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Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces:

The World War II Experience of Chestnut Hill, Tennessee

By Rebecca Byrd*



The December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor represented one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. During the next four years, the United States supported a worldwide war effort on numerous fronts. Across the nation, citizens bought war bonds, collected scrap metal, formed community preparedness groups, took jobs that directly supported the war, and joined the military. On the home front, farmers, industrial workers, women, and minorities made many sacrifices to help support the war effort. Rationing of gasoline, rubber, sugar, and meat brought Uncle Sam into every household. The effort to win World War II dramatically changed the social, economic, and political landscape of the nation and set a new more modern tone in the years that followed.¹

Each region and state supported the war effort in unique ways. In East Tennessee, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) embarked on a massive and dam building program to help supply the energy needed for war industries. TVA's power grid supported the work of oleum and munitions plants in the Copper Basin, aluminum plants in the town of Alcoa, and the various tests being conducted in the secret city of Oak Ridge just a few miles from Knoxville. In the process, the agency continued its efforts to modernize the

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¹ See, Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (London, 1981); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, MA, 1984); Mary Thomas, *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie: Alabama Women and the Second World War* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1987); John Jefferies, *Wartime America: The World War II Home Front* (Chicago, 1998); John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York, 1976).



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the region through electrifying rural areas, improving agricultural practices, and controlling the Tennessee River and its tributaries. At the same time, however, TVA's wartime programs and projects displaced residents, flooded valuable farmland, and irrevocably changed rural areas that had been isolated for generations.²

In rural areas of East Tennessee directly or indirectly affected by the lakes and programs of TVA, the onset of World War II and the effort to support the war challenged many social, economic, and cultural values. For example, World War II represented a transitional period for many residents in the small community of Chestnut Hill, in Jefferson County, Tennessee. Support for the war effort also affected operations at the area's largest employer, Bush Brothers & Company. In rural communities like Chestnut Hill, change came more slowly and in ways that sometimes paralleled but just as often diverged from the national trends. The residents of Chestnut Hill accepted or resisted the changes brought about by the war based on their economic interests and core community values. By focusing on sources from the early 1940s and the recollections of three residents who lived and worked in Chestnut Hill during this transitional period, this essay explores how support for the war effort affected a largely unstudied rural area in East Tennessee.

Chestnut Hill, Tennessee is a small unincorporated community located between Douglas Lake and English Mountain at the junction of Jefferson and Sevier Counties. According to the earliest known records the area was settled sometime after 1783 when the original grant of 500 acres south of Indian Creek was given to John Webb. The community grew steadily despite periodic conflicts with Native Americans. During the Civil War, residents of the community were largely Republicans and mostly identified with the Union. Following the war, the area remained rural with farming as the major occupation.³

Near the beginning of the twentieth century, a simple business venture transformed the nature of the community. In 1897, A.J. Bush, a local schoolteacher and entrepreneur, entered into a partnership with Decatur Lewis to open a general mercantile store called Bush, Lewis & Company to serve the community's needs. The store prospered and Bush expanded his business. In 1903, leaders of Stokely Brothers Canning Company, which was located in nearby Newport, approached Bush about opening a

² See, William Wade Drumright, "A River for War, a Watershed to Change: The Tennessee Valley Authority During World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2005); William Simson, "Munitions and Victory Gardens from the Old Red Scar: Managing the Chemicals Industry in the Ducktown Copper Basin during World War II," *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 83 (2011): 56-71; Charles W. Johnson and Charles O. Jackson, *City Behind a Fence: Oak Ridge, Tennessee 1942-1946* (Knoxville, 1981); David Smith, *From Monopoly to Competition: The Transformations of Alcoa, 1888-1986* (Cambridge, MA, 1988).

³ Lena Maye Bush Ethier, and Edward R. Walker III, *Chestnut Hill: A Chronicle 1783-1986: A History of Chestnut Hill* (Jefferson County, TN, 1978), 2; Noel Fisher, *War At Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).



In 1897, A.J. Bush, a local schoolteacher and entrepreneur, opened a small store in the Chestnut Hill community. Bush's business expanded to include a cannery that produced many varieties of canned vegetables. The company provided employment for a large number of residents in the community and region. Pictured is the Bush family, Alger, Sallie, A.J. (left to right, front row), Claude, and Fred (left to right, back row). Bush Brothers & Company.

tomato cannery in partnership with them. Bush agreed and constructed a cannery in Chestnut Hill, which quickly became the economic center of the community. In 1908, A.J. Bush bought out his partners and formed Bush Brothers & Company. The Bush brothers in the company's name were actually A.J. Bush's sons, Fred, Claude, Alger, and Burnett. Leaders of the new venture purchased large tracts of land for growing vegetables and contracted with local farmers to purchase their crops. To meet the growing demands for canned vegetables, during the 1920s the company expanded its operations at Chestnut Hill and constructed new canneries in Clinton and Oak Grove, Tennessee. As the Great Depression limited budgets for many consumers, the company focused on canning inexpensive foods such as hominy, sauerkraut, and pork and beans.⁴

As the company's product line expanded, more and more community members became tied to "the factory," as it was called, either through direct employment or by selling agricultural products from their farms. The recollections of three residents of the Chestnut Hill community provide a window into life in the community, working for the company, and adapting to the changes of the early 1940s. Alma Miller was born about 1905, and

⁴ Charles Metz, *This Community of Companions: A History of Bush Brothers & Company* (Knoxville, 2011), 14, 25, 80; Edward R. Walker III, *Cocke County Tennessee* (Charleston, SC, 2007), 60; "Bush Brothers: About Us," available at, http://www.bushbeans.com/en_US/about_us/.

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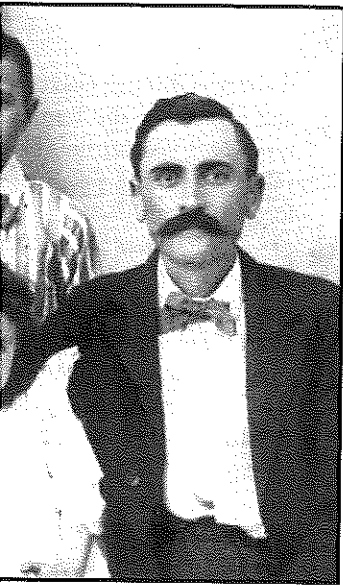
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opened a small store in the Chestnut Cannery that produced many varieties for a large number of residents in the community. A.J. (left to right, front row), and Burnett, A.J. (left to right, back row), of Bush Brothers & Company.

Bush agreed and constructed a cannery to become the economic center of the community. He and his partners formed the company and named it after themselves: A.J. Bush, A.J. Burnett, and Burnett. Leaders of the community were interested in growing vegetables and producing canned goods. To meet the growing demand for canned goods in the 1920s the company expanded to include new canneries in Clinton. The Great Depression limited budgets for producing inexpensive foods such as beans.

As the community grew, more and more community members were called, either through family or business contacts from their farms. The Chestnut Hill community provided a source of produce for the company, and adapting to the needs of the community was born about 1905, and

Bush Brothers & Company
Sevier County Tennessee (Charleston,
Tennessee)
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before her marriage she worked in the Bush's General Store. During the war she did not work and took care of her young child. Ina Feezell Norris was born in 1926 in the nearby community of Byrd's Crossroads in Sevier County. Norris was a teenager attending high school in Sevierville in 1941. Joseph Chester (J.C) Thornton was born in 1929 and attended Chestnut Hill School during World War II.⁵

Norris and Miller had distinct memories of how the Great Depression affected Chestnut Hill and working for Bush Brothers & Company. Despite the economic downturn, demand for canned vegetables remained steady and the company relied on local labor. Especially significant was the number of women and children temporarily employed to harvest crops. Ina Norris recalled that as a teenager she and her brother were frequently employed as farm laborers on Bush Brothers & Company property. Particularly vivid were her memories of picking greens in the spring. She recalled that pickers earned a nickel a bushel and that consequently everyone tried to "fluff up" their greens to make the basket appear fuller than it really was. One of the Bush family members monitored the workers and on several occasions used his foot to pack down the greens in her basket.⁶ Similarly, Alma Miller recounted a story about the women employed in the factory to string and break beans. The women were also paid by the basket and wore a punch-card around their necks to record the number of baskets completed each day. Bush family members would periodically come around and shake the baskets to ensure that the company was getting its money's worth.⁷

Norris' and Miller's memories of their employment in both the fields and the factory demonstrated the significant degree of vertical integration that Bush Brothers & Company achieved in the 1930s and 1940s. A.J. Bush wanted to ensure a stable supply of produce for the cannery by purchasing and then leasing farmland.⁸ The acquisition of land allowed the company to open a satellite corn plant between Chestnut Hill and Dandridge in the Oak Grove community. In addition to the purchase of farmland, the Bush family also acquired or built houses within the community which were rented to the factory workers. The development of this single, family owned business as the economic core of the community, along with its relative isolation and unincorporated status, gave Chestnut Hill a unique character.

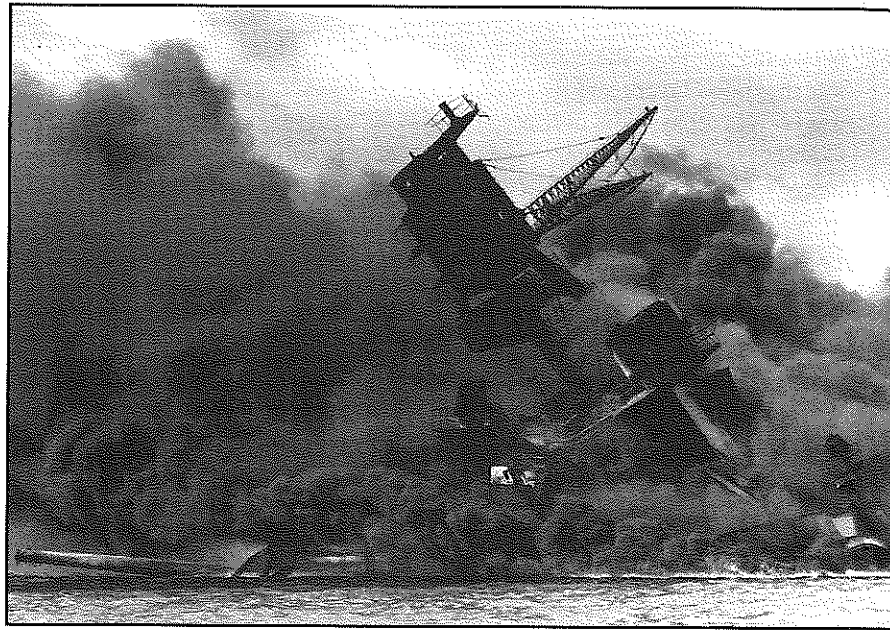
For residents of Chestnut Hill access to information about the war varied. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 came as a

⁵ Author's interview with Ina Feezell Norris, March 9, 2002; Author's interview with Alma Batson Miller, March 22, 2002; Author's interview with Joseph Chester (J.C) Thornton, March 14, 2002.

⁶ Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002.

⁷ Author's interview with Miller, March 22, 2002.

⁸ Metz, *Community of Companions*, 73; "Bush Brothers Co. buy 900-acre farm" *Standard Banner*, January 25, 1940.



The surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941, killed over 2,300 and destroyed U.S. planes, submarines, and battleships, including the USS Arizona. The next month, America entered World War II. "The USS Arizona (BB-39) burning after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor," December 7, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, National Archives and Records Administration.

surprise to most of the residents of Chestnut Hill, especially those who had no access to newspapers or radio broadcasts. The attack was more shocking to those who had paid scant attention to the news of the war raging in Europe.

Alma Miller, a young wife and mother in 1941, had no memories of the war in Europe before Pearl Harbor. Her lack of knowledge was likely because her family did not own a radio or subscribe to a newspaper. Miller stated that her family received the news of Pearl Harbor the same way they heard most things, through word of mouth from some better-informed neighbor.⁹ Even if the Millers had subscribed to the local newspaper, it is unlikely that they would have known about the war in Europe. Coverage was virtually nonexistent in *The Standard Banner*, the Jefferson County newspaper published in nearby Dandridge.¹⁰

In contrast, J.C. Thornton, who was twelve years old in 1941, had strong recollections of the war in Europe. Thornton related that he had a deep interest in the European war beginning in 1938 when the Munich

⁹ Author's interview with Miller, March 22, 2002.

¹⁰ The paper did not put out a special edition following Pearl Harbor and the issues produced in early December did not recount the details of the attack.



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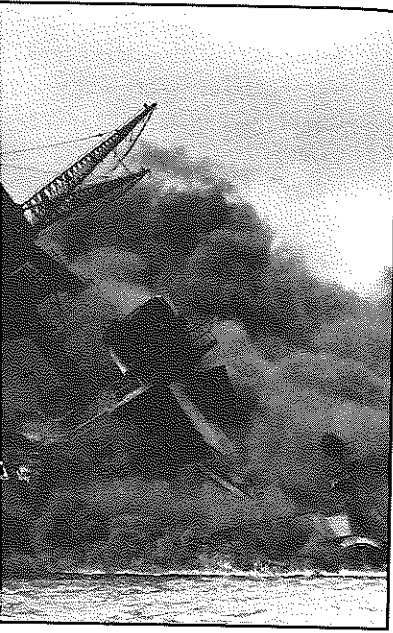
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conference was reported in the news. Thornton's father was a supervisor at the cannery. His position provided the family with a stable income that allowed them purchase items such as a radio, a subscription to one of the Knoxville newspapers, and a truck. Thornton recalled that he became so interested in the course of events in Europe that his father purchased a globe. The globe allowed Thornton to better visualize the events described in the news reports. The ability to purchase a luxury item such as a globe during the Great Depression also reflected the family's higher economic status.¹¹

The Feezell family had access to information about the war. Ina Feezell (later Norris) was fifteen in 1941. Her father was a farmer and occasionally a shopkeeper in a small store. She recalls that her family owned a radio that they listened to daily and subscribed to one of the local papers. Norris attended high school in Sevierville, which gave her greater access to knowledge of world affairs and reflected her family's economic status.¹²

In 1941, Chestnut Hill residents ran the gamut from families like the Thorntons who could afford to be well informed about the war, to those like the Millers for whom war only became a reality after Pearl Harbor. Items such as a radio, newspaper subscription, or vehicle were clearly beyond the economic means of many Chestnut Hill families before and during the war years. A lack of access to information limited their knowledge and understanding of the war.

While knowledge of the war in Europe and the world in general did not lessen residents' horror of learning about Pearl Harbor, it helped diminish their fears. Thornton recalls that his family learned of the attack on Sunday evening either at church services or from the radio news broadcasts. Thornton recalled not being frightened by the news of Pearl Harbor or later worrying about air raids. He stated that "we were surrounded by water; had the Atlantic and the Pacific to protect us, so I don't ever remember being worried about war coming here." His understanding of geography, gained from his globe and the current event reports that he prepared for school, aided this sense of security.¹³

Similarly Norris was unclear as to when she and her family first received the news about the attack on Pearl Harbor. She remembered going to school the next day and participating in an assembly, during which the students sang patriotic songs, prayed, and listened to President Roosevelt's radio address. Norris's experience was similar to that of many American children nationwide who gathered in assemblies to hear Roosevelt's address.¹⁴ Like Thornton, Norris did not recall being particularly frightened of possible air

¹¹ Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

¹² Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002.

¹³ Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

¹⁴ William Tuttle, "Daddy's Gone To War" *The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children* (New York, 1993), 5.

raids on the Chestnut Hill community. She said, "I always felt like we were so far from the ocean and that there wasn't anything here important enough to bomb."¹⁵

Miller, however, recalled being very frightened by the news of Pearl Harbor and fearful of the possibility of air raids throughout the war.¹⁶ This seeming incongruity is perhaps best explained by Miller's world view. She was neither well informed nor particularly interested in the world outside of Chestnut Hill. Both Thornton and Norris specifically cited the oceans as geographic barriers to enemy attack. They also mentioned the time difference between the East Coast and Hawaii as part of the reason that they were delayed in learning about Pearl Harbor. Both of these statements reflected knowledge of world geography gleaned from exposure to the news media and their lessons in school. Conversely, Miller made no mention of such geographic barriers. Taken as a whole, this evidence suggests that the Chestnut Hill residents who were least knowledgeable about world affairs in 1941 were probably most frightened by the outbreak of war.

The news of war spread throughout the community and in following years residents faced many of the same restrictions and realities of living on the home front during wartime. While air raid drills and blackouts were common in many communities throughout war, such practices were limited in Chestnut Hill.¹⁷ When interviewed, Miller, Thornton, and Norris did not remember participating in an air raid drill at home. Thornton recalled practicing some drills at school, but more likely those drills were for severe weather.¹⁸ Miller and Norris did not remember blackouts, but Thornton recalled participating in such exercises at home. He remarked that blackouts did not make sense in a community where most families still went to bed at sundown.¹⁹

The idea of a possible enemy attack did not resonate with residents throughout the county. Reports in *The Standard Banner* described the county's participation in blackouts. An article on June 4, 1942 informed citizens of a statewide blackout practice to be held on June 9. A later article informed the public that the only viable signal for blackouts in most communities was the ringing of church bells and that the bells should not be rung at any other time. However, the effectiveness of blackouts in Chestnut Hill and throughout Jefferson County was limited. According to *The Standard Banner*, the county's effort in the blackout in early December 1942 was "very

¹⁵ Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002.

¹⁶ Author's interview with Miller, March 22, 2002.

¹⁷ Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War*, 5-8.

¹⁸ In 1932 a severe storm, referred to as tornado, destroyed the Chestnut Hill Methodist Church. That event resulted in more frequent severe storm drills in the public schools. Ethier and Walker, *Chestnut Hill*, 347.

¹⁹ Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.



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discouraging." Thornton's recollection that, despite the instructions, the community's church bells continued to ring throughout the war may have contributed to such a poor response. Unlike many rural communities in East Tennessee, residents of Chestnut Hill did not organize an active air raid program and no available evidence indicates that community leaders selected an air warden to conduct drills.²⁰

While preparedness for a possible attack did not become a part of daily life in Chestnut Hill, the limiting of resources affected nearly everyone. Like every other community in the nation, Chestnut Hill's experience with rationing began in January 1942 when the government announced the rationing of tires. Tire theft quickly became a problem in Jefferson County. In May 1942, an article in *The Standard Banner* requested that citizens come to the sheriff's office in Dandridge and register the serial numbers of their tires to make tracking them easier in case of theft.²¹ Theft of tires occurred in Chestnut Hill. Thornton reported that his uncle had purchased a car just before the war that he kept in a shed near the barn. Thieves stole the tires and left the car sitting up on blocks. The shortage of tires made it impossible for his uncle to purchase new ones until after the war.²²

A national sugar rationing program began in February 1942. In Jefferson County, teachers were given the unenviable task of assigning every family in the county a sugar rationing book before May 4. However, a May 7 article in *The Standard Banner* reported that some families had not received a ration card because more had to be ordered. Rationing of sugar had a serious effect on rural communities because of the need for sugar in canning. Rural women in East Tennessee had always preserved food for their families' consumption, but the Great Depression had forced them to become more self-sufficient. In Jefferson County, women who wanted to obtain extra sugar for canning purposes had to complete a form and return it in-person to an office in Dandridge. This twenty-mile-round-trip was an extra hardship on families who had limited access to vehicles, many of which were without tires.²³

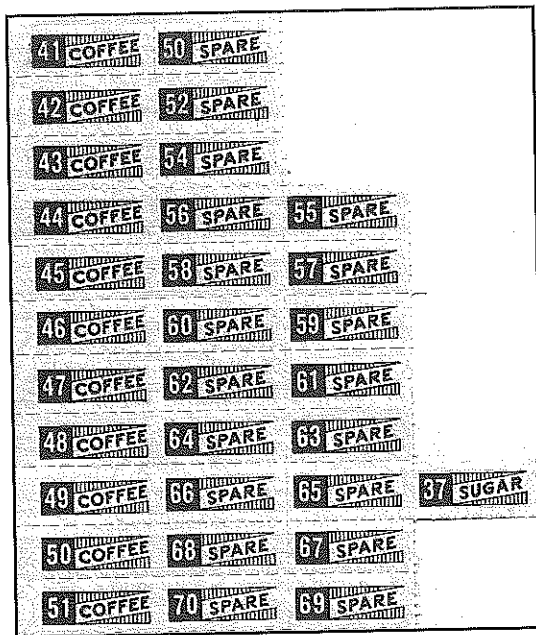
Of all of the wartime rationing programs, Chestnut Hill residents were most affected by the shortage of sugar. Miller remembered that her mother used molasses and honey to sweeten desserts and saved her white sugar either for canning or for when company came to visit. Like women across America, Miller's mother was able to "make do" with less sugar without radically

²⁰ "Statewide Blackout," *The Standard Banner*, June 9, 1942, 1; "Blackout: Church Bells," *The Standard Banner*, June 25, 1942, 1; "Blackout: Discouraging," *The Standard Banner*, December 10, 1942, 1; Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

²¹ "Sheriff Busy," *The Standard Banner*, May 7, 1942, 3. The article also reported that tire theft and liquor (moonshine) were now taking up most of the sheriff's time, but that liquor "still takes the lead on Saturday night."

²² Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

²³ "Sugar Rationing," *The Standard Banner*, May 7, 1942, 3; Ethier and Walker, *Chestnut Hill*, 17, 23; "How to Obtain Sugar for Canning," *The Standard Banner*, May 28, 1942, 1.



Wartime rationing made sugar a valuable commodity in Chestnut Hill. At the end of the war, the Thornton's family ration book contained one stamp for sugar. Thornton family, Chestnut Hill, Tennessee.

changing her normal social and family routines. Miller noted that having a ration stamp did not guarantee that sugar would be available for purchase. Likewise, Thornton recalled the lack of available sugar in their household. The family's surviving ration book contained one sugar stamp.²⁴

Wartime rationing of other foods by the government placed fewer limits on the residents of Chestnut Hill. Norris remembered that most

families were highly self-sufficient in food production, so rationing of food items did not affect them. Thornton, Norris, and Miller all believed that food rationing most affected people living in cities because they did not have the opportunity to farm. None of them mentioned standing in line for any items or having a lack of meat at the dinner table. Thornton recalled that his family "had fried chicken pretty much whenever they wanted it." Miller, Norris, and Thornton understood the importance of rationing, but they all reported that the rules were not strictly enforced and some people were guilty of buying items they did not truly need.²⁵

Schools played an important role on the home front. Not only did they educate children, but they also served as community centers for issuing ration books and organizing scrap drives. When the war began, child guidance experts were divided on how adults should help children deal with war. Initially, some advocated telling children as little as possible about the war. However, this strategy quickly proved inadequate as war talk filled the airwaves, newspapers, and homes of most children, even in Chestnut Hill. Other experts advised parents to help children control their fears during air raid drills and other war-related activities by giving them a meaningful task to perform.²⁶

²⁴ Author's interview with Miller, March 22, 2002; Amy Bentley, *Eating For Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Chicago, 1998), 102-108; Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

²⁵ Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002; Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002; Author's interview with Miller, March 22, 2002; Bentley, *Eating For Victory*, 155.

²⁶ Robert Kirk, *Earning Their Stripes: The Mobilization of American Children in the Second World War* (New York, 1994), 14-18, 56.



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at the home front. Not only did community centers for issuing ration stamps. When the war began, child labor could help children deal with rationing as little as possible about the rationing. As war talk filled the air, children, even in Chestnut Hill, tried to control their fears during air raids by giving them a meaningful task

Bentley, *Eating For Victory: Food and War*, 102-108; Author's interview with

Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002; Bentley, *Eating For Victory*, 155.

American Children in the Second World

In 1942, the government announced that the need for scrap materials was acute. Materials such as scrap metal, rubber, waste paper, and aluminum were needed for war industries. The War Production Board created an impressive public campaign, which encouraged children to help collect scrap materials. Collecting scrap was arguably the most important contribution that children made during wartime. The campaign used radio and comic book characters as well as other child-friendly means to encourage children to collect scrap.²⁷

In Chestnut Hill, the most effective method to motivate children to collect scrap materials was the school-sponsored contest. *The Standard Banner* reported a scrap-collecting contest for the county's school children on September 10, 1942. The article credited children with doing "a great deal of the work in the [previous] rubber campaign," and asked them to begin bringing in scrap metal. Students could either donate their metal directly to the school or take it to a collection center to sell and bring the receipt to school. The prize for the student bringing in the most scrap was five dollars worth of defense stamps.²⁸

Thornton remembered his participation in this scrap collecting campaign with great pride. He recalled that the children of the community searched high and low for every piece of scrap metal they could find, including old barbed wire. He was helped in the contest by his father who had access to scrap metal from the Bush Brothers & Company factory. Betty Sue Bush, daughter of Alger Bush, also had help from her father to collect scrap. Thornton recalled that his family collected four tons of scrap and he won the school-level contest. In this contest alone, the school reported receiving 27,000 pounds of scrap material from students. Based on the school's enrollment, the each student represented a contribution of 154.3 pounds of scrap collected, which demonstrated a high level of participation in this contest. Scrap collected in Chestnut Hill and other communities contributed to Jefferson County winning a statewide contest in 1942. Residents of the county collected 92.465 pounds of scrap per capita. Thornton's description of diligently searching the community dump for bits of metal resembled the stories of other children. The involvement of children and other residents of Chestnut Hill in scrap collection campaigns paralleled the national experience.²⁹

Norris recalled participating in the scrap metal drive. Her family collected scrap metal and sold it to the Bush's General Store. Miller, who had worked

²⁷ Ibid., 68-70.

²⁸ "Chairman Godwin Has asked the 'Junior Commandos' To Lead Jefferson County Drive for Scrap," *The Standard Banner*, September 10, 1942, 1; "Grammar School Commandos," *The Standard Banner*, September 17, 1942, 1.

²⁹ Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002; "What Our School Children Did In The Scrap Campaign," *The Standard Banner*, November 5, 1942, 1; Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War*, 122-24; Kirk, *Earning Their Stripes*, 66, 70; "Jefferson County's Wins State Contest," *The Standard Banner*, November 5, 1942, 1.

at the Bush's General Store before the war, did not recall participating in any scrap drives during the war. Despite her lack of involvement, women and children were actively encouraged to participate in scrap collection and other campaigns. By 1943, Jefferson County had a Women's Salvage Committee to oversee the collection of waste fat, silk and nylon hosiery, and smashed tin cans. Mrs. Fred Bush, the wife of

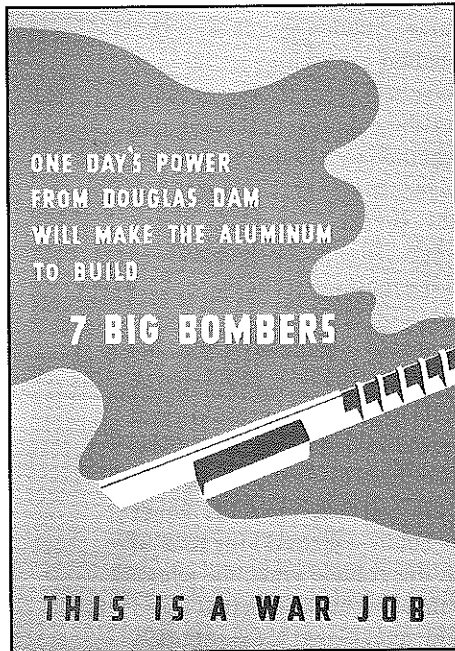
one of the owners of Bush Brothers & Company, served as the Chestnut Hill representative. Residents collected these items and brought them to the Bush's General Store.³⁰

Miller's lack of participation in scrap drives illustrated the differences between the government's ideal vision of the home front war effort and its reality. For example, the government campaigned intensely in schools to encourage children to buy war bonds and war stamps. However, neither Norris nor Thornton, both students at the time, had strong memories of participation. Thornton recalled that he spent most of his disposable income on his hobby of stamp collecting. Articles in *The Standard Banner* also showed that participation in government drives did not always equal expectations. For example, the newspaper ran a front-page article on July 2, 1942 titled, "Jefferson County War Effort Shows Lack of Interest." The article told residents that they were not knitting, sewing, collecting, or buying enough. Similarly, a 1943 school drive to raise money for the purchase of a Jeep for

the military was not very successful. The newspaper reported that only the county high school had submitted its collection figure of \$900. Such reports were intended to increase donations, but in Chestnut Hill the majority of residents had little disposable income to contribute.³¹

³⁰ Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002; Author's interview with Miller, March 22, 2002; "Women's Salvage Committee," *The Standard Banner*, January 7, 1943, 1; "Women's Salvage Committee Named," *The Standard Banner*, February 4, 1943, 1.

³¹ Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002; Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002; "Jefferson County War Effort Shows Lack of Interest," *The Standard Banner*, July 2, 1942, 1; "School Jeep Contest," *The Standard Banner*, March 25, 1943, 1; Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War*, 125-26.



During World War II, the Tennessee Valley Authority aligned their dam building projects with supporting the war effort. This poster for Douglas Dam reminded those affected by the project that the dam would supply both jobs and electricity needed to build aluminum aircraft. Douglas Dam War Poster, K-2665, Tennessee Valley Authority.



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³² Drumright, "Development of Project: Complete Douglas Project"

³³ "Proposed C 1940, 2; TVA Acre Farm," 99-100, 107

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³⁰ Author's interview with Miller, March 22, *Standard Banner*, January 7, 1943, 1; "Women's", February 4, 1943, 1.

³¹ Author's interview with Thornton, March 1943, 1; "Lack of Interest," *The Standard Banner*, July 1943, 1; Tuttle, *Daddy's*

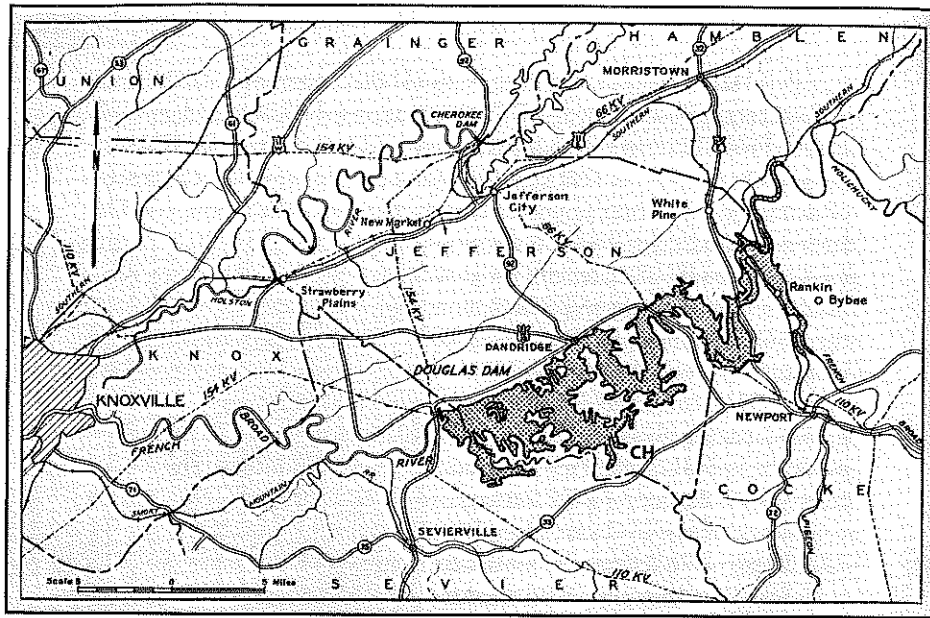
By 1942, residents in Chestnut Hill and other communities in Jefferson County became fully aware of the TVA's intention to build a large dam on the French Broad River near Dandridge. Headquartered in Knoxville, TVA was designed to control the Tennessee River and its tributaries through a series of dams and other river improvements. In the early 1940s, however, TVA leaders focused their attention on supporting the war effort by supplying massive amounts of electricity. In particular, aluminum plants in Alcoa needed more electricity to produce aluminum for aircraft and scientists at the Clinton Engineering Works, later known as Oak Ridge, needed greater wattage to support high-energy experiments. To generate greater electric output, TVA embarked on a wartime program to build seven dams and other generation plants. One of the proposed projects, named Douglas Dam, would be located on the French Broad River near Dandridge. The massive reservoir would flood nearly forty square miles of prime farmland in the counties of Jefferson, Cocke, Hamblen, and Sevier.³²

Residents in Jefferson County were cognizant of TVA's interest in the area. Many residents supported the construction of the Cherokee Dam on the Holston River, only about twenty miles from the Douglas site. An article in *The Standard Banner* from 1940 explained that Jefferson County residents were in favor of the Cherokee Dam because the electricity was needed to produce aluminum for airplanes. Greater access to electricity motivated many in rural Jefferson County to support the dam. However, by early 1941 public opinion shifted with the rumor that TVA wanted to build a dam on the French Broad River in Jefferson County. The bottomland along the French Broad River was one of the best farming areas in East Tennessee. Throughout the 1930s, A.J. Bush purchased farmland in the river valley, including a 1940 purchase of over 900 acres. By 1941, Bush and his company owned roughly 4,000 acres in the area, with much of it located in the area to be flooded by the Douglas project. The potential loss of crops from this area represented a crisis for the business and the community that depended on Bush Brothers & Company as a source of employment.³³

Many residents in Jefferson County questioned the benefits of building Douglas Dam, especially since the United States was not yet engaged in World War II. Articles in *The Standard Banner* criticized the proposed dam because it destroyed a vital food production area, thus, they argued, its construction would hurt national defense more than it would help. Articles

³² Drumright, "A River for War," v; Gordon R. Clapp, *The TVA: An Approach to the Development of a Region* (Chicago, 1955), 39-40; Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Douglas Project: Comprehensive Report on the Planning, Design, Construction, and Initial Operations of the Douglas Project* (Washington, D.C., 1949), 1, 36.

³³ "Proposed Cherokee Dam Rejected By Senate Committee," *The Standard Banner*, June 27, 1940, 2; TVA, *Douglas Project*, 36; Bush Brothers, *History*, 5; "Bush Brothers Co. Buy 900 Acre Farm," *The Standard Banner*, January 25, 1940, 2; Metz, *Community of Companions*, 99-100, 107.



The building of Douglas Dam affected many East Tennessee communities, both directly and indirectly. A "CH," to designate the approximate location of the Chestnut Hill community, has been added to this 1949 map of the area. Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Douglas Project: Comprehensive Report on the Planning, Design, Construction, and Initial Operations of the Douglas Project* (Washington, D.C., 1949), 16.

opposing the project were very careful to couch arguments against the dam in terms of what was best for the country and not in terms of how local residents would be affected. In fall 1941, a group of concerned citizens of Jefferson County, including Fred Bush, met with Tennessee Senators Arthur Thomas Stewart (D) and Kenneth Douglas McKellar (R) and urged them to oppose the dam. McKellar and others in Congress suggested that TVA build four smaller dams on tributaries in the area, which would protect the valuable bottomland from flooding and inundation.³⁴

Throughout late 1941, McKellar effectively blocked congressional approval and funding for the Douglas Dam project. However, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, McKellar withdrew his objections. In late January 1942 Congress approved the project and construction on the dam began in February 2, 1942. Residents in Jefferson County reacted negatively to the decision to build the dam. Both Thornton and Norris remembered a great deal of community antipathy towards the

³⁴ "Talk of Dam On French Broad River," *The Standard Banner*, June 12, 1941, 2; "Douglas Dam on French Broad Is a Possibility," *The Standard Banner*, August 7, 1941, 1; "Steam Plant in Lieu Of New Douglas Dam," *The Standard Banner*, August 14, 1941, 1; "Senator Stewart Visits Residents of Proposed Dam Site," *The Standard Banner*, September 25, 1941, 1; "Appropriations Committee Defers Action on Douglas Dam," *The Standard Banner*, October 9, 1941, 1; Clapp, TVA, 39-40.

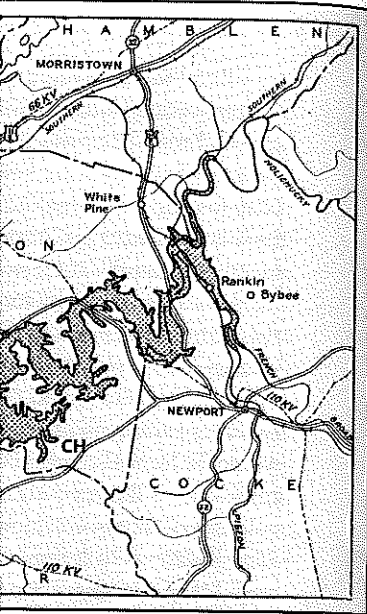
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Arguments against the dam were not in terms of how local opposition of concerned citizens of Tennessee Senators Arthur H. Kellar (R) and urged them to Congress suggested that TVA would protect the area, which would protect the region.³⁴ They completely blocked congressional action. However, following the passage of the project in 1941, McKellar withdrew his support and approved the project and in 1942. Residents in Jefferson County opposed the dam. Both Thornton and the community antipathy towards the

Standard Banner, June 12, 1941, 2; "Douglas Dam," Standard Banner, August 7, 1941, 1; "Steam Plant," Standard Banner, August 14, 1941, 1; "Senator Opposes Dam," Standard Banner, September 25, 1941, 1; "Dam," The Standard Banner,

proposed dam. Residents did not view opposition to the dam as unpatriotic. Instead they believed the war was being used as an excuse for constructing the dam. Residents also took issue with President Roosevelt because they believed that he had unduly pressured McKellar into withdrawing his opposition to the project. Roosevelt's support of the project reinforced the already strong Republican sentiment in Jefferson County and the Chestnut Hill community.³⁵

The construction of Douglas Dam took just over twelve months, with sluice gates closing on February 19, 1943. The turbines at the dam produced approximately 100,000 kilowatts of power, which could be used to support war production. To complete the project, TVA claimed just over 33,000 acres of land for the resulting reservoir, named Douglas Lake, and surrounding areas. In the process, TVA displaced 757 families and flooded hundreds of acres of valuable farmland. Much of the inundated fertile soil had been used to grow crops for Bush Brothers & Company and the canning operation at Chestnut Hill. To offset these losses, in 1944 the company purchased the Blytheville Canning Company.³⁶

Even though no property in Chestnut Hill was flooded by the waters of Douglas Lake, the dam had significant effects on the community. In the short-term, the construction of the dam and efforts to clear the land before inundation provided employment to many in Jefferson County. However, the dam project disrupted the business of the area's largest employer. Bush Brothers & Company lost not only property to the dam, but their satellite corn plant and employee owned homes in nearby Oak Grove had to be dismantled and relocated to Chestnut Hill. Thornton's father was involved in the project and gave his son the task of straightening nails removed from the buildings, so they could also be reused. However, for some residents the loss of Bush Brothers & Company lands meant that the crops on their land became more valuable.³⁷

Wartime restrictions and regulations greatly affected the operations of Bush Brothers & Company. A shortage of metal limited the number of cans available and resulted in changes in the product line. Production of kraut, a staple during the Great Depression, was discontinued so resources could be devoted to more important products such as pork and beans, which were produced under government contract. Beans were canned as usual, and then dipped in olive drab paint so that if they were eaten in the field there would be

³⁵ "House Committee Refuses Request for Douglas Dam Fund," *The Standard Banner*, December 4, 1941, 1; TVA, *Douglas Project*, 1, 7-9; Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002; Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002; Drumright, "A River For War," 90-91; "The Army and the Dam," *The Standard Banner*, January 29, 1942, 1.

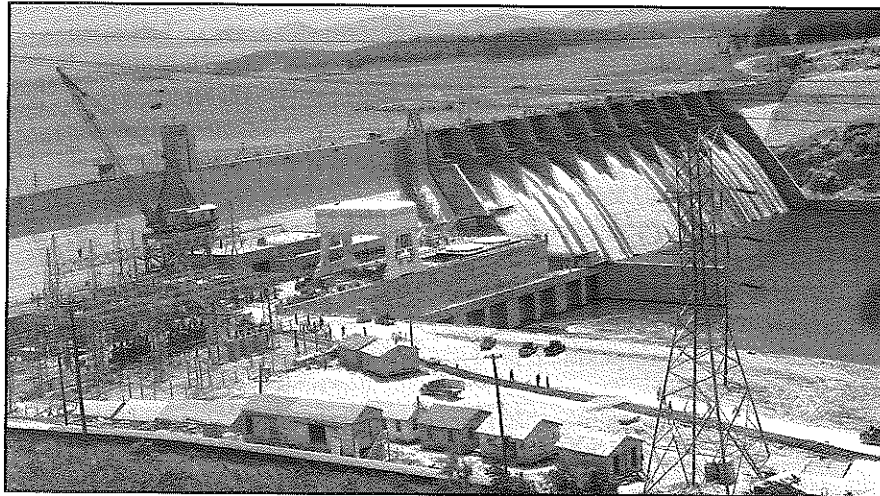
³⁶ TVA, *Douglas Project*, 36; Drumright, "A River For War," 90-91; Clapp, TVA, 40-41; Metz, *Community of Companions*, 111.

³⁷ Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

no reflection to alert the enemy of a soldier's position. While the can painting was done by conveyor belt, most of the factory's work was done by hand.³⁸

During World War II, the workforce changed somewhat at the Bush Brothers & Company cannery in Chestnut Hill. Women traditionally did much of the preparation work while men were employed to lift cookers, pack crates and perform other heavy tasks. As men joined the military, rather than hiring more women the company obtained a special dispensation from the government to employ teens normally restricted from performing factory work. Thornton, who worked in the cannery at age 15, recalled that "women and children kept the place running during the war." Men who were too old for military service and teens were employed to perform traditionally male jobs, such as that of mechanic or line loader. Norris recalled that if a shipment of green beans arrived and the factory was short of workers, A.J. Bush would drive to the nearby Finchum farm and get those "boys out of the fields to go work for a couple of days." The use of teenagers in factory work due to manpower shortages was common across the nation.³⁹

The wartime needs of the canning industry resulted in appeals for more women to join the workforce. An article in the May 20, 1943 *The Standard Banner* urged women to take jobs in the canneries as the "first step in the great Battle of Food." The article explained that the foods shipped from this area are "fighting foods-foods that go to war. Perhaps some of the very foods you help to pick will get to some of the boys who left our



Completed in February 1943, Douglas Dam generated electricity to support the war effort, but the resulting reservoir inundated hundreds of acres of prime farmland.
Douglas Dam, KX-02090, Tennessee Valley Authority.

³⁸ Metz, *Community of Companions*, 103; Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

³⁹ Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002; Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002; "Back to School," *The Standard Banner*, August 9, 1945, 1; Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 93-95.



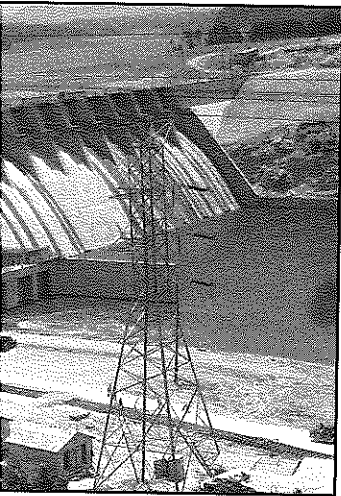
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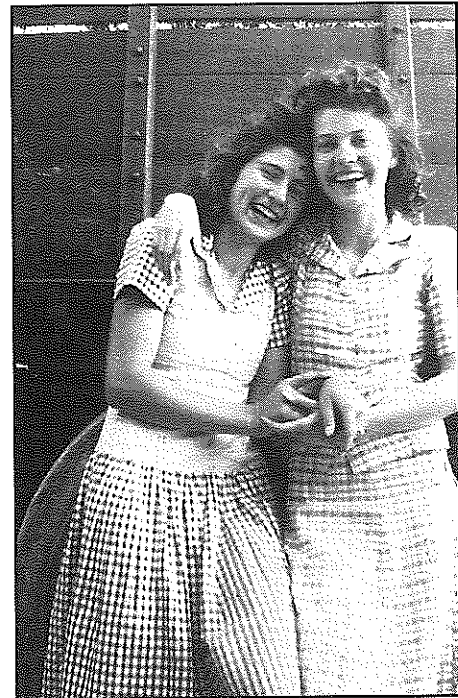
with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

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August 9, 1945, 1; Anderson,

town to risk their lives for American
freedoms." The article appeared above
a large advertisement that poignantly
told mothers that the hands which
had once fed and cared for her son
could now help him by doing vital war
work. The same article appeared again
on June 10, 1943, which implied that
the need for women cannery workers
had not been met. However, none of
these articles made specific references
to Bush Brothers & Company.⁴⁰

Despite the numerous changes
during the early 1940s, residents of the
community held tight to traditional
beliefs about women's roles in society.
Norris reported that she wanted to
go to Oak Ridge to work, but that
her uncle was firmly against such a
move. He thought it inappropriate for
a young girl to move far from home
and live among strangers from all parts
of the country and convinced Norris's
father not to allow her to leave.

Norris later considered becoming a nurse or joining the Women's Army
Corps (WACs). Perhaps Norris was influenced by the flurry of recruitment
campaigns mentioned in the local newspapers. For example, in 1943, *The
Standard Banner* published at least five articles either directly or indirectly
urging women to join the military. The articles emphasized the patriotism of
the young women and that each female recruit freed another man to fight.
When Norris expressed her interest in the WACs to her sweetheart, an Army
recruit, he urged her to reconsider. He told her that the WACs and nurses
were little more than "call girls" and that he did not want her associated
with either. These sentiments and perceptions were common throughout the
community. Further, throughout the war years very few women left Chestnut
Hill for employment or other service opportunities to support the war.⁴¹

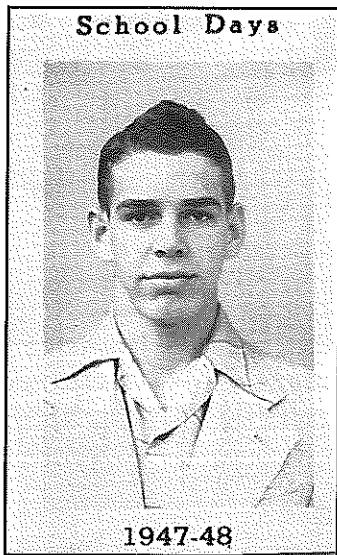


Ina Feezell Norris (at left) with a high school friend
in 1945. Norris family, Chestnut Hill, Tennessee.

⁴⁰ "Women Are Urgently Needed To Help With The Canning Of Crops," *The Standard Banner*, May 20, 1943; "I'll Do My Fighting With These Two Hands," *The Standard Banner* May 20, 1943, 2.

⁴¹ "WAVES and SPARS Recruitment," *The Standard Banner*, April 29, 1943, 1; Campbell, *Women at War*, 39-41; Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002; Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002; Author's interview with Miller, March 22, 2002; John Jeffries, *Wartime America: The World War II Home Front* (Chicago, 1996), 69-92.

Eventually Norris fulfilled her desire to contribute to the war effort and became one of many temporary teachers in Tennessee. Following graduation from high school in 1945, Norris secured a teaching position. A teacher shortage in Chestnut Hill, as well as the nation, resulted from a combination of no deferments for male teachers, low teaching salaries, and high salaries in the defense industries. For example, Chattanooga schools experienced a constant shortage of teachers during the war years. Also, the teacher shortage was severe in rural areas and in boomtowns. Many rural school districts hired teachers like Norris, who only had a high school diploma.⁴²



J.C. Thornton as a student in 1947.
Thornton family, Chestnut Hill,
Tennessee.

Norris taught school during the day, worked in her home and garden in the afternoons and weekends, and still found time to correspond with soldiers. She wrote to her sweetheart, her brother, cousins, and an uncle. Letters from the home front helped soldiers remain connected to home. In fact, soldiers prized any kind of mail. Norris recalled that her uncle wrote home about a man in his unit who never received any mail. He included the man's name and address and asked if Norris and her friends would write to him so he would not be left out at the next mail call. Norris concurred and wrote the lonely soldier a letter. She and many other on the home front believed that writing letters and keeping soldiers' spirits up was the best way to contribute to the war effort.⁴³

A large number of eligible men in Chestnut Hill served in the military during World War II. Thornton recalled that most of his older friends were drafted and that he lived with the expectation of going himself. He explained that "it was in the back of your mind all the time. My number is next. I mean I was fifteen when the

war was over, but this thing had been going for some five or six years. That was all you saw and heard in the newspapers and on the radio." He recalled that he felt "not exactly fear. It was anticipation. I would dream I'd be going. I would be coming up next."⁴⁴ His dreams were no doubt influenced by the experiences of those young men who were drafted. One of his close friends was shot while serving in Germany. Thornton's cousin was killed overseas and he recalled that his aunt would not put up the gold star she received for

⁴² Maritose Arendale and Frances Bishop, "Chattanooga Schools Go to War: 1941-1945," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 48 (Spring 1989): 48; Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War*, 120-21.

⁴³ Author's interview with Norris, March 9, 2002; Campbell, *Women at War*, 200-201.

⁴⁴ Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002.

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at school during the day, worked in the garden in the afternoons and still found time to correspond. She wrote to her sweetheart, her mother, and an uncle. Letters from the soldiers remain connected to the soldiers prized any kind of mail. At her uncle wrote home about the soldiers who never received any mail. He asked for her name and address and asked her friends would write to him so he could get out at the next mail call. Norris wrote the lonely soldier a letter. Her mother on the home front believed in keeping soldiers' spirits up and contribute to the war effort.⁴³ The number of eligible men in Chestnut Hill for military during World War I was small. He recalled that most of his older brothers had died and that he lived with the shame of being himself. He explained that he was in your mind all the time. My mother mean I was fifteen when the war started for some five or six years. That was on the radio." He recalled that he would dream I'd be going to war. There no doubt influenced by the war. He was drafted. One of his close friends was killed overseas and she received the gold star she received for

⁴² "Schools Go to War: 1941-1945," *Journal of East Tennessee History*, 72(1), 120-21.
⁴³ Bell, *Women at War*, 200-201.

her son because she just could not accept the fact that he was really gone. Miller had two brothers in the Army, one of whom died in an accident in Czechoslovakia in 1945. Although Norris' brother, cousin, and future husband returned home, she too recalled the names of some men who did not return to Chestnut Hill.

Following World War II, Ina Feezel (Norris) continued to teach in the public school system. In 1947, she married Stanley Norris and they started a family. Once their children were grown she returned to the classroom and worked as a teaching assistant in Jefferson County public schools for many years. Alma Miller remained a homemaker after the war and remained an active member of the Chestnut Hill community. J.C. Thornton graduated from Carson-Newman College in 1952 and served in the United States Army from 1952-1954. He planned for a career in education and after leaving the military he secured a job at Bush Brothers & Company to save money. He became a salesman and worked for the company until his retirement in 1994. The company expanded its product line, built new facilities in other states, and became a national brand with the success of its baked beans. Today the Chestnut Hill cannery is still in operation and the company operates a visitor's center on the site of the original Bush's General Store. The community of Chestnut Hill has remained unincorporated and consists mostly of families involved in farming or working for Bush Brothers & Company.⁴⁵

The recollections of Miller, Norris, and Thornton, supported by newspapers and other sources, demonstrate that Chestnut Hill had much in common with other rural American communities during the war. Chestnut Hill residents collected scrap, filled out ration cards, and adapted to shortages. Many of the community's women and children went to work at Bush Brothers & Company and many of its young men went to war. Recruits warded off homesickness through numerous letters home, to which friends and family readily replied. Support for the war and the sense of national unity infiltrated even the most rural areas of the United States during the early 1940s, even though that support was uneven.

But different from the home front experiences of other areas, the residents of Chestnut Hill often remained unaffected by or disconnected to overseas events. As examples, Norris, Miller, and Thornton had no recollections of watching newsreels as a source of information about the war, selling or promoting war bonds, or severe shortages of staple foods and meat. While the war resulted in massive population and gender shifts for many small communities, in Chestnut Hill there was little evidence of the movement of residents to boomtowns, even though Alcoa and Oak Ridge were nearby, or the community's women engaging in non-traditional jobs or

⁴⁵ Author's interview with Miller, March 22, 2002; Author's interview with Thornton, March 14, 2002; Author's interview with Ina Feezell Norris, March 9, 2002; "Bush Brothers: About Us," available at, http://www.bushbeans.com/en_US/about_us/.

joining the armed forces. At a time when most Americans on the home front complied with government policies and decisions, the residents of Chestnut Hill vocally opposed the construction of TVA's Douglas Dam. Residents of the community demonstrated their support for the war with high levels of patriotism, but they also voiced opinions when larger changes represented possible negative consequences for the community.

There are also important differences in the ways in which the individuals experienced and remembered the war. Some aspects of Thornton's and Norris' experiences differed dramatically from Miller's recollections. Though she was older, Miller seems to have had a very limited knowledge of the war effort. Miller also differed in her participation in scrap drives and her reaction to Douglas Dam. The available evidence suggests that Miller's lower economic status circumscribed her home front experiences. For Thornton and Norris, a more middle class family with economic resources equaled a home front experience more similar to other rural and urban children across the nation. The memories of these Chestnut Hill residents offer a glimpse into the relationship between economic status, access to information, and home front experience.



A Bush Brothers & Company plant in Chestnut Hill, 1947. Bush Brothers & Company.

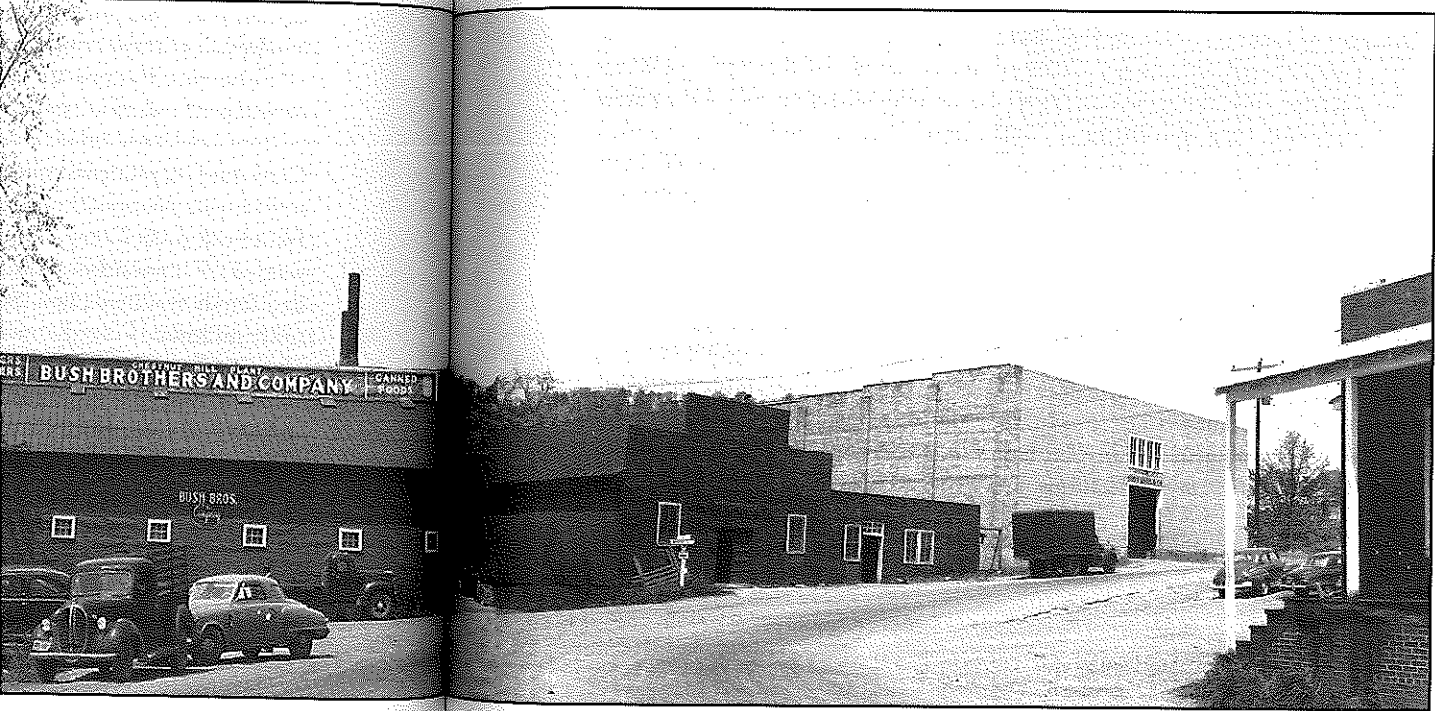


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As World War II recedes further into the past, the reality of wartime experiences fade as the larger-than-life images of television and films of the period fill the public's consciousness. Yet, Americans did not just experience World War II in terms of battles and military campaigns. World War II was also about the experiences of the men, women, and children, who built the planes, grew the food, wrote the letters, and kept the home fires burning. The portrait of Chestnut Hill in wartime presents a snapshot of home front life in one rural community in the Appalachian South. This portrait reveals the nuanced nature of change in rural communities because of larger cultural and social forces. World War II represented a transitional period for many residents in Chestnut Hill, because it challenged the economic interests and core values of the community by supporting a sometimes distant and uncertain effort.



l, 1947. Bush Brothers & Company.