

Cabbage-Hill Against the World: Profile of a Neighborhood

By Marc Oliff

Settled by German immigrants between 1840 and 1880, the Cabbage-Hill section of Lancaster exhibits remarkable stability and demonstrates an unexpected rate of permanency among its inhabitants. Between the early 1880s and late 1930s, citizens of Cabbage-Hill established various community, individual, religious, social, and ethnic ties, enabling the formation of a solid neighborhood. Because the Hill was “typical of a small, conservative, working-class neighborhood settled in the middle of the last century,”¹ the establishment of community can only be explained by certain developed and inherent qualities of this area.

The Bethels, a rich Quaker family, began selling land in the 1700s. Still very much open country in the 1840s, the Hill had become more residential by 1886. Maps indicate vast expansion and building around 1900. These findings agree with figures showing a larger percentage growth in urban areas than in the total population between 1880 and 1920.² Several factors account for this extensive Cabbage-Hill development in the late 1890s. The ancestors of many of the Cabbage-Hill residents were Bavarian and Hessian German nationals who fled to America around 1800. In addition, David Ward points out that between 1860 and 1890, Germans were the most numerous emigres to the United States.³ Ward also notes that their possession of required resources enabled travel and land purchases.⁴

Many of these successful immigrants settled in the area stretching from Manor to Fremont Streets and from West Strawberry to Love Lane (now Fairview Ave.), an area first developed in the 1850s. Most houses date from circa 1860 to 1900 and cost originally between two and three thousand dollars. The two-story brick houses and the streets exhibit strong unity of scale and "the overall character is that of a solid, forthright, and relatively intact Victorian working-class neighborhood." The hard-working Germans of the Hill retain, even today, ancestral customs like cultivating backyard cabbage for homemade sauerkraut.

The process of establishing a stable community on the Hill was due to a conscious effort by the people who moved in. The community was not always stable and the citizens struggled to achieve certain patterns of inhabitancy, ownership, rent and occupation. In 1900 Lancaster City had a population of 30,000 people living in 6,000 dwelling houses.⁶ Description and analysis of twenty-seven of these homes and their inhabitants between 1884 and 1938 is a typical profile of a lower-class neighborhood. The houses on the south side of Poplar Street between W. Strawberry and Filbert are all in rows, small and inexpensive. Many aspects of this area are typical, except that most people lived in the same house for a number of years. In fact, many families remained in the same house for four generations. Most lower-class neighborhoods have a high rate of turnover, making Cabbage-Hill an atypical lower-class example.

In the 1880s German families adopted the Hill as a home. Almost all residents were German for the next fifty years. However, the stability was evident only after 1903. Prior to this time people frequently moved. For example, only 34% of the sample living in Cabbage-Hill in 1884 still lived there only two years later. By 1892, only one of five of the 1884 residential profile remained on the Hill. The rate of transiency decreased at the end of the decade to 60%. Between 1899 and 1903 rates of permanency and transiency fluctuated.

These high rates of transiency declined sharply in the first decade of the twentieth century. Between 1903 and 1905 the Cabbage-Hill community attained a remarkable degree of residential stability. For example, 65% of the sample living on the Hill in 1905 were there in 1907. This rate dropped to 55% between 1907 and 1909, but three of four residents of the Hill in 1909 were there in 1913. Sixty-five percent of the sample in 1916 had been on the Hill three years earlier and only 20% of the citizens in 1918 had not previously lived on the Hill. Levels above 60% resident retention remained through 1938, reaching a peak of 80% in 1921 and 1922.

Despite a high degree of permanency in the neighborhood, relatively few residents owned their homes. In any given year approximately 80% of the homes in the sample were rented. In 1938, this trend was practically

reversed because 19 of 27 families owned their own homes. As expected, there were fewer owners among more transient people than among permanent residents. Another interesting fact is the absence of boarders in any home after 1899, although directory compilers were not consistent. In the Cabbage-Hill sample there were four boarders in 1884, eleven in 1886, and seven in 1899. Lack of boarders after this time showed that families often took boarders to economize and offset expenses. In a few instances, after the boarder(s) left, the original owner bought the house.

Cabbage-Hill seems to challenge the assumption that low-class neighborhoods will have inevitably a high rate of transiency. The Hill also questions the notion that the "demand for low-paid unskilled labor attracted most of the new immigrants to industrial and commercial employment in urban centers."⁷ Lancaster became an urban center at the end of the nineteenth century, but the 400 block of Poplar disproves Ward's thesis. Instead of being occupied by unskilled laborers, the Cabbage-Hill sample includes only an average of 5 unskilled laborers between 1884 and 1938. In contrast, there were many skilled workers. An occupational profile of the Cabbage-Hill neighborhood includes: tanner, shoemaker, bartender, carpenter, blacksmith, engraver, cabinet maker, cigar maker, barber, carpet weaver, painter, plumber, baker, tailor, conductor, brewer and not to mention milkman, fireman, foreman, musician, travel agent, and managers of the Hippodrome and Strand Theatres. Indeed, in 1907 only 35% of the sample were unskilled or semi-skilled millhands, umbrella examiners and laborers, while in 1925 nine of ten inhabitants were skilled workers.

The initial attraction and drawing power of Cabbage-Hill belonged to business and industry. Numerous small industries in the western part of the city increased the number of people living on Cabbage-Hill.⁸ Complementing the "rapid development of this new section of the city was the attraction to Lancaster of a high grade of artisans."⁹ As the number of mills increased, so did the need for more cotton and silk mill workers. Conestoga Cotton Mills opened in 1848 and created a labor demand. Also, as a tobacco-processing area, the Hill required workers. In 1900, as tobacco and cigar production increased, so did the need for labor.¹⁰

Besides small industrial production there existed a plethora of small businesses, firms, and shops. Some of these businesses were Paulson's Bakery, Keiffer's watch and clock shop, Fauber's Grocery, Barney Miller's Clothing Store, Kunzler's Meat Shop, and Flear's Greenhouse, plus the Peerless Umbrella factory, Dodge Cork Company, and the Strand Theatre, said to have had housewives peeling potatoes during the movie. "Hucksters, icemen, fish peddlers, and junk collectors all had their routes."¹¹ Another example of stability was Falk Brothers Butcher Shop, in its fourth generation

of business. Tying much of the neighborhood together was the Laurel and Filbert Trolley, which went to Penn Square. All these businesses and conveniences suggest that stability in 1910 was due to a generally good economic state following increased manufacturing and activity between 1890 and 1900.

Only Cabbage-Hill's skilled workers, artisans and craftsmen could afford to buy their own homes. Indeed, this high percentage of skilled workers and the cohesiveness of this unique community fostered stability. For example, five families, upon leaving their original homes, moved to a different home down the block. Community strength was also proved by the fact that three families, after living in rented houses for many years, eventually purchased these houses. In addition, three larger families rented more than one house at a time.

Economic factors alone cannot explain the emergence of a stable residential community on Cabbage-Hill. Common ethnic heritage made the Hill an ethnic conclave. Some of the families fled from Germany to escape religious persecution. Many of the men, however, came to avoid mandatory German military service.¹² Common experience and common language produced institutions that gave community residents a sense of place and time among their own people.

The most important source of identity was religious, and religious stability was maintained by St. Joseph's Church, the focal point of Cabbage-Hill. Physically, the late Victorian church stood on the brow of the Hill and was visible from the entire area. From the church one could see most of downtown Lancaster. In the graveyard next to the church were buried many of the original inhabitants of Cabbage-Hill. Poplar Street overlooked this scene.

In 1849, the German element of St. Mary's Catholic Church petitioned Bishop Kendrick to set up a separate congregation. An elderly resident told me the increased presence of Irish immigrants had annoyed the Germans. The new organization was approved, and in 1850 a church and parsonage were established for eight thousand dollars.¹³ After 1850, St. Joseph's was for Catholics and Christ Lutheran Church served the needs of the German Protestants. Strong Catholic ties among the Catholics on Cabbage-Hill were responsible for a unified community.

Other institutions also contributed to the stability of Cabbage-Hill. The presence of clubs and the feeling of community were the most important contributors. The Eighth Ward German Club, German Beneficial Club, and German Literary Club all had active members who congregated for various reasons. Almost everyone in a designated area knew each other, but just in case, the Liederkrantz was a German-only singing society.

Their motto was "Einigkeit mach stark," unity makes strength.¹⁴ In addition to all these clubs, one must not forget the abundance of bars and drinking houses. Other community aspects included sledding on the same street in the winter and cultivation of a garden in the spring, two activities participated in by all. These activities, German clubs and institutions, gave a sense of neighborhood and ethnic identity.

This neighborhood identity even survived the anti-German hysteria of World War I relatively intact. True the name of German Street at the eastern edge of the Hill was changed to Farnum Street, but the community persisted. A vast range of forces contributed to stability within the Cabbage-Hill community. The Hill was almost like a minority society prepared to handle any circumstance to protect the permanency and welfare of the people. As one writer points out, the feeling of community and love of America was enhanced during World War I as sons of Hillians were called to fight their brothers in Germany.¹⁵ People on Cabbage-Hill thanked God for the opportunity to come to America. Feelings such as these involved complex emotions. Also mentioned was the diphtheria epidemic in 1900, which killed many and necessitated mutual communal reliances. The community maintained stability because the Germans on the Hill acted like a "Self-contained unit."¹⁶ In fact, natural geographic boundaries separated the area because beyond it (as seen in the 1886 atlas) were estates. Where the estates ended, Cabbage-Hill began.

So strong were its cultural and social institutions that the Cabbage-Hill community survived even the economic dislocation of the Great Depression. The dance halls and hippodromes of the early twentieth century may be gone, but the sense of community persists even today. For many, there was no need to ever leave the Hill, and of those who moved away, many returned. Numerous signs of persistence exist today: St. Joseph's Church is still a viable institution; the Hill is still predominantly Germanic; there are some fourth-generation stores; local taverns—Many of them family-oriented—and bars are still active and shops and services cater to commercial needs.

To many people, "Cabbage-Hill is more than just a geographic area; it is a way of life."¹⁷ Recently, residents have supported the 400, 500, and 600 blocks of Poplar, St. Joseph, and West Vine as an Historic District. Desiring to preserve, a working-class image, Hillians feel this will add pride, help upkeep, and eliminate neglectful landlords. As the *New Era* points out, "Cabbage-Hill has mirrored, for 150 years, enduring Community Strengths."¹⁸

Cabbage-Hill is a kind of ideal urban community. More than simply a place to sleep, the Hill has been a place to work, shop, and socialize.

Strong neighborhood ties formed a pattern unlike most other lower-income areas. Whereas residents should have been transient, unskilled workers, the opposite was true. Ethnic heritage, occupation, and religion acted to insure a high rate of permanency, stability, and persistence, making Cabbage-Hill a truly special part of Lancaster.

Notes

1. New Era, Oct. 10, 1979.
2. David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants* (NY: 1975), p. 6.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
5. John J. Snyder, *Cabbage Hill* (Lancaster: 1980).
6. F.A. Klein, *Lancaster County Since 1841* (Lancaster: 1914), p. 88.
7. Ward, p. 55.
8. Snyder, *Cabbage-Hill*
9. Lancaster Board of Trade, *Resources* (Lancaster: 1887), p. 62
10. F.S. Klein, p. 93.
11. Bill Lenox "Cabbage-Hill." *Susquehanna Mag.* (Lanc.: 1980), p. 28.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 29
13. Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans, *History of Lancaster County* (Philadelphia: 1883), p. 464.
14. Lenox, p. 28.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. New Era, Oct. 14, 1979.

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Editor's Note

The twenty-seven homes sampled were on the south side of Poplar Street between Filbert and Strawberry streets.

Typical German "Cabbage Hill" family names taken from the 1912 city directory include:

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| Angermier | Muehleisen |
| Boettger | Oeschger |
| Braungard | Ostermayer |
| Burger | Ransing |
| Danz | Ranzinger |
| Deichler | Renz |
| Dengler | Rietschy |
| Draude | Schaller |
| Driendl | Schantz |
| Duschl | Scheidhoff |
| Goebel | Scheuchenzuber |
| Henrich | Scheurenbrand |
| Hergenrother | Schlotterbek |
| Hohenwarter | Schmalhofer |
| Houck | Schmid |
| Huegel | Schultz |
| Huehnergarth | Schwenzer |
| Kienzle | Stockbauer |
| Kipphorn | Stoe |
| Kirchner | Stoekl |
| Kirsch | Strosser |
| Koellisch | Stumpf |
| Kohlmaier | Voehringer |
| Kreckel | Vottler |
| Krimmel | Wappenstein |
| Kruschinski | Wuerdinger |