

Seeds of MOVE tragedy sown eight years ago



From arrest on minor charges came fatal Powelton episode

The seeds which grew into the fatal May 13, 1985 shootout on Osage Avenue between the radical MOVE group and Philadelphia police were planted in Powelton Village eight years before, when another fatal confrontation between MOVE and police occurred on the morning of August 8, 1978.

Nine MOVE members were sentenced to 30-to-100 year terms for the death of a police officer during the 1978 confrontation.

The demands by MOVE for the release of those nine members, plus that of five other members jailed on lesser charges, set off a series of events that ended last May with the deaths of 11 MOVE

members and the destruction of 61 homes.

It all started with the jailing of four MOVE members on minor assault charges in March, 1977.

Three months later, armed, khaki-clad MOVE members appeared on the barricade in front of their 307-309 N. 33rd St. compound, demanding the release of those four jailed members.

The threats issued on May 20, 1977 led to a 15-month standoff between city authorities and MOVE which ended in the August 1978 gun battle. Police set up 24-hour surveillance of the MOVE compound on May 20 and continued to monitor the site planning to arrest MOVE members if they left.

Between March and May of

1978 then-Mayor Frank Rizzo initiated a 54-day total blockade of the MOVE compound.

The blockade was ended in May with an agreement between MOVE and the city, worked out by a Black led citywide coalition.

MOVE was to vacate the house by August as a part of the agreement. Police were serving arrest warrants resulting from the failure to vacate under the terms of the agreement when the shootout began.

MOVE said it was not bound by the terms of the agreement. MOVE has repeatedly claimed that it has been the victim of a conspiracy among city, police and court officials. — Linn Washington

