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Periodic Atlas of the Metro scape: The Face of Density, Diversity, and Disparity in 20th Century Portland

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Periodic Atlas of the Metro scape

The Face of Density, Diversity, and Disparity in 20th Century Portland

by Craig Wollner and Meg Merrick

W e of the 21st century often congratulate ourselves on policies that have led to greater density and diversity in our urban settings, as remedies to the sprawl, ghettoization, and poverty that became the bane of planners and activists during the last half of the previous one hundred years. But the maps on this and following pages, generated by the Teaching American History Project of the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies, suggest that there was plenty of density in various parts of the city at times in the twentieth century and a lot of diversity in certain neighborhoods. Often, these outcomes were the result of intentional policies of the city government and its business allies, especially those in real estate, transportation, and finance. Frequently, these policies perpetuated or accelerated poverty and decline in the neighborhoods—although those who made them said they were designed to ensure the greater good, or to conform to consensus values, or that they were promulgated because there were more pressing matters to address.

Today, we have replaced these policies with different and (we think) more humane, forward looking ones where urban planning is concerned. But perhaps we have only proved that, as the proverb has it, “There is nothing new under the sun,” or maybe that as the great historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. put it, we have yet to learn “what is necessary and what is merely the product of our contingent arrangements.”

HOLC Map of Portland

After World War I, the real estate industry was especially vulnerable to the suspicion of foreigners and non-whites that was a feature of post-conflict society. In the twenties and thirties, appraisers and realtors believed that in order to maintain the value of a neighborhood's properties, it had to be homogeneous. They thought the stability of property values could only be maintained if income levels and racial composition in a given area remained constant. If, on the other hand, a neighborhood were “invaded” or “infiltrated” by elements different from the established group, property values would decline. Actually, the theory regarded decline as inevitable and saw all neighborhoods undergoing eventual degeneration through infiltration until they became slums.

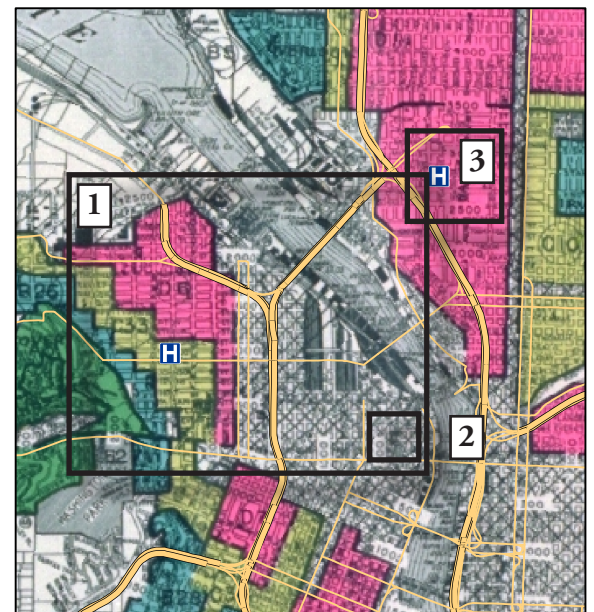
Accordingly, appraisers were trained to watch

neighborhoods closely for their potential to attract inharmonious racial or ethnic groups. One manual on appraising warned that although most human differences caused only gradual decline in property values, “there is one difference in people, namely race, which can result in a very rapid decline.” Another confidently ranked racial and ethnic groups according to their effect on property values. From top to bottom they read: 1) English, Germans, Scotch, Irish, Scandinavians; 2) North Italians; 3) Bohemians or Czechs; 4) Poles; 5) Lithuanians; 6) Greeks; 7) Russians, Jews (lower class); 8) South Italians; 9) Negroes; and 10) Mexicans.

The code of ethics of the National Association of Real Estate Boards stated that it was unethical for a realtor to introduce into a neighborhood “members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values.”

Banks depended on appraisers for assessments of property values as they evaluated loan risk. In fact, appraisals were frequently done by loan officers at banks. The mortgage lenders were thus intimately tied directly or indirectly to the prevailing views about the influences on property value and the impact of potential purchasers on it.

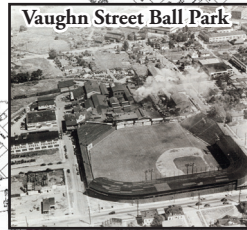
The HOLC map of Portland plainly shows the areas of Portland that were regarded as inviolable under this philosophy.



The 1938 Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) Map of Portland and the areas included in the atlas: (1) Northwest Portland, (2) Old Town, and (3) the Emanuel Hospital area. Red areas are those that were “redlined” by the HOLC. Areas considered commercial or industrial (cross-hatched) weren't graded by the HOLC. Current freeways are included for reference.












Lewis and Clark Exposition

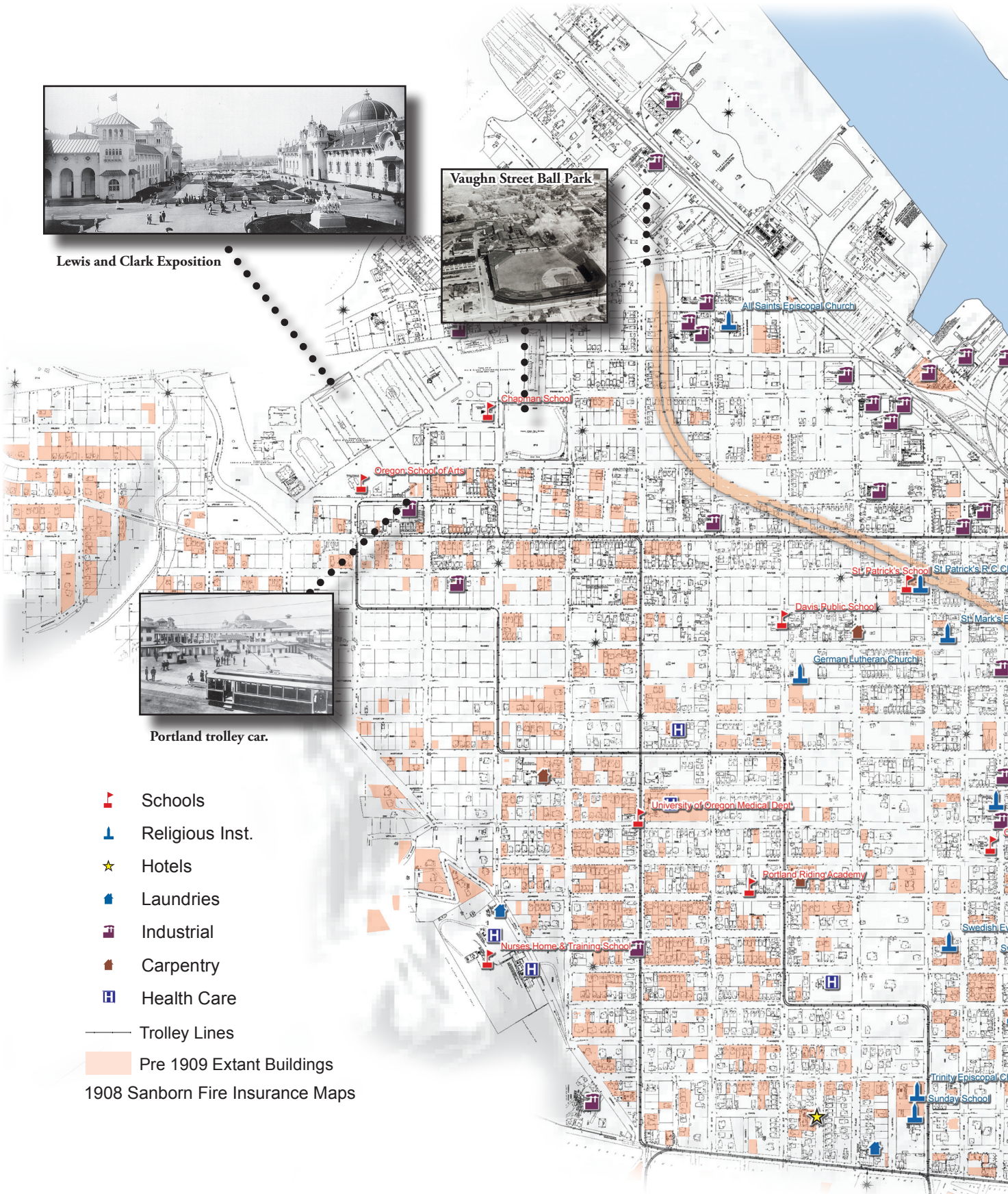


Vaughn Street Ball Park



Portland trolley car.

-  Schools
 -  Religious Inst.
 -  Hotels
 -  Laundries
 -  Industrial
 -  Carpentry
 -  Health Care
 -  Trolley Lines
 -  Pre 1909 Extant Buildings
- 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps



Northwest Portland in 1908

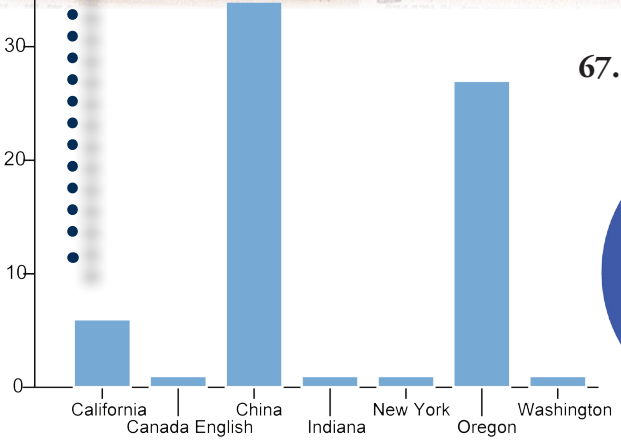
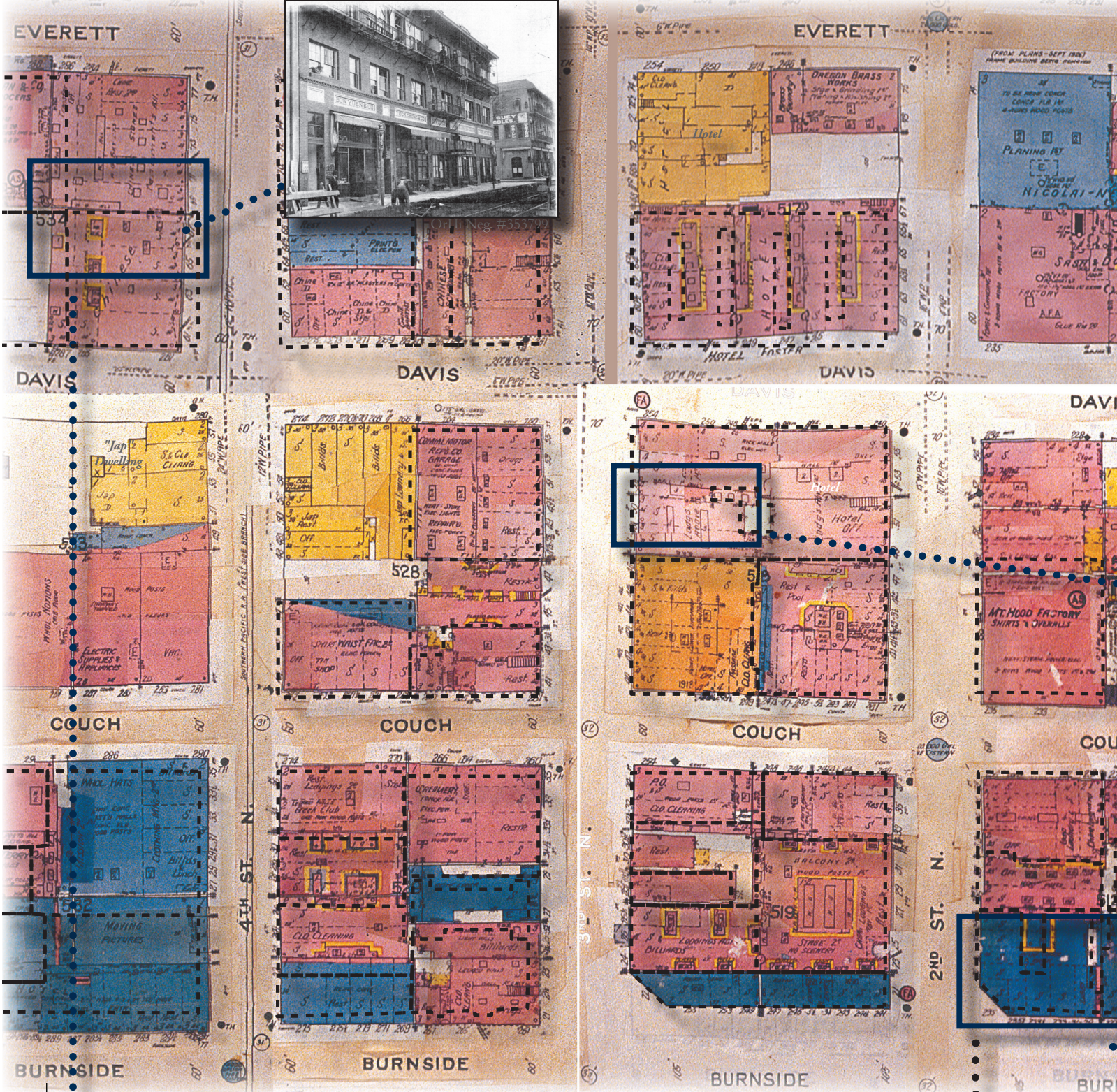
The map shows that in Portland's youth, whether by design or accident, the notion of mixed use, later made famous as a grail by the planning icon Jane Jacobs, was a fact in the city's northwest quadrant. Much of that structural diversity was later sacrificed to the path of the 405 freeway in the 1970s. In its heyday, the diversity was fed by the need of the owners of the city's trolley franchises to have amenities along their lines, so that as many people as possible would have a reason to ride. Hence, the Lewis and Clark Exposition of 1905 in the Guilds Lake district, and the Vaughn Street baseball park. Note the presence of residences, schools, and residential structures including single-family homes, flats, apartments, and hotels, as well as the Good Samaritan Hospital.



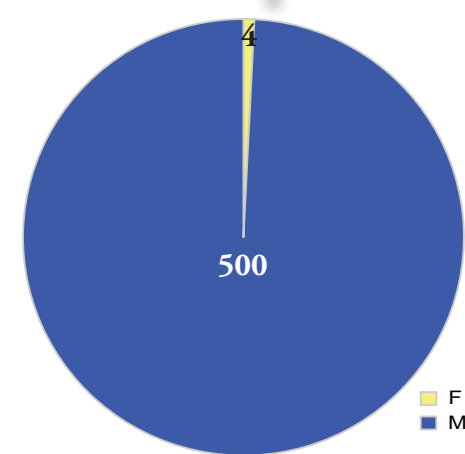
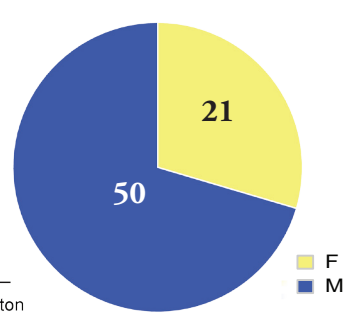
The historical data used to create the maps included in this atlas are available for download at the our Teaching American History website:

www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/TAHv3/Map_Resources.html

This website includes shapefiles, other GIS-ready materials, and GoogleEarth projects that have been made possible by a series of Teaching American History grants from the U.S. Department of Education.



67.5 and 69.5 N. 4th St.



Sixty-nine residents were identified in the 1930 Census as Chinese and two were identified as white.

Old Town circa 1930

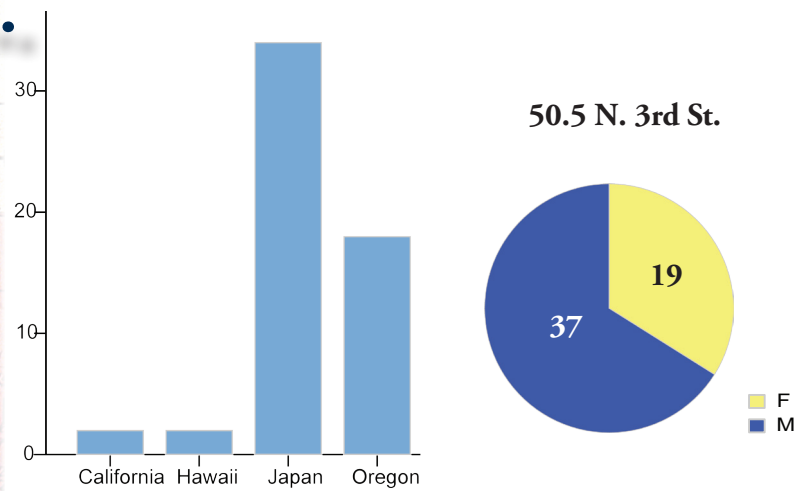
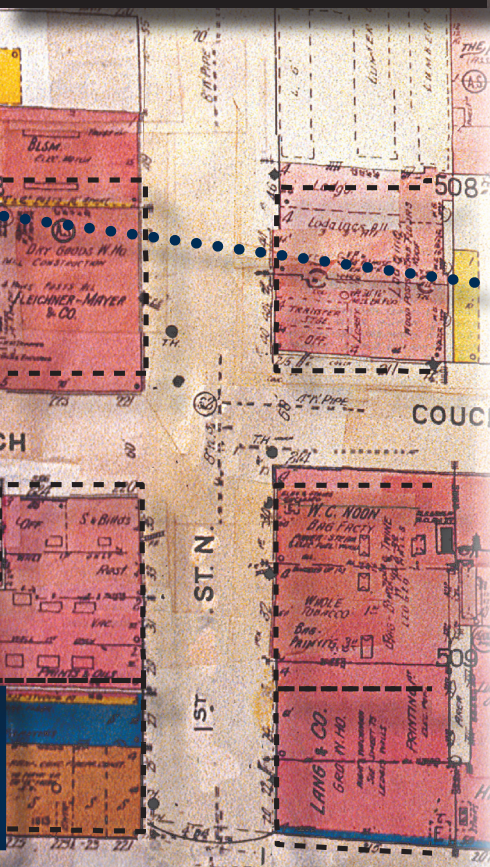
The map here was originally generated in 1926 by the Sanborn Company for fire insurance purposes. It and the graphs on these pages illustrate the phenomenal diversity of what we now know as the Old Town district of downtown Portland. The graphs reveal the typical patterns of residence for the area. By the late twenties, Chinese and Japanese there tended to live side-by-side, but separately and often in family arrangements (which is different from how we usually conceive of them in this period). The bottom graph shows that the other residents of Old Town were extremely diverse. The profile presented here is framed by the facts that:

- In 1930, there were 1,919 residents living in 17 acres shown here – a density of 113 people per acre or 7,230 per square mile.
- In 2000, 2,063 people lived in the 2000 census blockgroup that extends from the river on the east to NW 12th to the west, Burnside to Glisan, an area over four times larger.

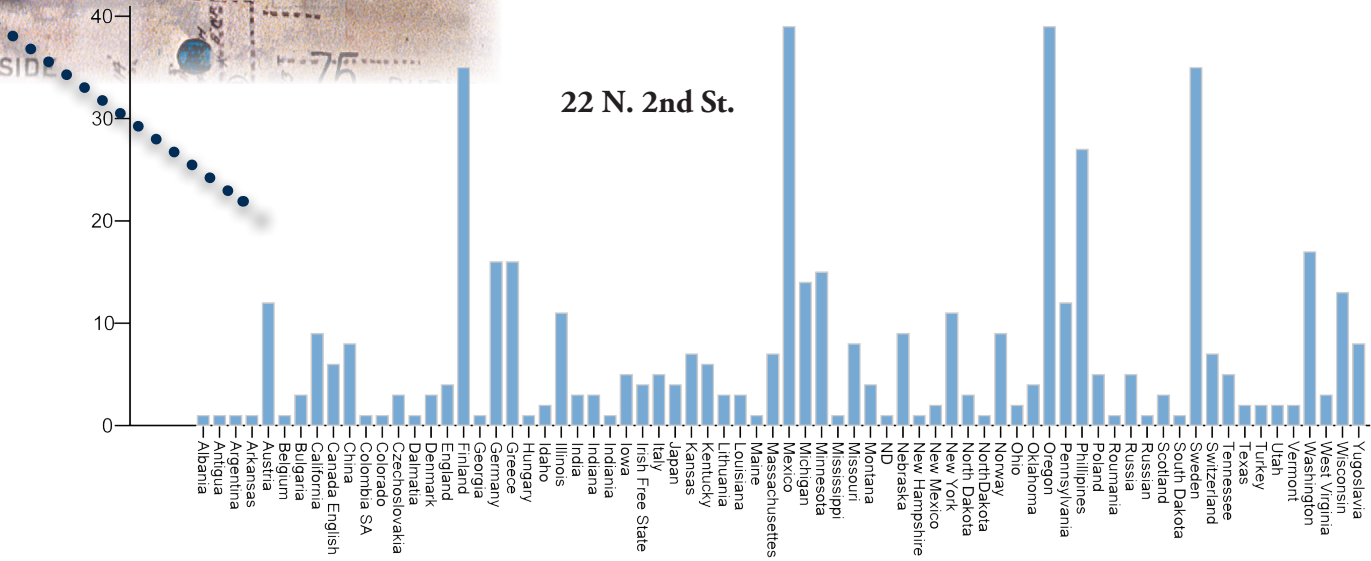
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1926
Dashed lines = Extant Pre-1931 Buildings

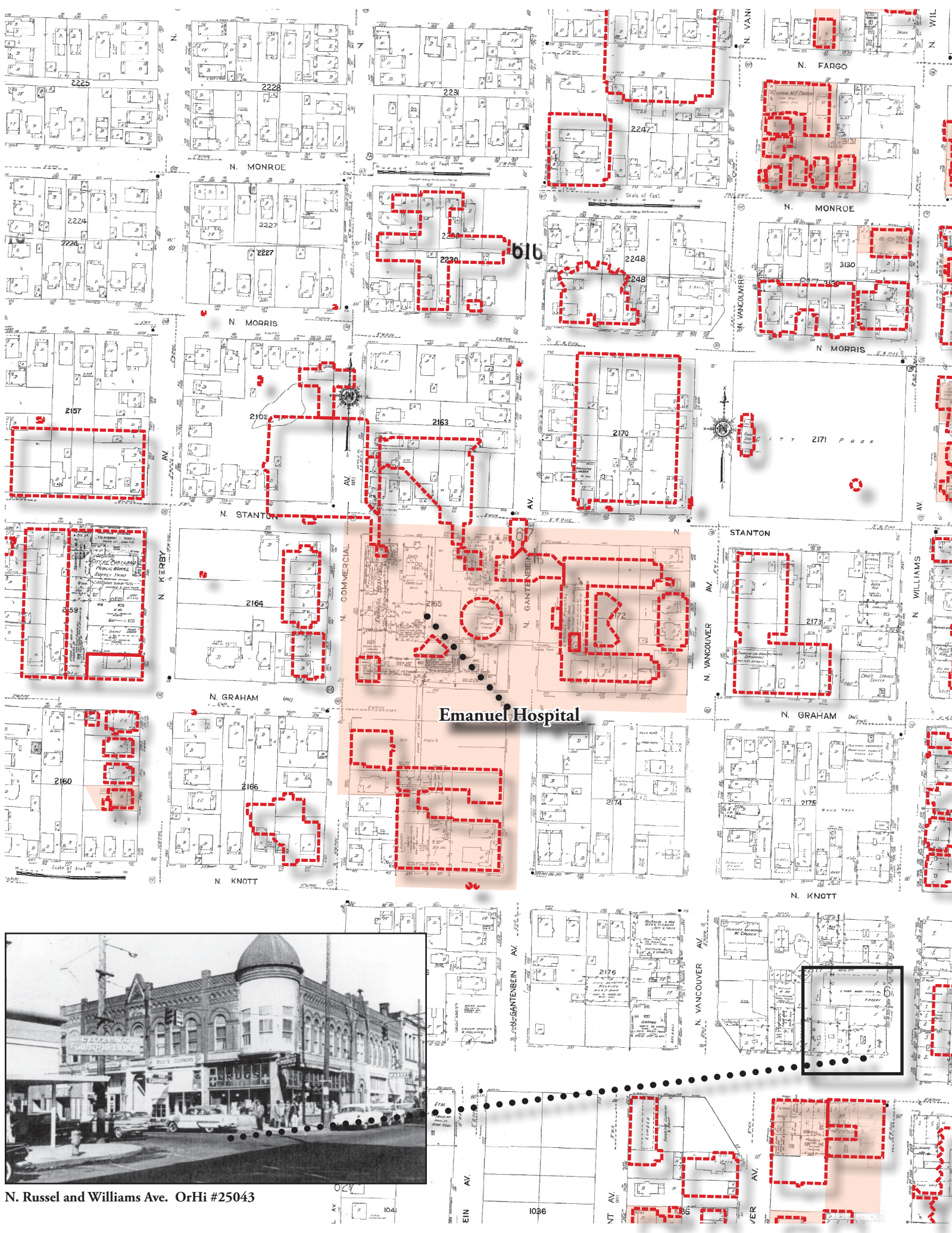
Some demographics of the residents (by categories used in the 1930 Census) of this area in 1930 include:

- Of the 1,919 residents, 177 (9.2%) were female; 1,742 (90.8%) were male
- Marital status: 289 (15%) were married; 32 (1.7%) divorced; 1,557 (81%) single; 32 (1.7%) widowed; 9 unknown status.
- By "Race" per 1930 census language, the residents were: Chinese, 6.8%; Filipino, 3.0%; Hin (East Indian), 0.2%; In (native American), 0.3%; Japanese, 14.2%; Mexican, 0.2%; Negro, 0.2%; White, 72.5%.



All residents were identified in the 1930 Census as Japanese.





Emanuel Hospital



N. Russel and Williams Ave. OrHi #25043

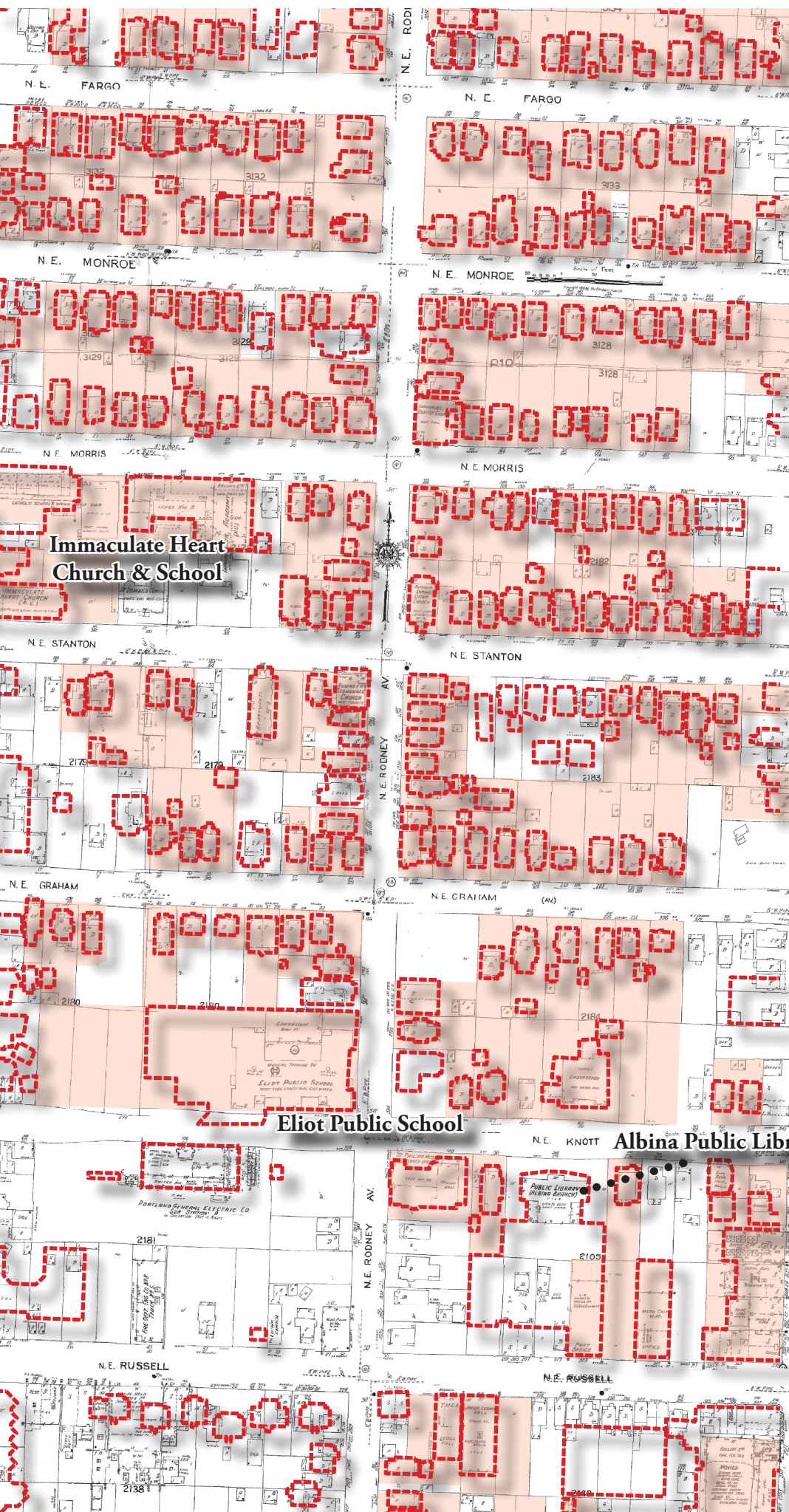
Emanuel Hospital Area in 1950

*Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1950
and current building footprints*

The Emanuel Hospital urban renewal project of 1963 was 55 acres bounded by the junction of the Fremont Bridge and Interstate 5, North Russell Street and Williams and Vancouver Avenues. The program was designed to build access to community hospitals for low income areas. The aim was to remedy the substandard housing and poor environment in the area by expanding the hospital and constructing related facilities: parking, employee housing, offices, and housing for the elderly. From the first, the program was plagued by problems including the failure of the Portland Development Commission (PDC) to keep interested citizen groups involved in the decision making process. In response, Albina residents, along with others, created the Emanuel Displaced Persons Association (EDPA) in 1970. Multiple meetings with PDC followed in subsequent years to discuss the outrage and dissatisfaction felt by many displaced citizens over such issues as intimidation by officials and PDC's preoccupation with a rigid time schedule.

After 200 people and 20 businesses were displaced in April 1973, Emanuel Hospital stopped work on the project when funds were lost following federal budget cuts.

The voice of the Emanuel community was probably muted by the color of the residents. During the Civil Rights movement and riots of the 1960s, the government feared social unrest. Many believed PDC's passive interest in the community's concerns was due to racism. Robert Nelson, spokesman for the American Friends Service Committee, stated, "Emanuel has been essentially a powerless community. The only 'power' has been, maybe, that people are supposed to be afraid of blacks. Well, they aren't. Maybe they were a few years ago during the riots, but not now."



- Current tax lots w/structures built prior to 1950
- Buildings in 2010