



## SOLID GROUND FOR ARGUMENT

The strategic location of that plot of ground at Elm, Orchard and Walnut Streets, has influenced the choice of every school site since the Washington School was built there more than a half century ago. Four times it was successfully exploited to defeat proposals to build schools in other and less central parts of the town, and once, in an off-the-record ballot, it was actually approved by a majority of the voters as the best site available for a High School.

Older residents will recall the intense factional dispute of 1910, when a majority of the Board of Education presented a plan, prepared by Architect Wilson Potter of New York, for a sixteen-room building to be erected on the "Peckham Dump," now the Mountain Avenue entrance to Mindowaskin Park. The Board asked the voters to appropriate \$90,000 for the building and \$7,200 for the lot and its grading. A stubborn and resourceful minority, led by Dr. Chauncey M. F. Egel and Edward F. Lowe, opposed this plan, and countered with a proposal that the Washington School be remodeled according to a design prepared by Architects Charles H. Darsh and his associate, Edgar A. Josslyn. This building, of twelve rooms, was to cost approximately \$90,000.

For a month prior to the school election, leaders of the opposing factions addressed the Woman's Club, the Presbyterian Men's Club and mass meetings in the auditorium of the Washington School. The majority plan was well received at first. Vice-President Earl A. Merrill contended that it would be cheaper and safer to tear down the Washington School than attempt to remodel it according to modern standards. He was ap-

plauded by North side partisans when he said that \$100,000 was a modest sum to pay for an up-to-date school that would beautify one of the town's leading thoroughfares. "Public schools," replied Dr. Egel, "are regarded as public improvements no matter where located, and it isn't up to the Board of Education to clean up the unsanitary places. A red barn would improve the appearance of Mr. Peckham's dumping ground." When invited to give his opinion, Dr. J. B. Harrison, president of the Board of Health, declared that the Peckham lot was sanitary, "but thought it would be difficult to lay a foundation in a swamp."

"That's the nub of the whole question," replied Mr. Lowe. "When the Town Engineer had dug a test pit five feet deep, he scarcely had time to jump out of the hole before it filled with water. To reach hard pan, it will be necessary to dig through fifteen feet of rubbish and muck." In the closing moments of the debate, Lawyer W. G. Peckham took the floor to explain that he did not wish to sell his Mountain Avenue lot, and had named a price only at "the urgent request of my good friend, Mr. Salter Clark," president of the Board of Education. "But," he added, roguishly, "I own a desirable property on Broad Street which I will sell. It's a bargain."

A preference for the Washington School plan was indicated in the defeat of the Mountain Avenue site by a substantial majority; but, strange to relate, a few months later, the voters approved, without opposition, the purchase of a lot at the corner of East Broad Street and Stanley Avenue, and the building thereon of the Grant School. Cost, \$74,000.