer and an officer of the local Republican party. These residents displayed wide-ranging levels of knowledge of and connection to the township. For example, one individual maintained a small group of friends and was involved in school politics but otherwise disconnected from township life. Another individual was a member of a watchdog group focused on growth politics in the township. Other residents who had once been deeply engaged in particular township issues, such as affordable housing, had shifted their attention to the same issue or other issues in the wider region. None of these residents were members of a group as cohesive and organized as was the network of early suburbanite activists and other intensely civic-minded residents.

The People Nobody Knew: Visible and Invisible

To fill in a picture of the township, its history and layers of settlement, I

attempted to locate residents whom “nobody” knew, particularly those whom the community-minded residents referred to as “recent arrivals.” Although the rapid population growth of the 1980's and 1990's meant that a considerable number of residents were “recent arrivals,” I was interested in meeting the particular group of “recent arrivals” who attracted the notice of long-term residents. These were owners of the highly visible “big” houses going up in the township. This effort met with little success. These homeowners did not seem to be integrated in neighborhood life, to the extent that it existed, and they were not members of township organizations. I conducted brief phone conversations with two of the 13 homeowners who objected to the proposed use, by the cooperative preschool, of the quarter acre. One of these residents was extremely hesitant about discussing the zoning board case. I was curtly dismissed by the other resident.

Although it is beyond the scope of this inquiry, I also made an effort to meet other residents whom “nobody” knew and whom, in fact, they seemed to want to forget. These were renters, occupants of affordable housing and owners of mobile homes. This effort also met with little success. Through an owner of a mobile home park I met and conducted an interview with the owners of a mobile home. I met one owner of an affordable house who preferred not to take part in an interview.

Interview Mode

I made initial contact with nearly all interviewees by phone, introducing myself as a resident of a neighboring township who was new to the region and who was undertaking a study for a dissertation in sociology about the experience of living in a

region undergoing rapid change. I explained that while a lot was written about such regions, little attention was paid to the experience of the inhabitants themselves. In both the introductory phone call and at the start of every in-depth or focused interview, I assured residents of confidentiality, emphasizing that the names of and identifying information about all persons, and in addition the name of the township, would be changed.

In the final stages of research I realized that necessary inclusion of statistical and historical data, and in addition data from newspaper articles, would reveal the actual township to anyone who cared to pursue this matter. Hence I retained the actual name of the township while changing all identifying information of interviewees and the names of all housing developments.

The response of nearly all individuals I contacted in this manner was positive. In the initial phone call I invited the individual to designate a time and place that was convenient for them. Of the 44 interviewees with whom I conducted in-depth interviews, 31 of these interviewees designated their home as the interview site. Of this group of 31 interviewees, 21 were women and three were men. That a greater number of interviewees selected their home as an interview site points to the near-absence in this landscape of a comfortable “third place” (Oldenberg 1989) such as a café, which might otherwise serve as a bridge between public and private spheres. (The three men who selected their home as an interview site had either held, or were currently holding, public sector positions and were accustomed to conducting interviews. The remaining seven men selected their offices, a firehouse recreation center and a backyard for the interview.)

In-depth interviews lasted up to two hours. The tone was conversational. My role was that of a sympathetic, appreciative and engaged learner. In keeping with the informality of the interview I chose not to formalize the event by introducing a tape recorder or by adhering to a standardized schedule of questions. So, also, I did not take notes for at least an initial portion of the interview. Only after a degree of familiarity was established, after I had the opportunity to display my legitimate interest in the subject at hand, and after interviewees were conversing with ease and enthusiasm, did I ask permission to take a few notes. At this point in the interview, note-taking did not matter to most interviewees. A few individuals were hesitant about my taking of notes. One interviewee explicitly requested that I not take notes. Often, when I did take notes, the closure of my notebook at the near end of the interview served as motivation for interviewees to offer detail held in reserve until that moment. I took extensive notes immediately after the interview, at a discreet distance from the interview site, and recorded more observations later at the computer.

The Sample

Demographic Characteristics: Of 44 persons interviewed, 26 are women and 18 are men. Interviewees are from 34 to 85 years of age, with the greatest concentration in the 35 to 44 and the 65 to 74 age ranges. The 2000 Census reports the greatest concentration of residents (21.0%) to be 35 to 44 years of age. 15.7% of residents are 25 to 34 years of age and 14.2% are between 45 to 54 years of age. 4.5% are in the 65 to 74 age group. All interviewees are owners of detached single family houses, reported by the

2000 Census as the most common housing type in the township, or 50.5% of all housing.

Among the 44 interviewees with whom I carried out in-depth interviews, 42 are white and two are black. No persons of Asian ancestry were referred to me by interviewees. Anecdotal data suggests that many of these residents populate newer housing developments of larger single family houses and that at present few of these residents participate in civic life. Census data for the Year 2000 shows that 70.5% of residents are white, 18% are Asian and 7.9% are black.

Several of the township's "gatekeepers" note that the township population has shifted from working and middle class to middle and upper middle class. Employment data reported in the Year 2000 Census supports these observations, showing a preponderance of white collar employment in the township. 53.9% of employed residents work in "management/professional and related occupations," 26.2% work in "sales and office occupations," 8% work in "service occupations" and 11.9% of occupations are in the combined categories of "construction" and "production."

The relatively high occupational levels of interviewees corroborates this data and suggests comfortable middle class status. Among the occupations reported are teachers, school administrators, social workers (two), professors (two) and lawyers (two). Of three former locals interviewed, all are retired from white collar jobs. One of these former "locals" worked as an office manager for a bank, another person worked as an office manager of an insurance company and the third is a professor emeritus. Of the 44 individuals with whom I carried out in-depth interviews, 12 are retirees. However, even though their incomes are presumably modest, mortgage-free housing enables them to

expend financial resources on such activities as fixing up their houses, traveling abroad and maintaining vacation cottages.

Interviewees have relatively high levels of education. Of 36 persons for whom educational level is available, 24 have graduate or professional degrees, eight have bachelor's degrees, four are high school graduates and one is a high school dropout. Year 2000 Census data shows that 20.8% of township residents over the age of 25 are high school graduates without a higher degree and that 49.0% have a bachelor's degrees or higher. (As interviewees have observed, educational level is not commensurate with purchasing power, in particular the acquisition of a "big" house. For example, the high school dropout whose observations are incorporated in this study is an entrepreneur who brings in a high six-figure income and who owns a "big" house. A woman whose husband made money in construction during a housing boom and who lives in a small, elite housing development of custom-designed houses, reports her relief upon finding that her neighbors were people like herself and her husband, "people who made it in the trades." Another woman who lives in a neighborhood of what are regarded as "big" houses reports that a neighbor is a former farmer who acquired a lot of money from the sale of his acreage.)

APPENDIX II

Interview Guide for Initial In-Depth Interviews

I. Background (age, education, employment, number and age of children)

II. Current situation and events leading to

A. Years in township

B. Years at present address

C. Where did you live before moving to this house, to this township?

III. Housing

A. What were you looking for when you chose this house, housing development, neighborhood and/or township?

Community

Neighbors

A type of housing

Low taxes

Schools

Location

More house for the money

Other

B. How did you learn about this present location?

C. Did you look at other houses and/or locations before deciding on this one?

What did you like/ not like about them?

D. Do you ever think you might move to another house or place? If so, where would you want to move? Why would you want to move? (For a perceived type of neighbor, location, setting?)

E. How does your development compare to others? What do people think of this development?

F. Has your housing development changed over time? How?

G. Have you fixed up your house in any way? If so, how?

IV. Characteristics of the township and its residents

A. What was it like here in earlier days?

B. How would you characterize the population then?

C. How has the township changed? What sort of community is this?

D. Who lives here now?

E. How does this township compare to others?

F. What is a “big” house?

G. Who lives in these “big” houses?

V. A local or nonlocal relation to space

A. Where do/did you work? How do/did you get to work? How long does/did it take?

B. Do you know any of your neighbors?

C. Where do your relatives/friends live? How often do you get together with them?

D. Are you a member of any organizations and/or do you work as a volunteer?

E. Do you read the local newspaper? Another newspaper?

F. Have you run for a township office?

G. Do you vote in township elections?

H. Do/did your children have time for play dates? If so, who do they play with?

VI. Township schools

A. What were the township schools like when you went to school or when your children went to school?

B. What did your children do after high school graduation? Or, Where are your plans for your children after high school graduation?

C. How did/does the high school compare to others in the region? What sort of reputation did/does it have?

VII. Characterizing the region; identifying problems

A. How would you characterize this region? Sprawl, “new city,” etc.

B. What do you like/not like about living here?

C. What are problems of living in this type of region?

APPENDIX III

Background Material

Item #1 – map of region

Item #2 – “South Brunswick Population 1790 – 1990”

Item #3 – “Calendar of Events”

Item #4, a-d – Features from “Designer’s Sketchbook”

Item # 1

Google Maps Address Middlesex New Jersey

Get Google Maps on your phone
Text the word "GMAPS" to 466453



Item #2

SOUTH BRUNSWICK POPULATION 1790 - 1990

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>
1790	1,817	State of New Jersey Dept of State Census Bureau
1800	n/a	<i>Compendium of Censuses- 1726 -</i>
1810	2,332	<i>1905, Together with the Tabulated</i>
1820	2,489	<i>Returns of 1905. Middlesex County</i>
1830	2,557	p. 26. John L. Murphy Publishing Co. Printers, 1906.
1840	2,797	" "
1850	3,368	" "
1860	3,816	" "
1870	3,779	" "
1880	2,808 *	" "
1890	2,403 **	" "
1900	2,337	" "
1905	2489	" "
1910	n/a	
1920	n/a	
1930	2,758	State of New Jersey Department of Labor, NJSCD 1990
1940	3,129	Census Publication. <i>New Jersey</i>
1950	4,001	<i>Population Trends 1790 to 1990.</i>
1960	10,278	Table 6. New Jersey Resident Pop- ulation by Municipality: 1930-1990,
1970	14,058	p 35 New Jersey State Data Center Trenton, NJ, July 1991.
1980	17,127	" "
1990	25,792	" "

* Part of South Brunswick annexed into Cranbury, 1972

** More of South Brunswick annexed into Cranbury, 1885.

(Carbone 1993, 10)

December Calendar



meetings

December 5, Tuesday:
TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE,
Municipal Building, 8 PM.

December 5, Tuesday:
CERES GARDEN CLUB.
Workshop of Christmas Tray
Favors for Veterans Hospital.
Also Christmas centerpiece
ideas. Home of Mrs. W. Huthan-
sel, 9 Wheeler Road, 8:30 PM.

December 11, Monday:
FRANKLIN WOMEN'S CLUB
at Colonial Farms in Middlebush,
8:30 PM.

December 12, Tuesday:
PLANNING BOARD,
Municipal Building, 8 PM.

December 13, Wednesday:
BOARD OF EDUCATION,
Library of High School, 8 PM.

December 14, Thursday:
SOUTH BRUNSWICK HIGH
SCHOOL PTA. Musical Christ-
mas Program performed by stu-
dents. Also preliminary report
of Survey of Youth Attitudes. High
School Auditorium, 8 PM.

December 14, Thursday:
FAMILY LIFE COMMITTEE.
Discussion Group led by Mr.
Leonard Brown - "Is Your Child
Silent About Sex?" \$5 for series
of 6 discussions. At home of Mrs.
J. Breetveld, 17 Palmer Road.
Call AX 7-0987.

December 18, Monday:
JAYCEE-ETTES Christmas
Meeting at home of Mrs. J. Dale,
20 Hodge Road, 8:30 PM.

December 19, Tuesday:
BOARD OF HEALTH,
Municipal Building, 8 PM.

December 20, Wednesday:
BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT,
Municipal Building, 8 PM.

December 27, Wednesday:
BOARD OF EDUCATION,
Library of High School, 8 PM.

December 2, Saturday Evening:
TEEN-AGE ROLLER SKATING
PARTY. Sponsored by Recreation
Council. Bus transportation pro-
vided. For information, call Mrs.
Neeb, AX 7-9030, Mrs. Sandridge,
AX 7-3548.

December 3, Sunday:
MEMBERS OF BROADWAY
REVUE "From the Second City."
Murray Theatre, Princeton. No
reserved seats. 8:30 PM.
Tickets \$1.50.

December 4, Monday:
PANEL DISCUSSION - "The
Dance." Walter Terry, Helen
Tamaris, Alwyn Nicolai. Murray
Theatre, Princeton, 8:30 PM.
Open to public.

December 7, Thursday:
QUINTET CHIGIANO - Piano,
String Quintet. Voorhees Chapel,
Douglass College. Admission
\$1.50. 8:30 PM. CH 7-1766,
Ext. 511.

December 8, Friday:
PETE SEEGER - Folk Singer.
12 Midnight, McCarter Theatre.
\$2.90 - \$1.90.

December 9, Saturday:
CHILDREN'S MOVIE --
Christmas Show sponsored by
Kendall Park First Aid Auxiliary,
10 AM & 1 PM, Cambridge all-
purpose room. 50¢ Donation.

December 10, Sunday:
ORGAN RECITAL Piet Kee,
Organist from Holland, at Kirk-
patrick Chapel, Queens Campus,
Rutgers University. 8:30 PM.
Admission Free.

December 11, Monday:
DAVID ROSS'S NEW YORK
production of Ibsen's "Ghosts."
McCarter Theatre, 8:30 PM.
Tickets \$4.50 - \$2.00.

December 13, Wednesday:
CONCERT - Special Christmas
Music - The Philadelphia Or-
chestra and the Rutgers U. Choir.
Gymnasium, Rutgers University.
For tickets call CH 7-1766,
Ext. 591.

December 13, 14, 15, 16:
SHORT FILM FESTIVAL, 13th -
Animated; 14th - Art in Films;
15th - The Poetic Documentary;
16th - Selections. McCarter
Theatre, 8:30 PM. WA 1-8700

December 17, Sunday:
CHRISTMAS CONTATA for
mixed voices - "Song of the
Angels" by Van Denman Thomp-
son. Adult Choir of the Commu-
nity Presbyterian Church of the
Sand Hills. All-purpose room,
Cambridge School.

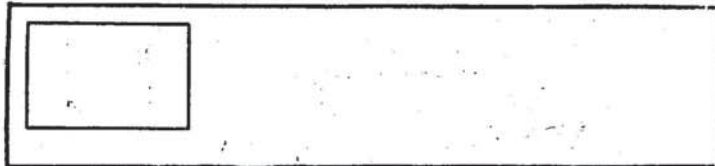
December 17, Sunday:
UNIVERSITY CONCERT SERIES
II, Rudolf Serkin - Pianist. Mc-
Carter Theatre, 8:30 PM.

December 18, Monday:
UNIVERSITY LECTURE SERIES:
John W. Ward, Asso. Prof. His-
tory at Princeton - "Whatever
Happened to Rugged Individu-
alism" - Voorhees Chapel, 8 PM.
Admission Free.

December 19, Tuesday:
FRENCH FILM SERIES - "Les
Mains Sales," McCarter The-
atre, 8:30 PM. WA 1-8700

December 24, Sunday:
PAGEANT WITH MUSIC - "Once
Upon a Christmas Time," pre-
sented by Young People of the
Community Church. All-purpose
room, Cambridge School, 7 PM.

December 28, Tuesday:
CHILDREN'S MOVIE -
"Dimples" with Shirley Temple,
sponsored by Women's Group at
Kendall Park Jewish Center,
11 AM & 2 PM. Donation 50¢.



Built-in privacy

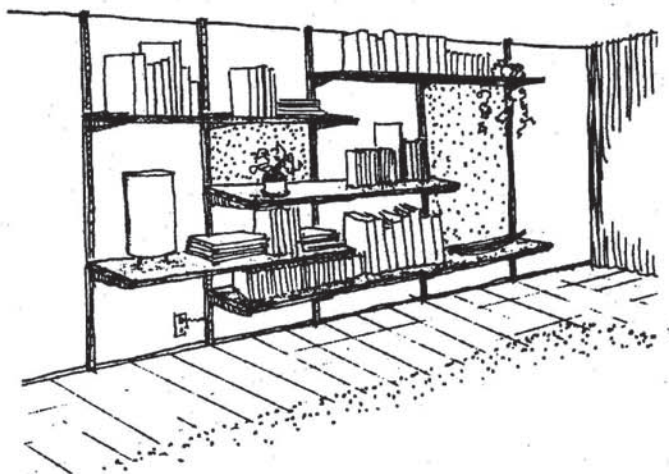


This naturalistic patio is at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Road. It is about 20 feet by 20 feet. They have used a variety of textures: walls of solar brick, posts of natural brick, flooring of flagstone laid on pebbles, plus shrubbery and a garden edged in granite blocks. It gives them both a private outdoor area and a delightful view from the house.

Item #4b

Designers Sketchbook

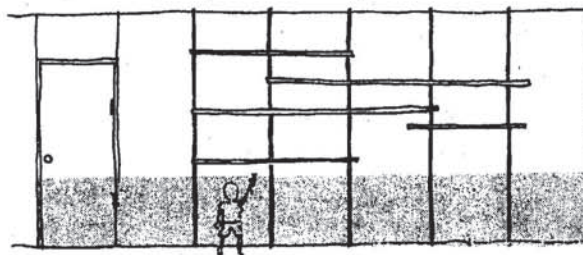
WALL BOOK-STORAGE UNIT



This inexpensive wall storage unit is flexible enough to permit many arrangements of shelves to accommodate various sized books, plants, lamps or Hi-Fi equipment.

Adjustable standards screwed into every second wall stud are employed to hold knife brackets that support the shelves. By cutting a slight hole on the side of the standard, electric wiring can be concealed within.

A light, airy feeling is achieved by the open shelving forming various spaces. By painting each shelf a different color, an interesting contrast is formed against the neutral wall. Inserts of colored panels occur in spots.



To prevent our 18-month-old son from damaging our books, the shelves are continually raised to a point just out of reach.

Item #4c

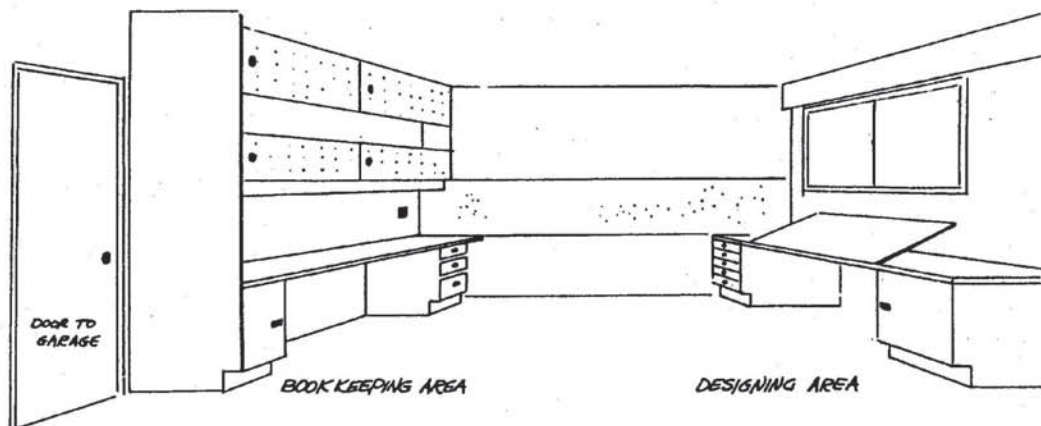
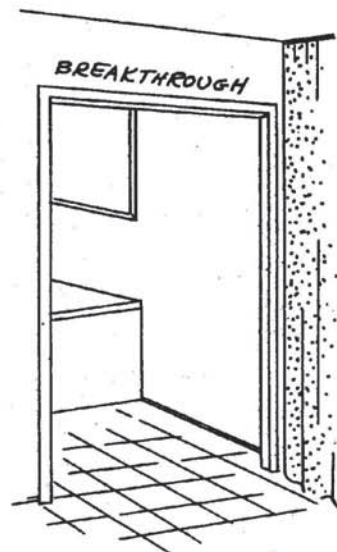
Designers Sketchbook

To convert cold, unused "hobby room" into useful studio-bookkeeping area, a 4-foot opening was cut through living-room wall into hobby room. All existing hobby-room walls were ripped out, new electrical lines brought in to wire 12 outlets, aluminum-foil bats installed, and then wall studs recovered with 5/8 inch striated masonite.

Side of room adjacent to garage was made into bookkeeping section with desk, storage shelves and fluorescent lighting built in.

Right side is designing area, with desk, storage units, and lighting. Long cork bulletin board joins both sides.

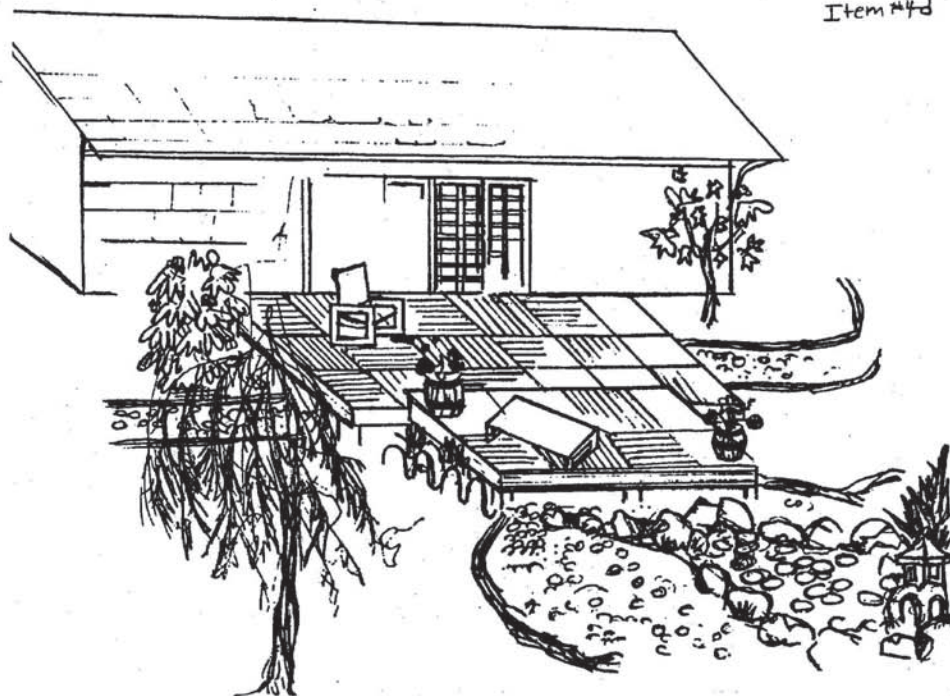
Comparatively inexpensive materials were used, since this is my first attempt at any sort of construction, and I anticipated much waste. Total cost approximately \$225, but well worth it because this is now the second most used room in the house.



Item #4d

PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTOGRAPHY



East meets West at the home of [Name] Road, where the interior and back yard reflect the couple's two and a half year stay in Japan.

The Blevins built a wooden deck patio on two different levels to follow the slope of the land, using 2x4's in 45 inch square panels. Highlighting the arrangement is an authentic Japanese garden which relies heavily on various shaped rocks and pebbles. The patio contains attractive outdoor furniture, also handmade by the Blevins.

The yard which would serve as a suitable backdrop for the Kabuki dancers, instead provides the Blevins' dachshund Fritzl with an exotic playground.



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