



40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION of  
UNIVERSITY CITY HIGH SCHOOL  
1971-72 + 2011-12

## 46 Remain in 16-Acre Ghost Town Where City Will Build High School

Author: Betty Medsger

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Some 46 Philadelphians are living in a ghost town.

Their homes are in a 16-acre site, in the vicinity of 37<sup>th</sup> st. and Lancaster av., where 115 families and 54 individuals lived about a year ago.

Only a blossoming potted plant inside an occasional window betrays a house that is still a home. Inside these homes are people waiting for “the right amount” for their property.

Then they’ll go, too.

This is where the school board and the Redevelopment Authority plan to build University City Science Center High School.

Broken glass lies along the streets where ground will be broken in February. The multi-million-dollar school will specialize in science and mathematics.

### **Many Have Moved**

Residents had been told that 7.6 of the 16 acres would be used for rehabilitation housing. Then, a year ago, the school board condemned the entire site for school purposes.

Later, the school board agreed to return 2.2 acres to the authority for new and rehabilitation housing, and the authority agreed to supply another five acres, near 40<sup>th</sup> st. and Powelton av., as a substitute for the lands taken by the school board.

Many residents have moved since then, finding places to live on their own.

Now the 5.4 acres, bounded by 36<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup> and Filbert sts. and Lancaster av., is almost deserted.

### **‘Best’ Is Pretty Bad**

The Redevelopment Authority says it has been doing its best to help the residents find housing within their means and suitable to their standards.

One man very concerned about the area said the authority's "best" is pretty bad when it comes to low-income housing.

"When the city is 80,000 behind in its housing needs," he said, "and you can spend barely \$50 a month on rent, where do you go? You go to a low-rent area that has blight."

People crowd into overcrowded neighborhoods, he said.

"It's not the Redevelopment Authority's fault," he added. "It's the symptom of the whole society and its inability to handle the problems it creates."

### **In Other Ghettos**

"The problem is simply this: Housing just doesn't exist."

He said residents of the 14-acre site where the school will be built are living in other ghettos.

"Most of them looked in the paper, saw something cheap and took it," he said. "Some of them sold too cheaply. They didn't know they could do better. They were afraid. They figured they had to leave right away."

Mrs. Ruth Byrd, of 33 N. 37<sup>th</sup> st., has been using her buffet and china closet as "housing" file cabinets for years.

Mrs. Byrd has been hearing and talking and getting letters about "community improvement, redevelopment, progress." Perhaps it was in 1924 that she first heard about redevelopment. That year, she and her mother had to move from their house at 3624 Ludlow st. because of a building project.

### **Her Turn Again**

It's her turn again. She admits being sentimental about the old neighborhood. "I don't know what's out there," she said when talking of the move she'll make soon, "but as it is now, I don't know what's here."

From the buffet, she takes letters and brochures that tell about housing projects, meetings for citizens committees called about housing projects, and letters, with later dates, that tell her she will be selling her home.

Mrs. Byrd had no objection to the new school, though she thinks it strange that while the multimillion dollar plan was finalized, the school superintendent was announcing that "the school system is on the brink of financial disaster."

"Why do they push us farther back in the slums?" she asks.

### **Can't Fight Board, City**

At 3639 Filbert st., Mrs. Mary Graves and her husband are preparing to move to Overbrook.

"We were lucky," she said, "We could find another place.

"We wanted to stay. I got tired of all the meetings over the last six or seven years. In the end, you couldn't fight the board and the city."

James G. Clark and his wife, who live at 30 N. 36<sup>th</sup> st., are looking forward to moving into their new home in the Northeast.

Clark has lived in the neighborhood all of his 75 years. "We did fix things up a few years ago, not thinking this would happen. But I can't complain. The School Board has been good to me."

# 46 Remain in 16-Acre Ghost Town Where City Will Build High School

OCT 29 1967 JK

By BETTY MEDSGER  
Of The Bulletin Staff

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