Between 1914 and 1916 several national magazines identified Greenwich Village as the “American Bohemia” and the “New World Latin Quarter.” It had not always been so. The original meeting place for New York bohemians was Pfaff’s, a German beer garden where Walt Whitman had held court in the late 1850s, and though its location on Broadway just north of Bleecker Street was not far from the Village, it was part of a Broadway–Bowery scene rather than within the Village orbit. Later on, in the 1890s and early 1900s, New York bohemians disagreed about which bistro or neighborhood truly represented bohemia. The Village had its adherents, notably Robert W. Chambers, a painter-illustrator who wrote about Maria’s in In the Quarter (1894), and James L. Ford, the journalist whose Bohemia Invaded (1895) was set in a classic bohemian gathering place just south of Washington Square. But James L. Huneker, the art and music critic to whose circle Bert and Mary Heaton Vorse once belonged, and William Sidney Porter, the writer better known as O. Henry, both slighted the Village. Huneker and Porter sometimes met at West Side cafes outside the Village, usually at The Eight’s favorite French restaurant, Mouquin’s, but Huneker’s primary loyalty was always to Lüchow’s, a German restaurant at East Fourteenth Street and Irving Place, and O. Henry’s preferred bohemian hangouts were even farther north on the East Side near Madison Square and Twenty-sixth Street.
The geographically dispersed nature of early twentieth-century bohemia was well documented in July 1907 when The Bohemian magazine published Charles F. Peters's article “When New York Dines A La Bohe’me.” Although Peters mentioned a number of Village restaurants—Renganeschi’s, Gonfarone’s, and six small Italian places on or near Bleecker Street in the south Village, only a small portion of his article dealt with Village sites; fully three-quarters of the text was devoted to describing French, Italian, Hungarian, German, and even North African and Near Eastern bohemian places scattered through the city outside the Village’s boundaries.

Adding to the difficulty of defining the precise geography of New York bohemia was the imprecision with which the words bohemian and bohemia were commonly used at the turn of the twentieth century. In his article Peters ventured no definition beyond saying that the bohemian was the “artist of life and the fool of trade.” This contrast between a bourgeois class devoted to trade and moneymaking and bohemians who devoted themselves to art and life was a generally accepted starting point for describing the bohemian as a social type. Almost any kind of unconventional behavior—disregard for wealth and social status, smoking by women in public, informality in clothing, looser sexual mores—was regarded as a sign of incipient or actual bohemianism. That bohemian hangouts often had a European flavor—French, German, Italian, Hungarian, and the rest—was a reflection of the bohemian’s affection for European culture, especially for Paris, home to the original Latin Quarter and Montmartre. Certain occupations related to the arts—writing, poetry, painting, sculpting, acting, and journalism—were also generally viewed as characteristically bohemian. However, even more important than one’s devotion to the arts was the spirit with which one lived. A true bohemian was assumed in popular lore to be a free spirit: playful, expressive, spontaneous, unconventional, and individualistic. That inattention to practical matters of money and status might make one poor contributed to the stereotype of bohemians as starving artists.

Ironically, although Greenwich Village became widely identified as America’s bohemia in the mid-1910s, many members of the founding generation, the group of artists and writers whose activities drew attention to the Village as a bohemian enclave, refused to apply the word bohemian to themselves. Mary Heaton Vorse, her A Club friends, and John Sloan, a leading figure in The Eight group, all explicitly rejected the term because it implied a dilettantism or lack of seriousness about art and life. Nevertheless, the bohemian label stuck because the founders of the Seventh Village, whether or not they were self-identified bohemians, fit popular preconceptions of what a bohemian should be. They had the right occupations, ad-
mired European culture, were interested in new and unorthodox ideas, and could be found drinking and dining at New York City’s bohemian cafes and restaurants.¹

The Seventh Village began to take form in late 1912, and 1913 was its first full year as a distinct phenomenon. So swift was its rise that by early 1915 the Village, which only three years earlier had usually been portrayed in the public press in its Sixth Village guise as a mixed-class, mixed-ethnic neighborhood, was with increasing frequency being described as a bohemian republic or city-state. Still, the transformation of the neighborhood into the Seventh or Bohemian Village, though it happened very quickly, was not all of a piece. The first or founding phase, 1912–1916, was a period of intense intellectual and artistic creativity led by a small group of Villagers connected with The Masses, Mabel Dodge’s salon, the Liberal Club, and the Provincetown Players. But this in-group, “our crowd” phase of Seventh Village history did not last long. Even before the founders’ cohesion and intensity began to diminish in 1916, the publicity their activities had generated led a larger group of newcomers to migrate to the Village. Some of the newcomers came to emulate the Seventh Villagers, others to gawk at them, and more than a few to try to profit from marketing bohemianism to tourists and pretenders. It was this second phase of the Seventh Village’s history, the selling-of-bohemia or “faux bohemia” period, that solidified the Village’s popular reputation as a playground for unconventional spirits. By 1917, much to the dismay of the Seventh Village’s founders, bohemianism for bohemianism’s sake had triumphed over political and cultural substance within America’s Montmartre.

**The Seventh Villagers**

Inspired by the conviction that the old order’s hold over art and society was weakening, Village artists and writers began to explore fresh ways of bringing a new order into being. The mostly informal network of friendships that had characterized the Village artists’ community before 1912 was now strengthened and extended through institutions run by the Seventh Village’s founders: a revitalized journal, The Masses; a salon hosted by Mabel Dodge; two gathering places on MacDougal Street—the Liberal Club and Polly’s Restaurant—where the core group met and socialized; annual costume balls for fun and fundraising; and a summer outpost in Provincetown that became the birthplace of the Provincetown Players. Since the Seventh Villagers and their varied activities have been the subject of dozens of biographies, histories, and analytical essays, only a brief description is needed
here to delineate the timing and main features of this short-lived but potent attempt to transform American cultural and political life (map 5).

The Seventh Village began to take shape in the fall of 1912 when The Masses was reorganized as a writers’ and artists’ collective. Founded in 1911 by Piet Vlag, an East Side Socialist and advocate of worker cooperatives, The Masses in its original phase had a narrow and orthodox editorial line and, except for artwork by John Sloan and Art Young, a drab appearance. The journal’s poor public reception discouraged Vlag, and publication was suspended in August 1912. But John Sloan, Mary Heaton Vorse, and several other Masses writers and artists refused to let the magazine die altogether. They invited Max Eastman to become editor and put out a redesigned magazine starting in December.

The revitalized Masses was the first joint project launched by the core group of artists and writers whose activities set the tone for the Seventh Village in its founding phase. Under Eastman The Masses was owned and run collectively by its contributing members. Their goals, as outlined in the early issues during the Eastman era, were to promote a cultural and political revolution and to do so in a lively, iconoclastic way. Editorial sessions with twenty or more participants in attendance, each with one vote, lasted for hours and occasionally bruised a writer’s feelings, but the gatherings also generated a strong sense of camaraderie and common purpose among the Seventh Village’s founders. An open, everything-is-possible spirit prevailed. Nominally a Socialist journal, The Masses featured an eclectic and often contradictory mix of viewpoints: Marxist, anarchist, feminist, Freudian, labor unionist, pagan, and bohemian. The journal’s artists, led initially by John Sloan, were delighted to have an outlet for artwork that commercial magazines wouldn’t touch—a subject pointedly addressed in December 1912 with a two-page illustration of a magazine editor prostituting his staff to the wishes of a bloated figure representing fat-cat advertisers. Some of the women’s submissions—Helen Hoyt’s poem about menstruation and Elizabeth Grieg’s cartoon that sympathetically depicted an unwed mother—would have been impossible to place in more conventional magazines.

Membership in the Masses collective was constantly augmented by new recruits. John Reed, the journalist and aspiring poet, and Mabel Dodge, a well-to-do woman looking for outlets for her considerable wealth and talents, were two such individuals who joined the Masses circle early in 1913. They almost immediately came to play major roles in three events—the Armory Show, the Paterson Strike Pageant, and the establishment of Dodge’s Fifth Avenue salon—that greatly enhanced the reputation of the Seventh Villagers as movers and shakers.

Dodge returned to the United States in November 1912 after eight years
Map 5. The Seventh Village, 1912–1918

1. Mabel Dodge's Salon ..................... 23 Fifth Avenue
2. Provincetown Playhouse ................. 139 MacDougal Street
3. Liberal Club and Polly's ............... 137 MacDougal Street
4. Webster Hall ................................ 119 East Eleventh Street
5. Bruno's Garret............................ 58 Washington Square South
6. Seventh Avenue Extension .......... Greenwich Avenue to Varick Street
7. Sheridan Square
8. Hudson Park
9. Public School 95 ......................... Clarkson Street
in Florence, Italy. She rented the second-floor apartment in a mansion located at 23 Fifth Avenue and promptly redecorated the place in white. She also persuaded her amiable husband, Edwin Dodge, to move out to rooms at the Brevoort, the pleasant French hotel and artists’ rendezvous only a block away. Mabel was full of energy but initially she was without direction. Although she had previously hosted a salon at her villa in Florence, it was not until Lincoln Steffens suggested that her talent for bringing people together for conversation made her ideally suited to host a salon in New York that she decided to use her Fifth Avenue apartment for that purpose.

Hutch Hapgood, who shared her quasi-mystical, questing spirit, helped her find interesting people to invite, and early in 1913 Dodge’s “Evenings” got under way.7

Her timing was perfect. Talk and more talk about new ideas and more new ideas was the order of the day. As she wrote in retrospect, “it seems as though everywhere, in that year of 1913, barriers went down and people reached each other who had never been in touch before.” So on Wednesday evenings (or at other times on Thursdays) Dodge opened the rooms of her Fifth Avenue apartment to a kaleidoscopic array of guests of every ideological hue—“Socialists, Trade-Unionists, Anarchists, Suffragists, Poets, Lawyers, Murderers, ‘Old Friends,’ Psychoanalysts, I.W.W.’s, Single Taxers, Birth Controlists, Newspapermen, Artists, Modern-Artists, Clubwomen, Woman’s-place-is-in-the-home Women, Clergymen, and just plain men” (fig. 35). At the height of their success, most of Dodge’s Evenings were organized around a topic or special guest, such as A. A. Brill on psychoanalysis, “Big Bill” Haywood on the I.W.W., Emma Goldman on anarchism, or two blacks performing African American dances. Convinced that a radical shift in consciousness was in progress, Dodge believed that bringing cutting-edge thinkers and doers together would hasten the coming transformation.8

Several months before Dodge’s Evenings entered their peak period in the fall of 1913, she had become involved in two other activities that served as defining events in the Seventh Village’s first full year. The first of these, the International Exhibition of Modern Art (better known as the Armory Show) was not, strictly speaking, a Village event, although it is often treated as such. The connection is made because the Armory Show reflected a spirit of rebellion against traditional values, an interest in exploring new ideas, and a desire to educate Americans regarding emerging cultural trends, all of which were prominent features of the Seventh Village milieu.

Among the more particular links between the Village and the Armory Show was the fact that its chief organizers, Arthur B. Davies (one of The Eight) and Walter Kuhn, were Robert Henri’s students; Davies in particular
had learned a great deal about organizing an exhibition from The Eight’s Macbeth Galleries venture in 1908 and the much larger Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1910. Moreover, Village sculptors and painters were well represented in the Armory Show’s American section, and Mabel Dodge made a significant contribution to publicizing the exhibit in the month before it opened on February 17, 1913.

Unfortunately for the American progressives—a term that characterized The Eight and most of Henri’s students—avant-garde European artists stole the Armory Show. Whether they were the objects of outrage or applause, it was the Cubists (George Braque and Pablo Picasso), the Fauvists (Henri Matisse, Georges Rouault, and Raoul Dufy), and Marcel Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase” that, as Milton Brown has written, “shattered the even complacency of American art.” By virtually every measure, the exhibition was a stunning success.9

The Armory Show had only recently closed (mid-March 1913) when another event, a massive strike in Paterson, New Jersey, captured the Seventh Villagers’ imagination. The strike had begun in February, when approximately twenty-five thousand workers walked out of Paterson mills to pro-
test changes in work rules. The walkout and the conditions in the mills, which accounted for nearly 60 percent of silk production in the United States, bore some resemblance to the situation in Lawrence in 1912. Once again, leading I.W.W. organizers Big Bill Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn joined the fray, counseling the strikers to hold firm against piecemeal settlements. But the strike went on, and by mid-April there was no sign that the mill owners would give in.

At this point a number of Villagers became deeply involved in the conflict. Despite their class and educational differences from the I.W.W. leadership, many Villagers were attracted to the Wobblies by their radical rhetoric and their affinity for the grand gesture. The one-eyed Haywood, veteran of many bitter labor struggles in the West, had already achieved folk hero status with Villagers who hoped that a decisive blow to the capitalist class system would be quickly followed by a new, democratic industrial order. Paterson looked enough like Lawrence, where the I.W.W. (with some help from its middle-class allies) had won a huge victory, that the Villagers were eager to help promote yet another working-class success.

The fact that Haywood had a mistress, Bea Shostak, a schoolteacher who lived in Greenwich Village, and that he frequented Dodge's salon contributed to the emergence of what became the Paterson Strike Pageant. One evening in late April, Mabel Dodge, Hutch Hapgood, John Reed, and others visited Haywood at Shostak's apartment near Washington Square. When Haywood complained that the Paterson strike was stalled because New York City newspapers were not giving much coverage to it, Dodge suggested producing a public pageant to raise funds and publicize the strikers' cause. John Reed volunteered to organize the pageant, and in mid-May Haywood presented the plan for the pageant to Paterson workers.

Three weeks of feverish work followed, with Reed rehearsing strikers in New Jersey while Mary Heaton Vorse, Mabel Dodge, Lincoln Steffens, Hutch Hapgood, and Jessie Ashley either raised funds or provided newspaper coverage. Reed's Harvard classmate Robert Edmond Jones designed a large stage set, and John Sloan organized its construction. Dozens of other Villagers contributed to the cause. On the scheduled day, Saturday, June 7, more than a thousand Paterson workers took the ferry from Hoboken to the Lackawana Pier in the Village, marched up Christopher Street and over to Fifth Avenue, and continued from there to the old Madison Square Garden on East Twenty-sixth Street, where they went through one last rehearsal. The site was resplendent in red—huge red banners in the hall, ushers wearing red bow ties or red hair ribbons, and red lights spelling out “I.W.W.” on the Garden's celebrated tower, designed by Stanford White. The pageant itself was a triumph; the huge worker contingent enacted
scenes from their strike and an overflow audience of perhaps fifteen thousand joined them in songs, jeered actors playing the police, and wept when the funeral of a slain worker was reenacted (fig. 36).

The aftermath was less happy. Heavy costs and too many free admissions produced losses rather than the hoped-for gains to finance the strike. In addition, the strike leadership, having underestimated the ability of Paterson mill owners to shift production to newer mills in Pennsylvania, was unable to force the owners to capitulate. Defeated, the strikers—those who weren’t blacklisted—straggled back to work. Grand gestures such as Haywood’s no-compromise strategy and the Villagers’ pageant had failed to bring victory. Bitter recriminations followed; the I.W.W. firebrand Elizabeth Gurley Flynn charged that the pageant’s failure financially had demoralized the strikers, causing them to lose heart and abandon their fight. The link between working-class and Village radicals, always at best, in one historian’s words, a “fragile bridge,” was damaged but not destroyed, as cooperation between the two groups during the unemployment crisis of 1913–1914 would prove.10

Despite the pageant’s failure to produce a successful end to the Paterson strike, morale among Villagers in the the Masses–Dodge salon circle remained high. In the fall of 1913 they widened their group’s social sphere beyond gatherings in homes, at editorial meetings, and at Dodge’s salon by establishing two more hangouts where the Masses crowd and their friends socialized. The two new places, Polly’s Restaurant and the rooms of a reorganized Liberal Club, shared the same MacDougal Street address, with Polly’s occupying the basement and the Liberal Club just upstairs.

Polly’s Restaurant was a joint project among three Village anarchists—Polly Holladay, her brother Louis Holladay, and Hippolyte Havel, Polly’s sometime lover. Havel claimed to have come up with the idea for a Village bistro where radicals could eat together and talk revolution. Often cited as the purest example of the Seventh Villager type, Havel amazed and delighted his compatriots with his ability to be more outrageous than anyone else. He gained notoriety by addressing patrons of the restaurant as “bourgeois pigs,” an insult that never failed to please those in search of authentic radical ambience. Havel served as cook and waiter, and Polly handled finances and flirted with customers. When discovered by the press in early 1914, the restaurant was still called simply “The Basement,” but it went down in Village history as “Polly’s,” the first of several restaurants she was to run and, more important, the first of many Village bistros to be run by a self-identified bohemian owner for a bohemian crowd.11

The Liberal Club story is more complex. Founded about 1907, the club was a debating society for socially progressive New Yorkers. Although dur-
ing the 1910–1912 period its meetings were held in the Gramercy Park area, Villagers—Lincoln Steffens, Hutch Hapgood, and Percy Stickney Grant—played leading roles as officers or charter members. The club’s monthly meetings followed a format in which a member or guest speaker presented a general proposition—in February 1910 Steffens took as his theme “there is good in good people,” for example—and then defended the stated position against all challengers.\textsuperscript{12}

In the summer of 1913, however, various internal conflicts led these kid-glove radicals to split irrevocably, a division that became public in September when the president, Reverend Percy Stickney Grant, resigned along with most of the other officers. The immediate cause seems to have been a controversy over sexual morality. One member, Henrietta Rodman, a city schoolteacher who had battled resourcefully with the city Board of Education over discrimination against married women teachers (especially those who became pregnant), secretly married a man who allegedly had a common-law wife. Rodman’s campaign on behalf of teachers did not trouble moderate Liberal Club members. But they objected strenuously when it seemed that Rodman and her supporters (described in newspaper reports as “ultra-liberal” Greenwich Villagers, although several of them did not live in the Village) also expected the organization to take a tolerant attitude toward the practice of free love, the convention-defying lifestyle to which Rodman subscribed. Rodman’s defenders said that club officials had no business condemning her on a matter of private morality, but divisions over this point proved irreconcilable, and the Rodman faction relocated itself to club rooms on MacDougal Street, thus initiating a new era in which the Liberal Club became closely associated with the \textit{Masses} crowd.\textsuperscript{13}

Like many women in the \textit{Masses} and new Liberal Club circle, Rodman was a women’s rights activist. A Socialist, free love advocate, and feminist, she repeatedly made headlines during the 1913–1915 period. Her high-profile war with the Board of Education, which finally resulted in her suspension from teaching, ultimately forced the board to relax its prohibition on women teachers returning to the job after having a baby. A radical feminist as well as an advocate of women’s suffrage, Rodman insisted that suffrage would not be a significant achievement unless women voters adopted more socially progressive views than men. By wearing sandals, smoking in public, keeping her maiden name, and campaigning for legalizing the distribution of birth control information, Rodman challenged many other conventions of her time. She founded a Feminist Alliance that advocated a radical new scheme of cooperative housing for married professional women proposed by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, another leading feminist of the day. This feminist apartment house program would have allowed women to
pursue their careers while experts hired for the purpose provided child care, cooking, house cleaning, and laundry services for the residents.\textsuperscript{14}

Rodman was joined by other Village radicals in the public pursuit of these causes—hearings with the Board of Education, rallies for birth control that resulted in the arrest of several friends, and massive vote-for-women marches from Washington Square up Fifth Avenue in 1913 and 1914. Two feminist mass meetings held at Cooper Union under the auspices of the Peoples’ Institute in February 1914 provide a useful short list of Villagers seeking to liberate women from public and private constraints on their personal development. Marie Jenney Howe, whose husband, Fred Howe, was the director of People’s Institute, chaired both meetings.

At the first meeting on February 17th, twelve men and women each gave ten-minute talks on the subject “What Feminism Means to Me.” \textit{The Masses} was well represented by the magazine’s editor, Max Eastman, and its associate editor, Floyd Dell, a writer and Liberal Club member recently arrived in the Village from Chicago. Henrietta Rodman, Crystal Eastman, and Frances Perkins were among the women Villagers on the panel. Three nights later, the seven speakers were all women. Their topic, “Breaking into the Human Race,” was explained by Howe. “We’re sick of being specialized to sex,” she said. “We intend simply to be ourselves, not just our little female selves, but our whole, big, human selves.” This goal would be achieved, the speakers argued, when women were granted the right to work at the jobs they wanted, to keep their maiden names when they married, to establish unions and other organizations to further their interests, and to ignore mainstream fashion styles.\textsuperscript{15}

Six of the seven women who spoke at the second mass meeting belonged to Heterodoxy, a Greenwich Village women’s organization that had been founded by Marie Jenney Howe in the winter of 1912–1913. Heterodoxy’s members gathered for lunch every other Saturday and adhered to a strict rule of secrecy in regard to the meetings’ proceedings. For this reason Heterodoxy does not figure in the public history of the Seventh Village or in the public’s perception of the Village as a bohemian enclave. Nevertheless, Heterodoxy made an essential contribution to the Seventh Village milieu. The Heterodites supported each other in pursuing a radical feminist perspective that involved a “shift away from a strictly political and legal definition of emancipation to a new and more modern understanding of the psychological and spiritual dimensions of liberation.” This greatly expanded feminist agenda underlay and energized the Seventh Villagers’ support of women’s sexual expression, pursuit of male-female psychological intimacy, and encouragement of women Villagers who sought to blend careers and marriage—positions that distinguished the Villagers’ version of cultural
radicalism from both the mainstream suffragist platform and the standard Socialist politics of the time.\textsuperscript{16}

During the unemployment crisis of 1913–1914 members of the Seventh Villagers’ inner circle once again, as they had at Paterson, energetically allied themselves with working-class protesters. An economic downturn that started in fall 1913 soon produced conditions in New York City worse than any since 1907–1908. As early as December city-run lodging houses could not meet the demand for sleeping space, and less than a month later the new year began on a solemn note for the working-class New Yorkers who lined up by the hundreds outside of Fleischmann’s, a Village bakery that distributed leftover baked goods free of charge to all comers every evening at midnight. By February 1914 between 350,000 and 500,000 New York City workers were unemployed, and perhaps one-third of them also homeless.\textsuperscript{17}

In late February Frank Tannenbaum, twenty years old, unemployed, a member of the I.W.W., and a protégé of Emma Goldman, called on jobless workers to join him in a direct action plan that involved marching into the city’s wealthier churches and demanding food and shelter. The first such “church raid” took place on Friday, February 27, and received front-page coverage from the city’s newspapers—exactly the publicity that Tannenbaum had hoped to attract. Over the next three nights, Tannenbaum’s army of the unemployed descended on other churches located near Lower Manhattan’s working-class districts. On the evening of Sunday, March 1, the raiders targeted the elegant First Presbyterian Church on Fifth Avenue in the north Village. The startled worshipers, once they overcame their surprise, treated the invaders quite generously.\textsuperscript{18}

Two other Village churches, St. Luke’s Episcopal on Hudson Street and Percy Stickney Grant’s Church of the Ascension on Fifth Avenue, soon announced policies of opening their doors to the homeless and, in Ascension’s case, serving their unemployed guests coffee and sandwiches in the parish hall. But many New York church leaders were far less compassionate, as the marchers found when they brought their protest to St. Alphonsus Catholic Church on the corner of West Broadway and Canal (the very southernmost edge of the Village) on the night of March 5, 1914. Not only were the raiders’ appeals for food and shelter summarily rejected, but police were summoned and almost two hundred marchers arrested (fig. 37). Although most of the detainees received jail sentences of sixty days or less, the presiding judge, determined to set a stern precedent in the case of their ringleader, sentenced Tannenbaum to a year in Sing Sing.\textsuperscript{19}

Village radicals and reformers showed their support for the city’s unemployed in diverse ways. As mentioned earlier, several important Village churches offered Christian hospitality and aid. Some individuals, notably
Mabel Dodge and Frances Perkins, invited groups of unemployed men and women to their homes to discuss the plight of New York’s workers. Pro-labor Villagers also organized themselves as the International Workers’ Defense Conference (also known as the Labor Defense Conference). The group’s officers included Jessie Ashley, Big Bill Haywood (of the I.W.W.), and Mary Heaton Vorse’s husband, Joe O’Brien, and many well-known Seventh Villagers—Mabel Dodge, Frances Perkins, Frederick Howe, Lincoln Steffens, and Hutch Hapgood, among others—lent time and money to its efforts. The workers’ middle- and upper-class allies gave unemployed workers legal and material assistance, defended the protesters’ right to free speech, and tried to prevent the brutal police assaults on demonstrators that became commonplace at the height of the crisis.20

During March and April 1914, Mary Heaton Vorse’s rented house on West Eleventh Street in the Village served as the I.W.W. command center from which many initiatives on behalf of the unemployed were launched.
As she was swept up in dealing with crisis after crisis, Vorse experienced a deep sense of camaraderie with her working-class friends. Though she had felt a powerful bond with workers earlier during the Lawrence strike of 1912, at that time she and O’Brien had been, as she put it, “spectators” viewing the workers’ struggle from the outside. 1914 was different. “Now,” she wrote, “suddenly we were on the inside, part of the movement, . . . feeling that their struggle and ours was single and indivisible.”

Vorse also played a crucial role in another of the Seventh Villagers’ most important achievements, the founding of the Provincetown Players in 1915. Vorse had bought a small house in Provincetown, Massachusetts, in 1907, and her enthusiastic reports about this little Cape Cod community gradually enticed her Village friends to spend part or all of their summers there also. In 1914, 1915, and 1916, at the height of the Seventh Village’s most creative period, a veritable mass exodus of friends from the Masses and Liberal Club circle summered at Provincetown. Of the first such summertime retreat, one participant wrote: “We were as a new family.” In 1914 alone, this “family” included, among others, Mary Heaton Vorse and Joe O’Brien, Max Eastman and Ida Rauh, Hutch Hapgood and Neith Boyce, three midwesterners, Floyd Dell, Susan Glaspell, and her husband, George Cram “Jig” Cook (all three of them writers who had become members of the Seventh Villager crowd in 1913), and Polly Holladay and Hippolyte Havel, who set up a temporary Provincetown branch of Polly’s Restaurant for the duration of the summer.

Much the same group, with a few additions—Mabel Dodge and Maurice Sterne, her artist-lover and future husband, and Leo Stein, her old friend from Paris and Florence—headed back to Provincetown for the 1915 summer season. One July evening at a small gathering, someone raised a topic of interest to all present: the sad state of American theater. Soon after moving to its new MacDougal Street location, the Liberal Club had begun to put on amateur theatricals at its club rooms, the usual fare being silly one-acters about Village life written by Floyd Dell and others. By February 1915 their interest in drama had led some Liberal Club members to form the Washington Square Players, which staged more serious plays at an uptown theater. But the Players had refused to produce “Suppressed Desires,” a satire that Jig Cook and Susan Glaspell had written about the Villagers’ fascination with psychoanalysis, on the grounds that the subject matter was too specialized to appeal to a general audience. Cook now proposed that the vacationing Villagers perform the play for themselves in Provincetown. Neith Boyce also offered her script called “Constancy,” and the two plays were performed on July 15, 1915, at the cottage Boyce and Hapgood were renting.
One thing led to another, though the animating spirit behind these developments was neither so completely spontaneous nor totally amateurish as legend would have it. Counting in their circle an able set designer, Robert Edmond Jones, two future Pulitzer Prize winning playwrights, Susan Glaspell and Eugene O’Neill (a recruit who joined in 1916, the second Provincetown season), and other men and women who had already embarked on successful careers as authors of fiction and nonfiction works, the vacationing Villagers could draw on a deep pool of artistic talent. Moreover, a significant core group had some familiarity with the emergent European avant-garde theater of the time and the ethnic theaters found on New York’s Lower East Side, and many had also contributed to shaping two culturally insurrectionist events in 1913, the Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant. In other words, they were primed to attack the sterile commercialism and conventionality of Broadway theater, and they had the talent to make good on their challenge.

Their project quickly gained momentum. In addition to Boyce’s “Constance” and Cook and Glaspell’s “Suppressed Desires,” two other one-act plays were staged at Provincetown in 1915, one of them Wilbur Daniel Steele’s “Contemporaries,” an allegory based on the Tannenbaum church raids. The following summer the company organized itself as the Provincetown Players and rented space on the town’s wharf where it staged more plays, including, on July 28th, Eugene O’Neill’s “Bound East for Cardiff.” That fall they took their experimental theater to Greenwich Village and opened a small playhouse in a building next door to the Liberal Club on MacDougal Street. Over the company’s relatively brief life, two Provincetown summers and six seasons on MacDougal Street, the group’s artistic output was impressive: nearly one hundred plays by no less than forty-seven writers. The company’s ensemble approach, its practice of privileging the interpretative views of directors and writers over those of actors, its innovative set designs, and its commitment to plays that had serious social and political content all contributed to making the Provincetown Players, in the words of Adele Heller, “one of the most valuable of the early experimental theatres that helped to establish American drama as a serious art form.”

By November 1916, when the Provincetown Players opened their first New York season, the Village countercultural scene was greatly changed from what it had been barely four years earlier. When the Masses–Liberal Club circle had begun to take shape in 1912–1913, its members’ commitment to cultural and political transformation had distinguished them from dilettantish bohemianism. That distinctive trait was still evident in 1916, culturally in the experimentalism of the Provincetown Players and
politically in the militance of, for example, Ida Rauh and Jessie Ashley, who contrived to get themselves arrested for passing out birth control pamphlets at Union Square in order to trigger a judicial test of New York’s ban on distributing such literature. But by 1916 the committed radicalism of the *Masses* core group was becoming less typical of the Seventh Village countercultural community than another, more familiar type of bohemianism devoted to wine, sex, and song. Even though the lines between the two types of Village bohemians—those committed to political and cultural activism, and those who simply dropped out of bourgeois society with no intention of trying to transform it—were by no means absolute, the growing prominence from 1915 onward of the latter kind of bohemianism had significant consequences inside Greenwich Village.  

Publicity generated by the Seventh Villagers’ most visible activities—the revitalized *Masses*, the Armory Show, the Paterson Strike Pageant, and the Liberal Club’s schism—made Village radicalism seem exciting and attractive. As early as spring 1914, New York newspapers ran articles on Dodge’s salon and about Liberal Club members dining at Polly’s basement restaurant. The tone of these articles, especially those in the *New York World*’s Metropolitan section, a lively, attractively illustrated feature of the Sunday *World*, was light-hearted and amusing. “Revelling with Parlor Socialists and Others At a Wednesday Night Soiree on Fifth Avenue” ran the headline of the story about “Mrs. Mabel Dodge’s Wednesday Evening Gatherings.” When you dine on MacDougal Street with members of the Liberal Club, the *World* announced, “You Are Served Socialism with Soup, Music with Meat, Politics with Pie and Advanced Thoughts on New Ideas with Your Coffee.” It sounded like a lot of fun and certainly didn’t seem to require serious political commitment.  

In December 1914 *The Masses* sponsored its first masquerade ball. Announced as the “Futurist Ball” (*futurism* was a term used for almost any avant-garde style of art or literature, e.g., cubist painting or imagist poetry), the dance was held uptown at Leslie Hall, on Broadway and Eighty-third Street. Again, metropolitan dailies covered the event with upbeat headlines—“What a Wild, Arty Cut Up Night for the Insurgent Devil-May-Cares!”—and pictures of the radicals in bizarre costumes. Two months later, in February 1915, the Liberal Club held its own costume ball, an Arabian Nights theme affair at Webster Hall on East Eleventh, soon to be the primary location for Village dances. These early balls were mainly for members of the Seventh Village’s core group, and the masquerade format was in no way an innovation, since costume balls had been popular with New Yorkers for many years. The fact that a dance craze swept the city in the 1910s simply provided another reason for organizing balls. In 1913, for
instance, the Socialist Press Club held a costume ball in January, and the Jewish *Forward* featured a “Mask March” at its February ball. By early 1914 the number of organizations holding such dances was on the upswing, as indicated by columns of the Socialist *New York Call* that carried announcements of no fewer than three masquerade balls scheduled for a single two-week period (fig. 38).27
The Seventh Villagers soon gave their costume balls a special bohemian twist. In 1916, the Liberal Club announced that its February Webster Hall dance would be a “Pagan Rout.” From that time onward sponsors of Village dances emphasized that their dances were in the tradition of Parisian Latin Quarter bacchanalia. A major goal of having dances was to raise money, and the sponsors frankly set out to attract paying customers by playing on the reputation of artists and writers as being sexually liberated. One sponsor promised an “Art Models’ Frolic” with the Village’s “prettiest girls . . . in laughs and lingerie,” and reports about another ball said that many models came, “some au naturel.” By 1917, if not earlier, Village balls were attracting few actual Villagers, and the dances’ main purpose had become selling bohemia to tourists. Members of the older Seventh Village group bemoaned this development, but, as some recognized, they had been the first to use dances as fundraisers.28

One individual who began selling bohemia early in the Seventh Village’s history was Guido Bruno. Bruno, whose birth name was Curt Kisch, arrived in New York from Chicago in late 1913. He settled his family in Yonkers and began to explore Village bohemianism. Sometime in 1914 he opened a small second-story shop called Bruno’s Garret on Washington Square South, the “garret” being a reference to the popular bohemian image of a starving artist living in an attic room. The shop’s location, directly across the street from the Fifth Avenue bus line’s Washington Square stop, was shrewdly chosen to attract the attention of uptown New Yorkers and tourists as they arrived in the Village. Bruno was half huckster and half sincere patron of avant-garde art, and he demonstrated his commitment to the latter by adopting young artists and writers as his protégés, among them the imagist poet Alfred Kreymborg, the artist Clara Tice, and the writer Djuna Barnes. But his main activity was offering visitors to the neighborhood a romanticized version of Village bohemianism. “Greenwich Village!” he wrote. “A republic in the air! A gathering of constantly changing men and women.”29

In 1915, Bruno began publishing works by his favorite artists, sponsoring art exhibits at the garret, and issuing a small magazine he named Bruno’s Weekly. Some articles carried information on representatives of the old Village, especially Washington Square North patricians like Emily Johnston de Forest, but the primary focus was on the bohemian Seventh Villagers. Hippolyte Havel, revered by his friends in the Masses crowd as a model anarchist, wrote a piece for an August 1915 issue of Bruno’s Weekly that became a classic, if not the classic, statement of the Seventh Village’s credo. “When I speak of Greenwich Village,” Havel wrote, “I have no geographical conception in view. The term Greenwich Village is to me a spiritual
zone of mind.” The net effect of Bruno’s first year as the chief publicist for Village bohemianism was that when major New York dailies did features on the neighborhood—for example, the *New York Tribune*’s piece in November 1914, “Who’s Who in New York Bohemia,” and the *New York Sun*’s article a month later, “Everybody Is Doing Something in Bohemia”—the individuals and sites chosen were associated with Bruno’s bohemian Village rather than with the neighborhood’s political radicals.  

One telling phrase in the *Tribune*’s “Who’s Who in New York Bohemia” suggests how the self-conscious and faux bohemian newcomers tended to live in the Village but not really be of it. Before 1914 most Village artists and writers had frequented neighborhood saloons and restaurants that were owned by middle-class Italian, French, and Irish ethnics. The new Villagers were different. As the *Tribune* reporter put it, “If Greenwich Village ever did gaze entranced upon the surroundings of Americanized Italy, its eyes are turned away now. For Greenwich Village is eating all to itself in little cubby holes.”

The transformation of the radical Village into a bohemian Village progressed swiftly from 1915 to 1918. A host of small Village publications—the *Pagan* and the *Ink Pot* in 1916 and the *Greenwich Village Spectator* and the *Quill* in 1917—emerged and took on the role that *Bruno’s Weekly* had once performed alone, publishing stories about Village characters and advertising the shops, restaurants, and galleries about which tourists or newcomers would want to know. With few exceptions the bohemian Village press advertised the “little cubby holes”—tearooms, restaurants, arts and crafts shops, bookstores—that were owned and operated by self-conscious bohemians.

The marketing of bohemia reached new heights during 1917. A host of Village eccentrics energetically exploited the tourist trade: the stick-thin Tiny Tim peddling his “Soul Candy,” Mme. Clquette of the Art Mecca offering to show visitors a “Soul Light Shrine” of “Hindoo Origin” in the shop’s basement, and the waif-like Sonja the Cigarette Girl, who specialized in selling cigarettes to women, promising “no criticism or hard looks.” The Seventh Village also acquired an unofficial photographer, Jessie Tarbox Beals, who began to chronicle the local bohemian scene in earnest in 1916 and then in April 1917 opened a shop, the Village Art Gallery, at 6½ Sheridan Square, where she sold her pictures of New York’s Left Bank and some of its better-known habitués. As a service to visitors who needed help locating the Seventh Village’s most outré sites, Adele Kennedy, a sandal-shod young woman with bobbed hair, undertook to offer guided tours of artists’ studios, gift shops, and tearooms to all who, as she explained to a reporter, came “primed for thrills, anxious to be shocked,” and hoping to see some
bohemian “freaks.” An alternative to employing Adele’s services was to turn to a full-length guidebook to the best of Greenwich Village bohemia that Anna Alice Chapin published in 1917.12

The brevity of the Seventh Village’s lifespan is in no way surprising. Its history followed a course quite typical of many cultural and political insurgencies. A group of creative individuals had come together purposefully and for a time were afire with enthusiasm for liberation and transformation. Drawn by news of exciting things being done, others came to the Village to join the movement, their numbers and varied motivations diluting the communal intensity that had characterized the founders’ inner circle. Before too long, the coalition of individualists who had launched the revolution began to unravel.

This process began as early as 1916, when John Sloan and several other artists seceded from The Masses staff in protest over editorial captions they felt inappropriately politicalized their art. One cause or another soon removed other key figures from the inner circle. In 1916, Inez Milholland died of exhaustion in the midst of a strenuous national speaking tour for women’s suffrage. In 1917, Mabel Dodge went off to Taos, and by that time John Reed was already spending more time in Russia than in the Village.

American entrance into World War I in April 1917 proved much more damaging to the Seventh Village spirit than did individual defections and absences. The tolerance for diverse views that had allowed for harmonious coexistence among individuals from different political and artistic camps broke down as Villagers divided for or against the war. Village magazines of the commercialized bohemia type generally rallied to the flag, and the artists of MacDougal Alley, led by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, organized a four-day “Alley Festa” in June 1917, which raised about $60,000 for the Red Cross and other war relief agencies and produced more than $500,000 in Liberty Bond sales. Army recruiting stations in the Washington Square area did a booming business, but so too did the nearby office of an anti-war organization, the Bureau of Legal Advice. Founded in May 1917 by a coalition of liberals and Socialists that included several radicals with Village ties (Jessie Ashley served as treasurer and Charles Recht as one of its lawyers), the Bureau opened an office at 70 Fifth Avenue to offer free legal counseling to draft resisters and conscientious objectors.13

Villagers opposed to the war did not escape unscathed from a retaliatory campaign that the federal government launched to repress anti-war sentiment. The most famous case in point involved The Masses. In mid-1917, federal authorities, angered by the magazine’s opposition to the war, refused to allow it to be shipped through the U.S. mail, causing the magazine to cease publication and leading, in 1918, to two trials of The Masses’s edi-
tors for conspiracy to obstruct enlistment. Split juries in both trials failed to convict, thus giving advocates of a free press a belated, if somewhat pyrrhic, victory, but the climate of super-patriotism and repression that prevailed in the country during the war proved inhospitable to the Seventh Villagers’ spirit of joyful iconoclasm. By July 1918, the demoralized condition of the Village bohemians was all too apparent from a *New York Times* report that the Liberal Club was bankrupt and on its last legs as an organization.34

On the night of January 23, 1917, John Sloan, Marcel Duchamp, and four friends ascended a staircase inside Washington Arch, hung red balloons and Chinese lanterns from the top of the monument, and declared Greenwich Village a free and independent republic. The symbolism was playful but not without a point for historians seeking to understand the legacy of the Seventh Village. Like a skyrocket, it had risen high and had lit the sky with a series of brilliant bursts—the revitalized *Masses*, Dodge’s salon, the Armory Show, and the Paterson Strike Pageant—and, after only a slight pause, secondary explosions followed: the Liberal Club schism, Polly’s Restaurant, Provincetown summers, and the founding of the Provincetown Players.35

The initial bursts of light soon ended, but their afterimage lingered. Although the core group of Seventh Villagers had fragmented, many of its leading members continued to pursue radical political causes and artistic innovations in the 1920s. A new generation of artists and writers came to the Village, drawn by its reputation as a special gathering place for individuals engaged in testing the boundaries of conventional thought and behavior. In much the same way, many participants in the Village’s later incarnations—the Beat Village of the 1950s, the countercultural Village of the 1960s, and the gay and lesbian Village of the 1970s and eighties—were aware of and attracted by the neighborhood’s reputation as a pre–World War I bohemian enclave and can, therefore, be counted as spiritual heirs of the Seventh Villagers’ grand rebellion.36

**The Neighborhood, 1913–1918**

Although the image of the Village as a republic of free spirits won wide popular acceptance during the mid-1910s, it reflected only a tiny sliver of Village life between 1913 and 1918. The vast majority of Villagers were not bohemians, and for them the most important changes in the neighborhood in the mid-1910s were not due to the emergence of a bohemian enclave so much as to shifts in the neighborhood’s ethnic composition and developments in local housing and transportation conditions. This is not to suggest
that the nonbohemian Villagers were unified in what they thought constituted a social neighborhood. On that subject, they differed greatly among themselves, and therein lies a key to understanding how the Village functioned as a social community for the diverse groups who lived in it in the early twentieth century.

A useful starting point for describing who lived in the Village between 1913 and 1918, the heyday of the Seventh Village, is to recognize that despite constant shifts in the Village’s ethnic composition, several longstanding demographic trends continued into the 1910s. In 1910, a majority of Villagers were still either foreign-born or the children of immigrants. Federal census figures for the year show that the Village had a population of 124,603, more than 55,000 of whom were foreign-born and nearly 48,000 more of whom were native-born children of immigrants. The Italian presence in the Village had continued to grow relative to that of other ethnic groups. By 1910, Italians outnumbered both of the Village’s two other large ethnic groups, the Irish and old stock Protestants (which were present in roughly equal numbers), by more than two to one. Between 1910 and 1920, the local Italian population grew slightly, while the Irish and old stock Protestants lost ground. In the same ten-year period the number of German-born Villagers, which in 1910 had stood at 3,733 (compared with 11,047 Irish-born Villagers), dropped precipitously, by approximately 50 percent.37

The African American community, which for at least four decades had been characterized by constant turnover but by relatively stable total numbers (varying from 1,200 to 1,600), also shrank significantly in the 1910s. In the south and west Village areas where most black Villagers had long lived, the African American population fell from nearly 1,300 in 1910 to fewer than 600 in 1920. Summarizing the consequences of this demographic change in a dramatic manner, one investigator asserted that by 1920 only “three Negro blocks” remained of an enclave that had once been much larger.38

One such block, the narrow lane known as Gay Street, had among its residents a family that had persisted in the Village for more than two decades despite the comings and goings of many individual African Americans and the overall shrinkage of the neighborhood’s black population. This family, the Morgan J. Austins (mentioned in chapter 1 as residents of MacDougal Street in 1900 and Minetta Lane in 1910), lived at 9 Gay Street in 1920. Morgan had died and at least one of his sons (Artie) had joined the uptown migration of black New Yorkers, moving to a boarding house on West 113th Street. But Annie, the family’s Irish American matriarch, three of her mixed-race children, and six of her grandchildren remained Villag-
ers. They were part of a sixteen-person household that occupied a three-story brick row house. Reading between the lines of the census, which shows that the family shared its small rented house with three adult male boarders (two Italians and a West Indian black) and that Annie's son, daughter, and son-in-law were employed, respectively, as a chauffeur, store saleslady, and truck driver, it appears that the Austins were still following their long-standing practice of turning to each other for social and financial support.39

The broad demographic shifts in the Village were accompanied by losses of significant individuals in various Village constituencies. Among the west Village Irish, for instance, an older generation of men and women who had immigrated to the United States before the American Civil War was passing from the scene. The death of individuals like William (“Billy”) Walker of St. Luke’s Place (in 1916) and Thomas Kennedy of 41 Christopher Street (in 1918) deprived St. Joseph’s parish and Tammany’s reform wing of stalwart supporters and, along with the migration of Irish Villagers to other parts of the city, went far to explain why Irish county societies, whose core members had long been drawn from among men of the Walker–Kennedy generation, lost strength in the Village after World War I.40

Death and the passage of time also weakened the ranks of north Village patricians. Families like the Johnston–de Forest clan stayed in their ancestral homes, but the Old New York element of Washington Square North suffered a major loss when Serena Rhinelander died in 1914. The next year the Rhinelander mansion was sold, and the contrast between Old New York society and that of the new century was vividly illustrated in October 1915, just after the mansion’s new owner, a wealthy suffragist, moved in. According to a Village weekly, “lovers of the old order of things were much amazed to wake up last Saturday morning and behold the windows of the prim and ultra-conservative Serena Rhinelander home aglow with yellow suffragist slogans and banners in all its windows.”41

Three developments had a particularly important influence on the Village’s physical environment between 1913 and 1918. These were the construction of the Seventh Avenue subway line, the movement to remodel old tenements and run-down houses and turn them into middle-class properties, and the passage of the Zoning Act of 1916.

Physically, the most drastic change in the Village was caused by the Seventh Avenue extension, which required the destruction of the better part of ten blocks of mostly residential buildings between Greenwich Avenue and Varick Street. “The Cut,” as it was called locally, temporarily divided the far western part of the Village from the rest by the deep trench in which the Seventh Avenue subway lines were laid, and the project also caused a
significant loss of housing stock in that part of the neighborhood. (Although the extension of Sixth Avenue south of Carmine Street in the mid-1920s affected a somewhat smaller area, the project again forced Villagers to adjust to many changes in the neighborhood. Two of the largest changes were the removal of the Sixth Avenue Elevated line and the construction of Our Lady of Pompei’s present-day church on Carmine Street, a move required because the parish’s old church on Bleecker was demolished to clear a path for the new section of Sixth Avenue.)

The prospect of the Seventh Avenue subway opening its station at Sheridan Square had a noticeable effect in the Village even before regular service commenced in July 1918. The ancient horsecars—small buses drawn by one or two horses that once had criss-crossed the neighborhood in great numbers—had been gradually going out of service, and the final trip of the Fourth Street line, the last to operate in the Village, took place in July 1917. Even more significant, the expectation that the new subway’s arrival would make the west Village more accessible to commuters and tourists stimulated local real estate entrepreneurs to begin remodeling old homes into studio apartments.

No Village entrepreneur promoted the remodeling business with greater enthusiasm or success than Vincent Pepe. Born in Italy in April 1876, Pepe had been only eleven when his parents brought him to the United States. A brother, Michael, had immigrated to New York earlier in the 1880s. The Pepe brothers were representative of the younger Italian Villagers, both those born in Italy and those born in New York, whose careers did not depend mainly on serving the needs of an insulated immigrant community. Just before the turn of the century the Pepe brothers formed a real estate firm that initially specialized in managing rental properties but gradually expanded into real estate development. By the mid-1910s its primary business was renovating old Village buildings into studio apartments, an enterprise that Vincent Pepe, the more active partner in the firm by World War I, publicized with articles in local publications touting his projects as producing “Real Estate Progress in Our Community.” Widely recognized as the man to see if you wanted to rent an apartment in the neighborhood, he was identified in one small bohemian-run publication simply as “Vincent Pepe, the Village Landlord.”

Pepe and other real estate agents were not alone in their efforts to promote the Village’s attractiveness as a middle-class residential neighborhood in the mid-1910s. Two important civic organizations, the Greenwich Village Improvement Society (G.V.I.S.) and the People’s Institute, cooperated to initiate similar promotional campaigns in 1914. The G.V.I.S., founded by Mary Simkhovitch in 1903 with the goal of improving city services and
intergroup relations in the neighborhood, had remained largely a paper organization until 1913 when, with Simkhovitch as its president, it began several years of very intense activity. People’s Institute, operating out of its home base at Cooper Union, had specialized for fifteen years in sponsoring free educational programs to a mainly Lower East Side working-class clientele. In 1914, however, the new director of People’s Institute, Frederick Howe (who with his wife, Marie Jenney Howe, the founder of Heterodoxy, had recently moved to West Twelfth Street in the Village), urged his board to approve new programs, one of which was a cooperative venture with the Greenwich Village Improvement Society. Both Howe and one of Howe’s high-ranking assistants, John Collier (who was a participant in the Liberal Club–Dodge salon circle), had become convinced that the best way to prevent the social fragmentation that was widespread in large industrial cities was to promote community spirit at the neighborhood level. Toward that end, Howe and Collier established a People’s Institute Greenwich–Chelsea Committee and offered financial and staff assistance to the G.V.I.S., the neighborhood association active in nearby Greenwich Village.43

One of the first fruits of cooperation between the G.V.I.S. and People’s Institute was the publication in 1914 of a sixteen-page pamphlet titled “How Would You Like to Open a Door Like This—Ten Minutes After You ‘Punch the Clock?’ ” This frankly promotional pamphlet, 20,000 copies of which were printed for distribution throughout the city, carried the message that the Village had something for everyone. In the north Village near Fifth Avenue wealthy families could find “spacious old-fashioned elevator apartments” or “quaint red brick houses” with ten to twelve rooms that could be rented for $1,200 to $2,400 a year. But near Washington Square South or west of Sixth Avenue over to Hudson Street, four to seven rooms could be rented for as little as $25 and no more than $70 a month. And many examples of the “big handsome solid-looking house, with high ceilings and square rooms” were also available in the Village. All these rental properties, the authors continued, were close to the city’s major transportation hubs: only eight minutes from Penn Station, ten by ferry from Jersey City, and ten or less from Cunard, White Star, and Anchor line docks where one could board a ship for Europe. Boats to Coney Island and Rockaway Beach could be reached in less than fifteen minutes, and commuters who worked anywhere in Manhattan from Midtown to the Battery could be home in fifteen minutes.44

From the picture on the cover of the People’s Institute–G.V.I.S. pamphlet (a handsome house door) and the pamphlet’s content it was clear that its authors were intent on promoting the Village as a pleasant residential neighborhood. That the pamphlet’s middle-class sponsors favored a neigh-
borhood of this sort was no surprise. All the local advocacy groups that had campaigned to improve public services in the Village—the G.V.I.S., the People’s Institute Greenwich–Chelsea Committee, and the Washington Square Association—wanted to preserve and enhance the status of the Village’s core section as a neighborhood of middle- or upper-class houses and small businesses. Moreover, the leaders of these civic organizations agreed that statutory restrictions on commercial and industrial construction would go far toward securing the Village’s long-term future as an attractive residential district.

Between 1913 and 1916, everything fell into place to facilitate passage of the appropriate zoning restrictions. In 1913 the state legislature authorized the city Board of Estimate and Apportionment to establish a comprehensive zoning plan for all five city boroughs. That very fall the victory of two Fusion (i.e., anti-Tammany) candidates, John Purroy Mitchel as mayor and George McAneny as president of the Board of Aldermen, opened the way to the passage, after a long and complicated process, of the Zoning Act of 1916. On the day (May 27, 1916) that the Board of Estimate’s hearings dealt specifically with the Village, Vincent Pepe and William Spinney (a Greenwich House social worker), representing the Greenwich Village Improvement Society, testified in favor of making the Village’s core area a residential and small business zone in which building heights would be limited and from which large manufacturing establishments would be excluded. Although a number of real estate developers opposed these restrictions, the G.V.I.S. got most of what it wanted, and the heart of the Village between Houston and West Thirteenth from Hudson Street over to West Broadway (a Seventh Avenue corridor excepted) was designated as a residential and business zone.45

The events of 1913–1918 ensured that the Village would not, as patrician and middle-class residents had feared only ten years earlier, suffer the fate that had befallen most of Manhattan south of Fourteenth Street, which had been taken over by slum housing and commercial or industrial buildings. The north Village gentry and middle-class west Villagers, by staying in their homes despite the expansion of tenements and factories nearby, had achieved a holding action that kept their parts of the neighborhood residential in character until that status was written into law in the Zoning Act of 1916. At that point in the late 1910s, the arrival of the Seventh Avenue subway encouraged entrepreneurs to add to the neighborhood’s housing stock through refurbishing old homes or constructing new apartment buildings.

By 1918, therefore, the survival of certain features of the Village’s nineteenth-century physical environment—its quaint street patterns and low-rise residences—was assured, and even the neighborhood’s geographi-
cal borders remained fairly well defined, distinct from nearby districts. However, the ten years from 1908 to 1918 had brought many developments that placed the neighborhood’s social fabric under great strain: the growth of the Italian population, the tensions that arose over the neighborhood’s public spaces, the conflicts between laborers and factory owners in the garment industry, the moral reformers’ efforts to control the behavior of disorderly Villagers, and the emergence of the bohemian Village.

Despite these strains and the heterogeneity of the Village’s population, the word neighborhood did have a social meaning for many Villagers—though the particular meaning it had varied from group to group. For example, the self-defined bohemians and cultural radicals whose activities the public found so captivating between 1913 and 1918 had a distinctive view of neighborhood and social community. Hippolyte Havel’s well-known definition of the Village as “a spiritual zone of mind” idealized a kind of neighborhood not tied to geographical boundaries. Havel in fact made it quite clear that most residents of Greenwich Village lacked the freedom of spirit and radical unconventionality needed to be considered true Villagers. Nevertheless, Greenwich Village as a geographical entity was not without importance to the bohemian residents, since it was a place in which a cultural radical could find a dense concentration of like-minded individuals for inspiration.46

At first glance it might seem that the middle-class New Yorkers targeted by Village real estate promoters had little in common with Havel’s “true” Villagers, since the middle-class New Yorkers who rented the neighborhood’s refurbished houses and recently constructed apartment buildings were drawn to the Village because of its material features—nice homes, excellent transportation, and good schools—rather than to the pursuit of the spiritual values with which Havel’s true Villagers were said to be imbued. However, as the historian Caroline Ware found, bohemian Villagers and middle-class newcomers shared one very important attitude toward community. Both valued the Village for its reputed tolerance of individual differences and in fact thought that neighborliness at its best consisted principally of a reciprocal arrangement in which neighbors did not meddle in one another’s private affairs. This spirit of “rampant individualism,” as Ware called it, meant that neither the newcomers nor the bohemians made any attempt to bridge the social gulf between themselves and the Catholic, immigrant, and working-class residents of the neighborhood.47

Clues to how those Catholic, immigrant, and working-class Villagers viewed their neighborhood can be gleaned from data that Ware and her research team gathered during interviews with old-time Villagers in the early 1930s. Ware’s researchers asked sixty Irish Villagers, most of them
residents of west Village blocks near Jones Street (where the offices used by Ware were located), questions about what neighborhood life had been like “before the war.”

Several of Ware’s informants asserted that their part of the Village had been “a genuine neighborhood” before World War I. According to these old-timers, around the turn of the century (but possibly a bit earlier) members of the neighborhood’s largest ethnic groups—Irish, Germans, and old stock Protestants—had enjoyed friendly relations. “Each block,” they said, “was more or less like a big family,” in which casual socializing took the form of “back-and-forth visiting,” and residents felt so confident about neighborhood safety that they didn’t lock the front doors of their houses. These old residents, Ware reported, believed that the prewar Village had been “a social as well as a geographical unit.” But in the postwar period many Irish families moved out of the west Village and relations with the Italians who replaced them varied, Ware wrote, “from violent antagonism to indifference.” The arrival of bohemian and middle-class Villagers served only to further undermine any sense of neighborly solidarity.

But what, precisely, had broken down? The neighborly paradise whose loss Ware’s Irish informants bemoaned had always excluded many local residents from its charmed circle. African Americans, though present in substantial numbers in the west Village during the era when neighborliness supposedly prevailed, were not members of the Irish old-timers’ social networks. Similarly, Italian newcomers were viewed by Irish Villagers as intruders rather than neighbors. In fact, even Irish informants who spoke of the friendly relations that existed between Irish Villagers and their German and “American” neighbors also spoke with pride of the many west Village saloons that “you couldn’t walk in[to] unless you were Irish.” On close examination, therefore, it’s clear that the social intimacy remembered so fondly by the Irish old-timers was achieved by excluding everyone who did not belong to a relatively homogeneous group of insiders. This pattern, of course, is quite consistent with the preponderance of evidence from the period which indicates that the Village as a whole was always more a constellation of smaller social communities—the patrician north Village, the Irish west Village, and so on—than a single social unit, and that even when Villagers from different ethnic groups were neighbors, as they often were in nearly every section of the Village, they usually remained strangers to one another socially.

Well aware of the fragmenting effect that ethnic and class diversity had on social community in the Village, Mary Simkhovitch of Greenwich House made combatting social fragmentation a central goal of her long career in the neighborhood. What she hoped to create was a more inclusive
form of neighborhood and neighborliness. From her very earliest years at Greenwich House she had sought to promote harmonious working relations across ethnic lines by inviting representatives of a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups to be members of Greenwich House’s board of trustees and officers of the Greenwich Village Improvement Society. Her goal, she said, was to foster “community spirit,” the chief sign of which would be the coming together of “all groups” locally in a spirit of “mutual respect, sympathy, and cooperation.” This, she emphasized, did not require a process of homogenization that would eliminate ethnic differences but rather an appreciation of the unique contribution that every group of Villagers made to the neighborhood.51

After making a good start toward learning about and responding to the neighborhood’s needs during the first ten years (1902–1912) of the settlement’s existence, Simkhovitch and her Greenwich House staff accelerated the pace of their community spirit-building activities during the next five years. From 1913 to 1917, Simkhovitch often turned to members of the Greenwich Village Improvement Society to spearhead her campaign for neighborhood improvements. In 1914, the same year that the G.V.I.S. cooperated with People’s Institute to publish their promotional pamphlet, they also prepared a survey of the quality of local street lighting, street pavement, and playgrounds and lobbied municipal authorities for improvements. Simkhovitch and her allies also campaigned successfully for passage of the Zoning Act of 1916 and won approval from the city to keep selected local public schools open after school hours to serve as community social centers. Under this program two schools, P.S. 41 on Greenwich Avenue and P.S. 95 on Clarkson Street, became available to the general public in the late afternoon and evening for such activities as basketball games, dances, and community meetings.52

Old Home Week, a five-day neighborhood festival held in May 1913 and sponsored by the Greenwich Village Improvement Society, was a particularly ambitious undertaking launched in pursuit of Simkhovitch’s goal of promoting neighborhood-wide civic spirit. A featured event of the Old Home Week program consisted of speeches by elderly past and present residents of the Village who reminisced about the neighborhood as they had known it forty or more years earlier (fig. 39). Two distinguished old-time Villagers, Robert W. de Forest of Washington Square North, who had grown up on Charles Street, and Everett P. Wheeler, an eminent lawyer whose childhood home had been on Grove Street, spoke at the opening day ceremonies. Later in the festival, lesser-known Villagers were introduced and asked to share their memories of former times. These individuals included Euphemia M. Olcott, a resident of the north Village since 1844,
two venerable retired firemen (Jimmie Winters, age ninety, and Dan Mott, eighty three), and Colonel J. Frank Supplee, the oldest member of the local National Guard unit. Elected officials—Alderman Henry Curran, Borough President George McAneny, State Assemblyman James (“Jimmy”) Walker, and Congressman Jefferson M. Levy—each took a turn at the speaker’s podium at various points during the week.53

Old Home Week’s other events included a parade of Village organizations, a band concert, prayer meetings at many local churches, a dramatized presentation by Greenwich House school children of Longfellow’s “Hiawatha,” and a closing dinner at Public School 95. Most of the week’s programs emphasized the Village’s past, and several speakers and newspaper accounts suggested that Greenwich Village was unique among the city’s neighborhoods in being able to mount a celebration of its history in which so many speakers could be found who had firsthand memories of earlier times. But the festival did not just look backward. By evoking the past as a reference point, it also addressed contemporary concerns about the lack of continuity and cohesion that several commentators felt had become typical of life in the city’s neighborhoods.54

At least two speakers, Professor Charles S. Baldwin of Columbia University and the lawyer Everett P. Wheeler, asserted that in some respects the
present Village was a better place to live than it had been, fond memories though they had of their childhood years in the neighborhood. Baldwin’s reasons for making this point bore directly on the goal of inclusiveness that underlay the festival planners’ efforts. He noted that many Irish names appeared on the Old Home Week program and observed that this was a welcome departure from the values of an earlier era, when Protestant Villagers had been wont to say, “We must keep the village American,” meaning that Irish immigrants were not welcome there.55

Diversity was honored in various ways. Numerous Irish speakers and old-timers participated in key events throughout the week. The Italian-born realtor Vincent Pepe made an invaluable contribution as the planning committee’s treasurer, and Old Home Week’s organizers actively sought to involve other Italian Villagers through invitations sent to every Italian church and religious society in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, Old Home Week’s inclusiveness had its limits. All the major addresses on the topic of the Village’s past were given by Protestants of western European background. Black Villagers, despite their long-standing presence in the neighborhood, were given no visible role to play in scheduled events, although a Greenwich House staff member on the planning committee did make an effort to have a letter from a black woman resident of the Minettas included among a series of letters to the editor that the New York World published about Old Home Week.56

These decisions by the celebration’s organizers conform to a general pattern evident in the community festivals, pageants, and reunions that enjoyed wide popularity throughout the United States in the decades before World War I. In contrast with the approach of the Village radicals, who less than a month after Old Home Week staged the Paterson Strike Pageant, a central theme of which was class conflict between factory workers and their employers, mainstream progressives like Mary Simkhovitch generally sought, as the historian David Glassberg has observed, to emphasize social cohesion. Most contemporary community celebrations portrayed old stock Protestants as the founders of American towns and cities that then “cheerfully welcomed ‘later’ immigrant groups” and their “colorful” ways, a historical approach intended to offer “a tangible demonstration of how disparate ethnic groups could unite into one community.” But as Glassberg adds, “blacks and Asians were generally absent from the pageant portrait of the community and its history”—a statement that applies equally well to Greenwich Village’s Old Home Week, which offered a version of the neighborhood’s past without any reference to blacks or black historical consciousness (fig. 40).57

The following May, 1914, a second neighborhood festival, this one called
the Village Fair, was sponsored by Greenwich House in cooperation with the Greenwich Village Improvement Association. As Greenwich House’s headworker and the G.V.I.S.’s president, Simkhovitch issued a press statement declaring that the occasion was being held to promote “the general happiness of the neighborhood.” Toward that end, a full array of entertainments was scheduled. George McAneny, now president of the Board of Aldermen, and State Assemblyman Jimmy Walker once again gave opening-day speeches. The next few days’ activities included a Village parade, a beauty contest for Village babies, an old-timers’ reunion dinner, two dances, social events at local public schools, a half marathon race, and exhibits of Italian women’s needlework and a marionette show by the Italian drama club at Richmond Hill House (formerly West Side Branch settlement house).58

An innovative feature of the Village Fair was a farm exhibit in Hudson Park across the street from Jimmy Walker’s old home on St. Luke’s Place. The display of farm animals—a pig, eight goats, some chickens and ducks, and a milk cow—made a particularly big hit with festival-goers. City children who had never heard barnyard sounds shrieked with delight every time the pig grunted. Newspaper reporters had great fun describing the difficult time organizers had finding a suitable cow (a Long Island farmer came to
the rescue and loaned them one named “Annie”), then the trouble they had getting someone to volunteer to milk Annie, and finally the test of wills between the out-of-practice volunteer and an uncooperative Annie during the milking demonstration. Overall, the festival accomplished Simkhovitch’s goal of promoting “general happiness.” The only slightly sour note was struck during the closing night’s dance, at which, according to a newspaper report, conflicts arose between attendees who wanted to do old-fashioned barn dances and members of a younger set who clamored for the latest dance fad, the tango (fig. 41). 59

Besides hoping that Old Home Week and the Village Fair would be fun for everyone who attended, the events’ organizers attempted to foster neighborliness by drawing many different types of Villagers into festival activities. After compiling a list of all the neighborhood’s religious organizations, the fair’s sponsors made sure that each received publicity about forthcoming events, including the possibility of hosting activities at their churches. Similarly, all political viewpoints were welcomed. Tammany district leader Charles Culkin was invited to suggest names of old residents, and he responded by sending a list culled from his carefully maintained files. Republican Alderman Curran, Tammany Democratic Assemblyman Walker, and Independent Democrat McAneny were featured speakers. Robert W. de Forest represented patrician Villagers, and Italian traditions were recognized through the exhibits held at Richmond Hill House. Two
Italian cherubs won the boys’ and girls’ baby beauty contests, and Public School 95, a large (2,600-pupil) grammar school, 98 percent of whose students were Italian, was chosen as the site for many Village Fair events.\(^6\)

That ethnic lines were in fact crossed as a result of Simkhovitch’s efforts to promote community spirit is most easily documented by examples of cooperation between Village settlement workers and the leaders of the local Italian community who were members or supporters of the Greenwich Village Improvement Society. During Old Home Week in 1913, the G.V.I.S. logo appeared on festival invitations and programs, but Simkhovitch and her Greenwich House staff did most of the real work of organizing and running the five-day affair. In 1914, however, much more of the basic legwork for the Village Fair was done by G.V.I.S. members other than Simkhovitch, with Vincent Pepe, the festival’s energetic treasurer, carrying the heaviest workload. Pepe’s commitment to the festival was just one more example, along with his role as the “Village Landlord,” of the way his public activities now extended well beyond the bounds of the Italian immigrant community.

Father Antonio Demo was another Italian immigrant whose connections with individuals and organizations outside the south Village Italian enclave expanded steadily from 1908 to 1918. Barely able to speak English in 1899 when he arrived in the Village to become pastor of Our Lady of Pompei, Demo initially had little need for English because at first he had little contact with anyone outside his immigrant flock. Gradually, however, this insular position vis-à-vis the surrounding non-Italian community broke down, in part because he was called on to represent the interests of his Italian-speaking parishioners to various municipal and private legal or social welfare agencies, and also because he was invited with increasing frequency to advise civic organizations regarding the needs and preferences of Italian Villagers.

A careful student of Demo’s wide contacts with institutions outside the Italian immigrant community has suggested that his behavior in this regard was “most unusual” for Italian Catholic clergymen before World War I. Those contacts increased in the 1910s and took an ever-wider variety of forms. In 1910 the librarian of the local public library asked Demo to suggest appropriate titles for Italian readers, and from 1913 onward Village public school principals frequently contacted him about problems involving students whose parents belonged to his parish. An important moment that signaled his increasingly open attitude toward contacts from outside the Italian immigrant community came in 1911, when he allowed members of the Women’s Trade Union League of New York, many of whom were middle- or upper-class Protestants, to distribute pro-union leaflets outside
of Our Lady of Pompei during memorial masses for victims of the Triangle fire.\textsuperscript{61}

In the mid-1910s Demo also carried on an extensive correspondence with administrators working for the Greenwich District of the Charity Organization Society. These exchanges concerned cases of Italian individuals and families in need of social or economic assistance. For several years Demo served, along with a number of school principals and social workers, as a member of a committee sponsored by an organization known as the School and Civil League, whose mission it was to promote a knowledge of American institutions in Village schools. He frequently received invitations to participate in programs run by the Village’s two main social settlements, Greenwich House and Richmond Hill House. When an officer of the Greenwich Village Improvement Society wrote urging him to support the G.V.I.S., Demo responded by making a small monetary donation to the group’s work. By the mid-1910s Demo’s civic activities were a practical example of Mary Simkhovitch’s conviction that the process of building community in a modern urban neighborhood did not require social intimacy or cultural homogeneity so much as it did mutual respect and pragmatic cooperation among the various subgroups who lived in the area.\textsuperscript{62}

Simkhovitch’s efforts to promote her ideal of neighborhood enjoyed considerable success during the five-year period from 1913 to 1918. By 1917, if not earlier, it was clear that she had accomplished many of her objectives. A new grammar school (P.S. 95) had opened on Clarkson Street, and along with P.S. 41 on Greenwich Avenue it had been designated as a neighborhood social center. A public bath house for which Simkhovitch had long lobbied had been built in Hudson Park. The neighborhood’s recreation facilities had been augmented by the conversion of the Barrow Street pier into a recreation site. The publicity that the Committee on Congestion had given earlier to the need for urban planning had helped create the political climate in which the Zoning Act of 1916 became law.

By January 1917, when Greenwich House moved its main facility from Jones Street to larger quarters on Barrow Street, Simkhovitch’s priorities were shifting to matters beyond the confines of Greenwich Village. She had been elected president of the National Federation of Settlements in 1916, and the entrance of the United States into World War I in April 1917 inevitably distracted her and other many Villagers from a focus on local concerns. Not that Simkhovitch’s work in the neighborhood was finished. She did not retire from her position as Greenwich House’s head resident until 1946, when she was seventy-nine years old. But by 1917 the formative period of her career in neighborhood social work was definitely coming to a close.
One idealized description of urban neighborhoods portrays them as tight-knit social communities. The individuals and families who reside in such neighborhoods are said to benefit from participating in extended social networks that provide their members with a sense of belonging and identity, offering them a refuge in the otherwise impersonal, fragmented, competitive world of modern industrial society. Whether or not this portrait is accurate for American urban neighborhoods in general—it has been suggested, for example, that many such model neighborhoods were, in fact, the products of nostalgia, in which the neighborhood of one’s youth is remembered as a better place in a better time—it is clear that Greenwich Villagers as a whole never shared a social community of the ideal type between 1898 and 1918.63

Much too much ethnic, class, and cultural diversity existed in the Village to support neighborhood-wide social intimacy. Although on some occasions, most of which occurred between 1908 and 1915, an impressive amount of communication and cooperation did take place across ethnic and class lines, these moments were the products of very special circumstances prompted either by the impact of a traumatic event (most notably the Triangle fire) or the efforts of middle-class social progressives committed to reaching out to their working-class neighbors. Major examples of this latter kind of cross-class, cross-ethnic interchange include the alliance between middle-class members of the Women’s Trade Union League and garment workers, the Church of the Ascension’s sponsorship of Ascension Forum, and Mary Simkhovitch’s many attempts to foster neighborliness through such initiatives as the Greenwich Village Improvement Society, community festivals, and neighborhood social centers.

More typically, however, feelings of social community and neighborliness in Greenwich Village existed only among smaller networks of Villagers who shared ties based on membership in a particular ethnic group, church, social club, or political organization or who lived in close proximity on a specific block or section of a block. Outside of these more intimate social networks, except under unusual circumstances, Villagers of different types for the most part had little social intercourse with one another, and even the Village’s smaller social communities were constantly buffeted by changes in the ethnic, physical, and political character of the neighborhood. The period from 1898 to 1918 was a time of ongoing transformation that left few, if any, Villagers untouched.

These latter days of the Sixth Village—years when a roiling mix of creeds, colors, classes, and nationalities shared the neighborhood—bequeathed a twofold legacy to its successors. The first, widely acknowledged by historians and Village residents alike, is the Sixth Village’s contribution
as the location in which the Seventh Villagers came together as a group and from which they then launched their grand rebellion, thereby creating the Village’s reputation as an enclave of free spirits whose unconventional ways are tolerated, even honored, by their neighbors. This reputation, which led to the famous image of the Village as America’s Montmartre, put down its first roots in a Sixth Village milieu; once established, it continued to inspire emulation by succeeding generations of Villagers.

By contrast, the second legacy of the Sixth Village era, the example it represents of a mixed-class, mixed-ethnic neighborhood, has scarcely been recognized at all. An obvious reason for this neglect is that at first glance the Sixth Village has always seemed to be the drab older sister to its vivacious bohemian younger sibling. In addition, because a number of other late nineteenth-century wards in lower Manhattan had diverse populations, the Village-as-multicultural-neighborhood phenomenon may seem to lack the uniqueness that attaches to the Village-as-America’s-bohemia.64

Whatever the cause for the Sixth Village’s relative obscurity, its special qualities are significant and merit close attention. A striking degree of awareness of their neighborhood as a distinct social and geographical entity existed among Villagers at the turn of the twentieth century, as indicated by the fact that it was there that the city’s first neighborhood association, the Greenwich Village Improvement Society, was established in 1903. Moreover, from the first the society’s leaders made it their goal to foster a spirit of inclusiveness that would transcend the narrow ethnic and class boundaries that so often defined “neighborhood” in other parts of the city. From the vantage point of yet another century’s turning, therefore, at a time when the populations of many American cities are exceedingly diverse, the cosmopolitan makeup of the pre–World War I Village and the plethora of Villages that existed inside its borders—the African American, Irish, and Italian Villages, and the cross-ethnic, cross-class Village networks sponsored by the Women’s Trade Union League, the Church of the Ascension, and Greenwich House—can serve as positive examples of the potential for cultural vitality that exists in a heterogeneous society of the sort that may well be “the future of us all.”65