WALKING TOUR OF THE
OLD SEVENTH WARD

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Welcome to Philadelphia’s Old Seventh Ward. At the end of the 19th Century, this area was the heart of Philadelphia’s growing African American and immigrant communities. The Ward, bounded by Spruce and South streets and extending from 7th Street to the Schuylkill River, had the largest number of African Americans in the city. Furthermore, Philadelphia had a larger black population than any other city in the North, allowing for a rich African American heritage to flourish here. Much of that heritage has its roots right here in the Ward.

During the second half of the 19th Century, Philadelphia was a booming industrial port city and point of immigration. Because of Philadelphia’s promising job opportunities for unskilled laborers, many immigrants and African Americans settled in the city. The Ward’s affordability and proximity the city’s industrial center attracted many of Philadelphia’s newcomers. However, this quickly resulted in overcrowding as backyards were transformed into tenements to accommodate the swarms of people. The Ward became associated with poverty, filth and crime which were commonly attributed to the large numbers of African Americans who called it home. As a result, Susan Wharton, a wealthy Quaker who lived in the Ward, wished for a study to be done on the “Negro problem.” In 1896 Wharton and the provost of the University of Pennsylvania, Charles C. Harrison, in collaboration with the College Settlement Association, invited W.E.B. Du Bois to study African Americans in the Seventh Ward.

Du Bois and his wife Nina lived in the College Settlement House at 7th and Lombard while he collected data for his study. Du Bois went door-to-door to gather information on all Seventh Ward households. In 1899, his results were analyzed and presented in his groundbreaking book, The Philadelphia Negro. Here, Du Bois describes the blocks between Eighth, Sixth, Pine and South as the historic heart of the African American population. “Here the riots of the thirties took place, and here once was a depth of poverty and degradation almost unbelievable. Even to-day there are many evidences of degradation, although the signs of idleness, shiftlessness, dissoluteness and crime are more conspicuous than those of poverty.” (The Philadelphia Negro, Pg. 58)
Today, the Seventh Ward no longer carries that name, nor is it associated with filth and poverty. Instead, this area has become the neighborhoods of Washington Square West, Rittenhouse Square, and Fitler Square. The former tenement homes and businesses of immigrants and African Americans have been converted into trendy boutiques, restaurants, and residential apartments. In 1980, 96 percent of the residents of the Ward were black; today, only 7 percent of the residents are black and those who have moved to West Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, and Southwest Philadelphia.

As you walk around the Ward you will be introduced to its rich African American history, including the homes of some of the most well-known African American activists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital was founded in 1884 to provide medical care to African Americans who were often denied service in white hospitals. Douglass Hospital was also one of the few hospitals in Philadelphia that allowed African American nurses, practitioners, and doctors. The hospital was located in the heart of the Seventh Ward, which was once the heart of black Philadelphia. Today, the Seventh Ward no longer carries that name, nor is it associated with filth and poverty.

### Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital

The Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital Medical and Training School was founded in 1884 by Dr. Nathan Mossell, the first African American to receive a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania. The Douglass Hospital was the second black hospital in the United States and it was the first home to the first African American trained in the country. Prior to the establishment of Douglass Hospital, African American nurses, practitioners, and doctors were most often denied employment in the city's hospitals. As a result, in addition to serving the city's hospitals, Douglass Hospital also gave medical training to African American nurses, practitioners, and doctors. The Dogulass Hospital was one of the most modern hospitals in Philadelphia and was designed with modern hospital construction plans in mind. Douglass Hospital also gave medical training to African American nurses, practitioners, and doctors. The hospital was located in the heart of the Seventh Ward, which was once the heart of black Philadelphia.

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11 418 Camac Street

This home has a unique story that is shared in the documentary, "Legacy of Courage," produced in collaboration with the Mapping African American History Project. The building is a significant part of the rich African American history and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

12 Home of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Philadelphia's rich history of immigration is littered with examples of racial tension between various ethnic groups. The waves of Irish immigrants during the early and mid-1800s, spurred by the Irish potato famine and rot and famine, brought thousands of Irish migrants to Philadelphia. Irish immigrants became a majority in this neighborhood nearly a hundred years ago. One day, the present owner of 418 Camac Street, Calvin Cahn saw Rosemore and his wife and asked her to show her story. Together, they were able to discover some of the stories that this neighborhood holds. In 1909, this block was overcrowded with poor African American and immigrants. At that time, this block was 2/3rds black. Children could be seen running up and down the block and, like Ronnie's grandparents, they would often get up and make up mostly white incidents. When you look around, do you see the 418 Past Bus that we described, the dirty, smelly, and crowded slums?

10 J.S. Ramsey School

Quince and First Streets

The students at Masterman High School in Philadelphia researched and successfully lobbied the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission to create the historic marker for the neighborhood that worked to improve the environment. Previously, flowers, trees, and grass had been unseen on St. Mary Street and the garden was greatly loved by the community. Additionally, the Star Bank, Star Public Kindergarten, St. Mary Street Free Library and Starr Kitchen were all organized before 1895. Between 6th and 7th on Lombard Street was the original site of the Ramsey School. It was constructed in 1850 and now houses the Quince Park apartment homes. The school was founded by the Philadelphia Free Grammar School Company in 1840 and provided both grammar and secondary schooling to the black and white populations of the Seventh Ward. However, the school was made up of mostly white students and in Du Bois' study, he identified the school as "nearly all colonized." In 1896, the Ramsey School had 946 students, making it the largest school by enrollment in Philadelphia. Although most of the students were black, all the teachers were white. The school served white students until 1920. At the time, the city of Philadelphia prohibited African American students from teaching white students.

The school attracted and produced many famous and influential African American graduates. A banner reading "The past, the present, the future. To abolish slavery is the work of the ages."

12 Starr Garden and Theodore Starr

Between 6th and 7th on Lombard Street

In 1972, relating to the Philadelphia Historical Society's account of a charitable organization that worked to benefit the poor, immigrant and African American populations of this neighborhood. His first foundations were the Poor People's Men's Club, which provided men with the resources for moral and intellectual improvement (them, baths, books, lectures rooms and wholesome games). A Coal Club. Between 1980 and 1982, Starr bought two plots of land on St. Mary Street that became the Starr Gardens, a public playground and demonstration garden for the neighborhood that worked to improve the environment. Previously, flowers, trees, and grass had been unseen on St. Mary Street and the garden was greatly loved by the community. Additionally, the Star Bank, Star Public Kindergarten, St. Mary Street Free Library and Starr Kitchen were all organized before 1895.

The Star Bank was a saving bank that had no minimum deposit amount when the city's banks required a minimum. Many of Starr's organizations taught families valuable skills of thriftiness. The kindergarten was open year-round and gave small children an educational and fun place for learning.
In 1892, these dwellings became home of the College Settlement Association (CSA) with Susan Wharton as president. Wharton, with other reform-minded women, pioneered in city planning.

In 1887, all of Starr’s organizations were assembled as the Starr Centre Association and Susan Wharton became chairperson in 1900. The Centre continued to grow and provide assistance to thousands of people in the Philadelphia. After 1900 the Centre sponsored lecturers to come and speak at the Church of the Covenant at 9th and Bainbridge. Lectures were given on topics from English literature and music to politics.

After Starr’s death in 1884, his organizations were left in the hands of Hannah Fox. In 1887, all of Starr’s organizations were assembled as the Star Center Association and Susan Wharton became chairperson in 1900. The Centre continued to grow and provide assistance to thousands of people in the Philadelphia. After 1900 the Centre sponsored lecturers to come and speak at the Church of the Covenant at 9th and Bainbridge. Lectures were given on topics from English literature and music to politics.

In 1837, Richard Humphreys, a wealthy Quaker, gave an endowment for the establishment of the Institute for Colored Youth. In 1901, the daily attendance was 125. The curriculum without any emphasis on religious training while still maintaining the classical studies. Furthermore, the library was expanded and opened to the community. This, along with sponsored lectures, allowed the African American community to further their education without attending school and provided nutritious meals at reasonable rates. Additionally, the Starr Kitchen sponsored a Penny Lunch program for school children. Every day, tables would be set up in playgrounds and school selling a small variety of food items for a penny. In 1898 56,316 lunches were sold to school children. Additionally, the Starr Centre sponsored lectures to come and speak at the Church of the Covenant at 9th and Bainbridge. Lectures were given on topics from English literature and music to politics.

In 1896 Fanny Jackson Coppin was first hired as the head of the girls' departments while Du Bois conducted his study. The work done by Starr, Fox and the Octavius Hill Association had bought and renovated 28 properties by 1901 where more than 80 families of various nationalities were able to find comfortable, sanitary housing. The Association maintained the buildings, keeping them in repair and up to sanitary standards while also keeping oversight of its tenants.

The city of Philadelphia did not desegregate its fire service until 1952. The slow process of integrating Philadelphia’s firemen was hard and fast against the resistance of many African Americans who were not allowed to fight fires and consequently were often treated as second class citizens and firefighters. However, these men risked their lives for citizens of all color.

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At the center of Philadelphia’s African American community was the Octavia Hill Association. In 1896 to improve the living condition of the city’s poorer districts. The Association had bought and renovated 28 properties by 1901 where more than 80 families of various nationalities were able to find comfortable, sanitary housing. The Association maintained the buildings, keeping them in repair and up to sanitary standards while also keeping oversight of its tenants.

For his efforts during the Civil War, Catto was awarded the rank of Major and the brevet rank of Captain. He is remembered as one of Philadelphia’s most politically active African Americans of the 19th century. After graduating as valedictorian of the Institute for Colored Youth in 1858, he immediately became engaged in the struggle against the Board of Education. Humphreys had wished for.

Here on Rodman Street, between 6th and 7th streets, was the heart of Philadelphia’s African American community. It attracted not only young people, but an entire unit at Harrisburg because the troops were black, fueling Catto to push the color line. He fight fires and consequently were often treated as second class citizens and firefighters. However, these men risked their lives for citizens of all color.

4 St. Mary’s Street
College Settlement Association and the Octavia Hill Association
Between 6th and 7th on Rodman

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5 Home of Octavius Catto
8th and South Street

Octavius Catto was a black educator, intellectual and civil rights activist who is remembered as one of Philadelphia’s most politically active African Americans of the 19th century. After graduating as valedictorian of the Institute for Colored Youth in 1858, he immediately became engaged in the struggle against the Board of Education. Humphreys had wished for.

In 1884, Coppin joined the Institute for Colored Youth as principal and began his influential career in education.

During the Civil War, Catto raised a volunteer regiment of black men to help defend the city of Philadelphia. During the Civil War, Catto raised a volunteer regiment of black men to help defend the city of Philadelphia. After graduating as valedictorian of the Institute for Colored Youth in 1858, he immediately became engaged in the struggle against the Board of Education. Humphreys had wished for.

Muralist Willis Humphrey designed and painted “Mapping Courage.” The Mural shows “Cropped Troops” that were sent to the front lines. For his efforts during the Civil War, Catto was awarded the rank of Major and the brevet rank of Captain. He is remembered as one of Philadelphia’s most politically active African Americans of the 19th century. After graduating as valedictorian of the Institute for Colored Youth in 1858, he immediately became engaged in the struggle against the Board of Education. Humphreys had wished for.

Mural by Willis Humphrey. Photo by Jack Ramsdale.
Before slavery was abolished in Pennsylvania, slave owners would take their slaves to Pennsylvania Hospital for treatment, but after Emancipation, few blacks visited the hospital. Many African Americans found it difficult to seek medical attention because of the hospital requirements, such as the need of a tax-paying citizen to vouch for your identity. Also, because there were no certified black nurses, practitioners, or doctors in Philadelphia hospitals, many blacks feared receiving poor medical treatment. Dr. Nathan Mossell was the only African American doctor working in Philadelphia's hospitals during the 1880s. As a result, he helped found the Frederick Douglass Hospital in 1895, the first hospital to train African American nurses and admit anyone regardless of race or economic status. Shortly thereafter, the Mercy Hospital (1907) was built to serve a similar function. In 1903 the Phipps Institute, just outside the Seventh Ward, was created for the sole purpose to care for tuberculosis patients. It wasn't until they hired an African American nurse, Elizabeth W. Tyler in 1910, that the Pennsylvania Hospital earned the trust of black Philadelphians and received black patients.

7 Home of Susan Wharton
910 Clinton Street

Susan Wharton was a wealthy Quaker who lived at 910 Clinton Street, in the well-to-do section of the Seventh Ward. Wharton's interest in studying her area's increasing crime rates led her to propose the "Negro problem" be studied. She approached her friend and provost of the University of Pennsylvania, Charles C. Harrison, and together they invited W.E.B. Du Bois to survey the Ward's African American population. Additionally, Wharton was an active philanthropist in the Ward. She worked closely with the College Settlement Association, the Octavia Hill Association and the Starr Centre, holding various leadership roles at each organization. All these organization worked to better the living and economic conditions of the city's poor African American and immigrant communities.

Take a look around Wharton's neighborhood. Are you able to see any signs of how this neighborhood differed from most of the others in the Ward at the turn of the century?

6 Pennsylvania Hospital
Between 8th and 9th on Pine

The Pennsylvania Hospital was founded in May of 1751 by Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Thomas Bond as the first hospital in the United States. The hospital was intended to be a partial solution to Philadelphia's growing numbers of sick, poor and mentally-ill who were wandering the streets. The building on Pine Street opened its doors in 1756; it is now used for offices and houses the hospital's archival and historic library.

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