

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 7, 2013

Our Town: During World War II, Hollywood made a black-and-white movie called *Our Town*, supposedly showing what small-town life was like during the war. Ann Revere was a widow with three children, Van Johnson, Donna Reed, and Mickey Rooney. Johnson was engaged to a hometown girl, June Lockhart, who was also his sister's best friend. He was a pilot in the Army Air Force and was soon flying overseas. Frank Morgan was the local telegraph operator who took nitroglycerin pills for a serious heart condition, and Rooney, depicting a 14-year-old, was his delivery boy, often having to deliver telegrams from the War Department advising of a loved one's death.

Donna Reed had a civilian boyfriend, James Craig, who had a convertible and seemed to avoid the draft. Donna and June Lockhart would often go to the local movies together and would have to fend off the attentions of local boys in whom they were not interested. Older men would pitch horse shoes on the town green. Rooney performed his usual escapades, in and out of trouble, but a good boy at heart. The movie concluded when Mickey went to the telegraph office to pick up one to be delivered, and he found Morgan slumped over his desk dead. Next to his hand was the wire he had just received. Van Johnson had been killed in action. Since movies of those days always ended happily, the blow was softened at the very end when an Air Force friend of Johnson's came to town to meet his family and to tell them how much his deceased friend had talked about his wonderful home town.

Although we did not live in the borough, Kennett Square was "our town." My parents knew almost everyone. My father was on the Board of the only bank in town (he had been president during the Depression). My mother chaired the Corporation Board of the Kennett New Century Club and belonged to a garden club and a card club there. We went to two of five doctors (Dr. D. Duer Reynolds or Dr. Herbert S. McKinstry) and a dentist (Dr. Carl W. Lofland) in Kennett Square and did all our food shopping there. Corson's (later Freter's) Drug Store was frequented, as well as John Detorri's Barber Shop. Alex D. Cozanitis' Kennett Kandy Kitchen restaurant and the Auditorium Theatre next to the old fire house were popular recreation spots. Jake Noznesky, a native of near Kiev in the Ukraine, owned the scrap yard, the Royal Garage, and many other buildings in the center of Kennett Square. At least six denominations had active churches in the community.

I have many fond memories of times in Kennett when I was growing up in the 1930s. Along with Oxford, each with a population of about 3,000, it was the fourth or fifth largest borough in Chester County, behind West Chester, Phoenixville, Coatesville, and possibly Downingtown. Although it had some light industry and was a major mushroom and flower-growing center, it was not a heavy industrial town. With my parents, I enjoyed many meals in Kennett's private homes. Taking less than 10 minutes "over the road" and about 13 minutes by Short Line Bus, it was readily accessible from Auburn Heights.

During World War II, Chalmers Tilley worked for the Kennett Square Post Office, and when a letter would come from the War Department advising that a local boy had been killed in action, it was his job to notify the family. What an unhappy job! While home on leave in early March 1945, I was in the lobby of the bank with my father, who had some business there, when Mr. Tilley sought him out. He had just gotten word that Alan Mancill had been killed along the Rhine about six weeks before. Alan's mother, my father's only sister, lived on Locust Lane north of Kennett at the time. She knew both Alan and his twin brother Bob were missing in action but nothing more. My father called Dr. Reynolds, a longtime family friend, found him home, and the good doctor and my father accompanied Mr. Tilley to relay the sad news in person. In his later years, Chalmers Tilley was a popular teller at the National Bank & Trust Company. He deserved the best.