

# All that remains are the memories

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**ABINGTON** — The three old friends strolled through their alma mater, picking their way through chunks of fallen plaster, piles of dust, faded, wadded newspapers and the occasional dead bird.

"That was not here when we were here," said Clayton Worster, known affectionately as "Muck" and "president of nearly everything" when he roamed the halls regularly as a member of the Class of 1932 of Abington High School.

They walked past each silent room, some of them dating back to 1908, pointing and exclaiming, "Oh! Mrs. Wyatt had that room!" and "I threw a snowball through that window!"

Peering into the room where Mrs. Lobach had taught Latin, they recalled the best student in class.

"Jo didn't mind us cheating off her," said George Walton. "She always pointed to the right answer."

"Why do I remember all these names after 60 years?" he mused.

The Abington School District wants to jettison the site of their recollections, the gray granite building at Susquehanna and Huntingdon Roads that served as the high school until 1956 and as Huntingdon Junior High School until 1983, when it was closed because of declining enrollment. With utility costs alone running \$44,150 yearly, the place has been referred to as a bit of an albatross by district employees.

But for people who received their degrees in the second-floor auditorium, the building is an important touchstone.

"Naturally, we're nostalgic about the place," Walton said.

In an interview at the district's alumni office last week, other graduates recalled characters, tales and practices that made a beloved building come to life.

"There was a spirit and feeling I felt there," said Mary Farmer, Class of 1937 and now an alumni officer. "Those were very special years."

Kenneth Schaefer, Class of 1936 and an alumni officer, said, "It was the Depression. In those days, everyone realized and appreciated what they had."

Yes, times were different then, back when students had to dodge trolleys to cross Old York Road.

In the morning, before school started, the

**There was a spirit about the now-threatened former Abington High School. Plus a galloping ghost and a dead cat.**



The building on Susquehanna Road in Abington served as a high school until 1956 and as a junior high until 1983, when it was closed because of declining enrollment.

girls would circle the track across Susquehanna Road in one direction, while the boys circled in the other. When a pair of eyes met another pair and the match clicked, the two would walk off the track together, said Charles Corwin, Class of 1940. Even so, the boys always went into the building through the right front entrance, and the girls always entered through the left.

At one corner of the track where the students eyed one another stood the baseball backstop, behind which some boys would smoke cigarettes until principal Joseph Weirick, known as a strict disciplinarian with a good soul, would march out to confiscate. Sometimes, the beloved janitor, Jimmy Condy, would give the cigarettes back if he could manage it, Corwin recalled. Condy turned the hot water off on Worster during his marathon showers.

Corwin told of how students dug the dirt out of a steep embankment on the Huntingdon Road side of what is now known as Memorial Field to make a level playing field in the late 1930s. The field is still used for Abington football games and graduation.

"The actual construction of the grounds was done by students and teachers," Corwin said.

"You can't get a kid to pick up a piece of trash now," Thomas Cameron, Class of 1936, said with a sigh.

School spirit was stronger then, the alumni maintained, recalling 15,000 fans pouring into Temple University Stadium to watch Abington square off against arch-rival Cheltenham High School.

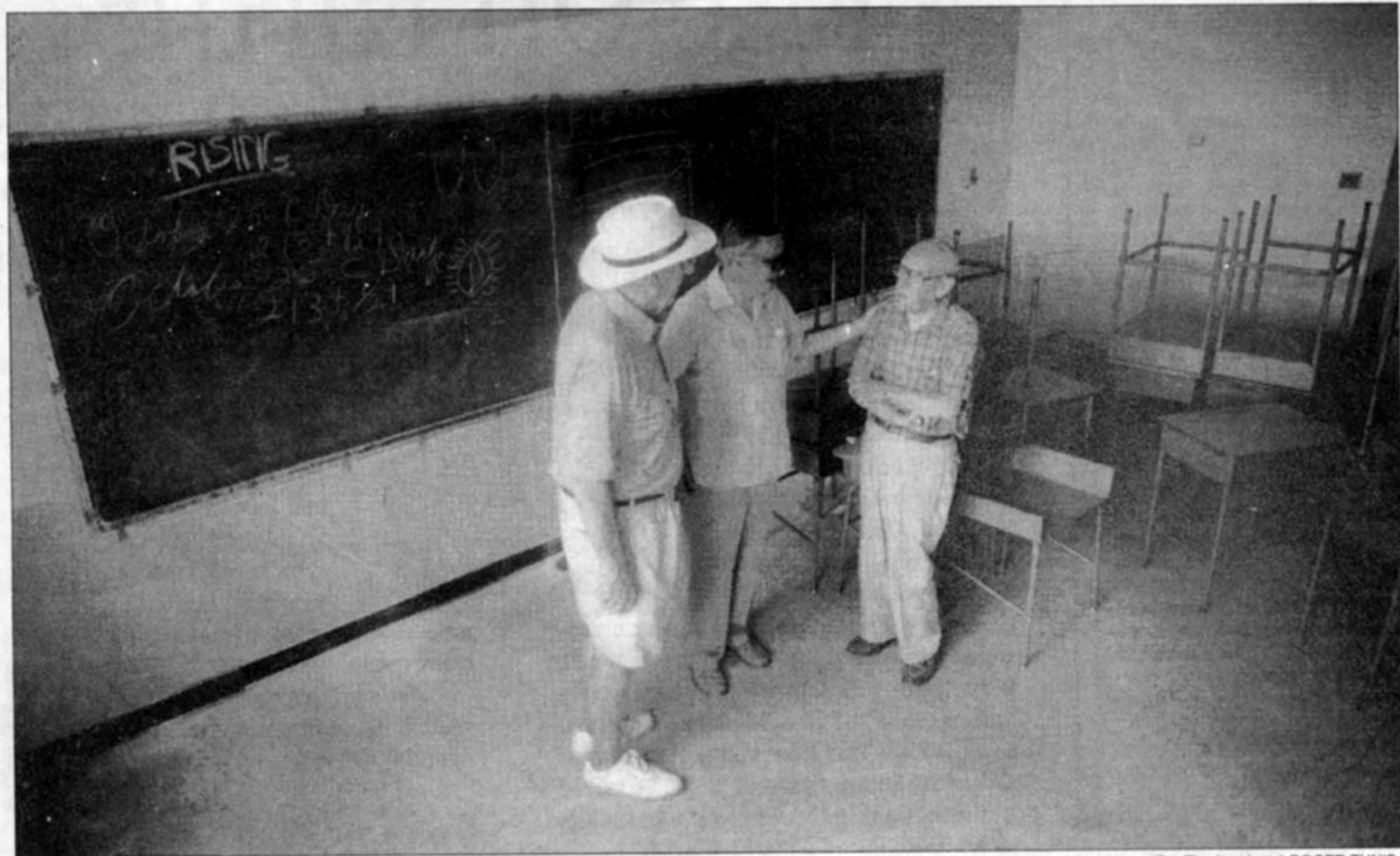
They accounted for the origins of the Galloping Ghost mascot. Worster said that football coach Glenn Snodgrass had been a backup to 1930s football hero Red Grange at the University of Illinois, and that Snodgrass suggested Grange's nickname as the school mascot. Schaefer and Cameron said Grange came and talked at a pep rally, and the school named its mascot after him and his inspiring speech.

In those days, someone actually donned a sheet and charged around the field on a horse. The ghost was usually Doris VanZant, Worster and Walton said. Her father was a veterinarian so she had access to horses, they said. She is also the one who brought the dead cat to biology class.

Peering through the windows at the back of the building, Walton could see the remains of the cafeteria, where groups would sell candy behind a partition.

"This sure has stirred up a lot of memories," he said.

"Yes," agreed Worster. "There were a lot of good times connected with this building, a lot of good memories."



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**Clayton Worster (left) and George Walton** of the Class of 1932 reminisce with Sam Cunningham (right) of the Class of 1926 about the good old days at Abington High. The school building "sure . . . stirred up a lot of memories," Walton said.