

Philadelphia's Historic District

(An excerpt from our Reunion2023 guide)

From Connie Bille

Penn's First Campus 1749 - 1801



Public Academy of Philadelphia. Source: Library Company of Philadelphia

1749-1801



Today.

Ben covered in 80,000 pennies from Philadelphia children

#1 — 4th & Arch Streets

If you walk roughly five square blocks in Center City Philadelphia - from 4th to 9th and Arch to Lombard- you will pass the sites where Benjamin Franklin established our alma mater, the first university in America with its charity school, classics academy and medical school. You will also pass the Continent's first hospital - also founded by Ben. You can still see its surgical amphitheater where the public could come to observe amputations and cataract removals between noon and 3 PM, sunlight permitting. You will see the plaques on Colonial-era buildings that signified membership in the first fire insurance company - also Ben's idea. Oh yes, and you'll pass the first lending library and philosophical society - also notions of our founder, the paragon of the Enlightenment. On the same route you will be crossing the rails of the Underground Railroad, passing the Quaker meetinghouse, the oldest Black church and the site of the interracial women's association which were the spine of the Abolitionist movement.

This same little quarter mile is chock full of much better-known places like Independence Hall and the Constitution Center, but the lesser-known sites give it special significance for Penn grads.

In my research on Penn connections to Historic Philadelphia, here is this clipping from the NY Times.

Liberty Bell Sit-In Continues

Special to The New York Times

PHILADELPHIA, March 13 — Twenty-five students who spent last night sleeping at the foot of the Liberty Bell continued their sit-in today to demonstrate their sympathy for the Negroes of Selma.

The demonstration at Independence Hall, where American liberty was proclaimed in 1776, began yesterday morning. At closing time last night, Dennis Kurjack, acting superintendent of the Independence National Historical Park, decided not to eject the young people.

"We are doing this," he said, "because the Liberty Bell is a symbol for all the people of the United States, and because we do not believe American citizens should be forcibly removed from the Liberty Bell while they are giving peaceful expression to their beliefs."

The demonstrators, including three girls, slept on the floor last night, wrapped in blankets. Because they were not permitted to bring food into the national shrine, they took turns going outside today to eat sandwiches and drink coffee brought by friends.

On March 7, aka Bloody Sunday, John Lewis and other civil rights marchers attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. They then began to organize to continue the march with the support of people from across the country, including Penn students.

My job that night was purveyor of sandwiches and blankets. My best friend, Janet Freedman Stotland, now a Fellow at Penn Law, was one of the occupiers. The next winter 25 of us Penn students went to Mississippi to work directly in support of the Civil Rights movement.