SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

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NOTES from SHCA President

eill’s sixty degrees, sunny cool with a nice NW breeze and —humidity. As I write this, it’s actively the kind of day we’re hopin’ for on Saturday, October 3rd, we’ll have two —Frank’s Day and —CA Family Picnic at Garden —Frank’s Day is the cenetum unveiling of the Historical plaque noting the 200th anniv. of the birth of poet/musician, Francis Melville Johnson near his home at 5 and Pine Streets. Mr. Johnson’s life within a few blocks of his birthplace, 536 Pine Street, at United States Military Acad. —

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SOCIETY HILL TOWERS WANTS SECURITY

SHCA Opposes Towers Fence

A “new and improved” method to tighten security has been proposed at the Society Hill Towers. This solution is a seven-foot high fence around Society Hill Towers! It would be a metal barrier to be constructed along the northern end of the Towers, from about where the Copper Penny Restaurant is located, and around Dock Street, coming up to 2nd Street where the Man Full of Troubles Tavern is situated.

This incomplete proposal was made by Jeremy Siegel, president of the Towers’ Owners’ Association and its Council, an executive committee of the association. His presenta- tion to the SHCA General Membership Meeting on September 16 was made as a precursor to filing for a variance with the city’s Zoning Board of Appeals so as to receive, at least, support for his proposal, or, at the minimum, no opposition by the community associa- tion.

The concept for the fence was conceived by a security consultant hired by the Towers’ Council. The Council’s rationale for the fence is that people use the area as a walkway and public park, particularly at annual events, such as the city’s Fourth of July celebrations when large crowds congregate there—thus, threatening its security.

The fence is a controversial issue among the approximately 1,500 residents of the Towers, and the specifics of the plan lack many important details. Nevertheless, Mr. Siegel said he hoped that the project could move speedily, and that the fence could be erected by spring ’93, prior to next summer’s activities at the Penn’s Landing and Head House areas.

5. A romantic comedy, “Beau Jest,” currently enjoying rave re- views in New York is the attraction at the Society Hill Playhouse. Pack- age rates with an optional dinner at Monserrat Restaurant prom- ises to be a delightful evening to benefit our community organiza- tion. Tickets available from either SHCA Board members or the SHCA office. Call 629-1288 for more information and reserva- tions.

Finally, THE THING at Penn’s Landing is nearly complete. The tower (commemorating the 500th anniversary of Christopher Colum- bus’ discovery of America) is a complete mismatch with any other art or artifact in the area. It meets my criteria for “serious ugly.” Maybe we should have a “naming” contest?

—Dick Ostrander

IN MEMORY OF Gretchen Becker

On July 30, 1992, Gretchen A. Becker died. Gretchen was one of the first urban “pioneers” to restore her Spruce Street, 18th century house in Society Hill. In the December issue of the Society Hill Reporter, we will be re- printing an article she wrote—prob- ably in 1974—for our community assoc. restaurant mentioning about her early days in the neighborhood, and par- ticularly “Christmas in Society Hill.” Contributions in her memory may be made to the Head House Conservation 302 South 2nd Street, Phila. PA 19100.
The concept is that of an enclave mentality. It means we have been defeated! It means that we are advertising a world that has taken over. This will start the
Society Hill as we know it.
Mr. Siegel tells us that his spokesmen to security people.
"Security people do for a living? They think in terms of hardware, guns and electronic security systems. We should be thinking about something much more important than simple barricade solutions. We should think in terms of about urban design and aesthetics, about real values.
We have strong negative messages will be delivered if the fence is installed. First, a big, black fence suggests a" mentality. And, more important, second, it sends a message—a disquieting psychological message—we've closed the gates, that we're afraid and that crime over our community who am I? I happen to live around here and I care happens here. My wife and I talked to two people today about this very disturbing development.
Ed Bacon said the fence would be a disaster, indicating that and that property values for the Towers would go And we also spoke to Denise Scott Brown, one of the most illustrious urban planners. She said that she knew concerns for the safety, they often resort solutions—that putting up fences. But, she said, there are many other ways to solve security problems. ways require imagination and effort.
A few of the specifics:
I'm sensitive to this issue. I have a daughter and when I walk around the neighborhood and the "tours" of the day, all the time. Have you ever watched a scene in a movie? Would a seven-foot fence stop a young man from leaping across the fence if he had something to do just that? the way to solve the problem of security is to bring more people, more traffic in the walkways! "Closing off the area, we'll put more pathways down. And be in the underbrush—we can see what happens behind those dark areas.
"The point was made by someone here that the vast majority of us don't live behind fences. We live at ground level. All those "unwanted" people that Mr. Siegel refers to walk right by our houses. We're protected by the traffic, because the streets are open, not because we've built barricades behind us.
"Mr. Siegel's proposal for the fence refers to several gates that would be locked shut only at nighttime. But, once the fence is up, the time will come when we'll hear a cry to shut the gates.
"Regarding once-a-year events, such as the recent Tall Ships event. As chairman of the Penn's Landing Corporation, I was aware of the events and I was deeply concerned about how they affect our neighborhood. The crowds at these events are generally quite friendly. If you don't want the neighbors on your front lawn to celebrate the Fourth of July—which, personally, I find down-right un-American—then you should assume a temporary barrier could be installed as a solution.
"Trash. I see the proposed metal fence as a trash collector. Fences always gather trash, such as newspapers and litter, which tends to blow and get caught along fences.
"A fence will not work. It might even exacerbate the problem, because a barricade can often create more of a security problem. You erect a fence to protect the people on one side, and you make the problem worse on the other side—where we park our cars, where we walk our dogs or go out for a recreational run or stroll then becomes a no-man's zone.
"The fence is wrong. On the other hand, if there is a security problem, then it is a problem that we as neighbors all share. When neighbors work together to solve problems, there is no end of ideas that can be generated. Rather than involve outside security people, who have a vested interest in providing their narrow range of solutions, we should address this problem together. Enclaves will kill this community.
"I, Chairman, I move that the Society Hill Civic Association vigorously oppose this fence and that we develop a joint committee with the Towers Council to see if we can come up with an alternative to the fence that would be a solution acceptable to all. Perhaps, you could invite people with expertise in architecture and urban planning to be a part of this newly formed committee.
"I regard Mr. Siegel's proposal as an idea that will not work. First we'd have one fence. Then another, and then Society Hill as we've known and loved it for all these years will be lost."

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THE SOCIETY HILL CIVIC ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
P.O. Box 3, Philadelphia, PA 19105

Attention: Treasurer

New Member: Household $25
Membership Renewal: Business/Corporate $50
Corporate Sponsor $100

Phone (day) (eve)

Would you be interested in working with the following initiatives:
Membership \ Liqueur Control
Neighborhood Maintenance \ Town Watch
Recycling \ Recipe/Sun newspaper
Zoning \ Legislative
Preservation \ Other (please specify)

YOUR HOME IS YOUR PRIMARY INVESTMENT. PROTECT IT!

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ZONING MATTERS
The Zoning Committee reports that most of the issues before the SHCA are currently on hold, with the following three exceptions:

1. Fencing at Society Hill Towers
Please see lead article on front page of Society Hill Reporter.

2. TGI Friday's Restaurant at Abbott's Square, 2nd & Lombard Streets.
Attempts by SHCA to convene a meeting of the civic groups who are joined in the agreement with Abbott's Square Associates was rejected by the Blackwell Place Association. This agreement specifically disallows expansion of the restaurant outside the building. SHCA notes that Abbott's Square Associates have removed the illegally erected fencing from the sidewalk. No request for arbitration has been made by any party to the agreement.

3. 423 Pine Street, Illegal Third-Story Addition
A meeting on September 10 brought together neighbors with the property owner and her attorney. Neighbors object to the addition on two grounds: (a) because it blocks light to apartments in 421 Pine Street, and (b) because it does not conform aesthetically to the neighborhood. In its objection to the construction was based on safety standards. The neighbors will consider support of the variance if the owner will agree to the following conditions: (a) never to enlarge the size of the building again, including exterior spaces such as roof decks and balconies; (b) to reconstruct the stucco exterior in a color to match a sandstone color used elsewhere on the building's exterior. The owner agreed to hire an architect to do a drawing of the proposed design, which all parties could agree to and sign. This then would become part of the public record and incorporated as a proviso limiting the variance.
HEAD HOUSE
Effort Continues to Restore It

Have you seen it recently? The Head House now boasts a regilded, shining weathervane and an all-new slate roof. The entire building has been completely repainted, including the cupola—which needed to be practically re-built from the inside, because it had sustained so much damage. A lightning rod was installed to prevent another harmful strike to the structure, and the beautiful clock has been repaired to working order. After many years, it is again telling the correct time.

Thanks to contractors’ discounts and contributions of labor and materials by so many friends, all this work was accomplished for the bargain cost of approximately $73,000. However, the ancient, peeling paint under the market stables happens to be lead paint—6,000 square feet of it! It will have to be scraped and hauled away in an environmentally safe procedure. Then the area must be repainted, and the broken lamps must be repaired or replaced. Next on the shopping list of “must do’s”? The brickwork needs repointing and the electrical system should be overhaul.

But the Head House Conservancy is now scragging the bottom of its financial barrel. So if you haven’t yet made your contribution this year, isn’t it time that you did? To continue improving this National Historic Landmark in our neighborhood, we must seek future grants from foundations. This means that we must show full community support.

Please mail your tax-deductible contribution to: Head House Conservancy, 302 S. 2nd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106.

Help us continue our effort to restore Head House to its former pristine beauty—so as to improve the monument for ourselves and for visitors from across the country and around the world to enjoy—for now and for the future. Your participation in this project is very much appreciated.