

PROGRESS

George Snedeker

BILL OF SALE

Mack trucks racing by on Route 130,

Three maple trees in the front yard,

A broken swing,

A dry well,

The house, and the dog's yard,

The barn,

Four chicken coops no longer in use,

Three apple trees,

A wheelbarrow bridge into the woods,

Several piles of broken bottles . . .

THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY WORKHOUSE

The old Middlesex County Workhouse

is now a juvenile center.

I'm not sure

what they call it today.

When I was growing up

it was where men served 30-90 days
for drunk and disorderly conduct
or other public order offences.

It was located right across the highway
from our small farm,
now a condo development called “Renaissance.”

Real-estate speculators
bought up the whole area
for a projected industrial park
which was never built.

I guess they did not know about
the plans for the
deindustrialization of America.

My parents did not want to sell
the farm
but they didn't want
to be surrounded
by smokestack industries
either,

so they signed their names
to the bill of sale.

So much for what used to be called
progress in America.

PROGRESS

I remember the two
well-dressed men
who knocked at the door.

They said that they were
interested in
buying our farm.

My father laughed and said,
“We don’t want to sell
the farm.”

But one of the men responded,
“If you don’t sell,
you’ll be
surrounded by
factories.
Everyone around here
has sold.

We’re going
to build
an industrial park.

If you don’t sell,
you’ll be
standing in the way
of progress.”

RENAISSANCE

The sign says
“Renaissance,”
but the rebirth
of what?

Rows of condos
had been
thrown up
for people
on the road
to success!

The old Middlesex County Workhouse
Is still
on the other side
of the highway,
but now it’s a
Juvenile Center.

They promised
an industrial park
would be built.
That’s how they got
my parents to sell
their four-acre farm.

But somehow
the factories
never got built.
Only
the condos.

AIR RAIDS

While we were still living
on the farm,
cars would pull to the side
of the highway

as the air raid sirens
went off.

I'm not sure
what the inmates in the Middlesex County Workhouse
did during air raids.

When we were at school,
we had to crawl
under our desks
as if this would save us
from an attack.

Of course,
the real purpose for all of this
was to create a sense that
there really was
something to fear
and it was not real-estate speculators,
but Communism.