

SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

Vol.1, No. 2 • Issued December 3, 1991

[This publication succeeds the Society Hill News, which published three issues.]

NOTES from the President

Hanukkah celebrations are underway, Christmas and the start of a New Year are just around the corner. It must be time to say, *Happy Holidays!!!*

A great deal of activity has been on the Zoning Committee calendar. You'll find detailed elsewhere. Special THANKS to Lorna Lawson and her dedicated group for their work in this critical area of continuing concern.

We really need similar dedication in several other areas to keep the civic association rolling. This issue of the Reporter came together only because of an extraordinary effort by Bernice Hamel. Call Bernice (925-4363) or me (922-6179) to become part of the 1992 editorial team.

Another unresolved volunteer area is the Starr Garden Recycling effort. A meeting at Engine 11 with Captain O'Donnell and Don McNeil has provided encouraging support from that fire company, but we need two or three folks willing to give about an hour once a month on Saturday morning to oversee the pickup and cleanup. Again, call or leave your name and number with Vernon or Alan at the park and we'll be in touch.

Becky Stoloff is looking for volunteers to work with Charles Peterson in developing an historically correct brochure which will be a walking tour of the area. We also plan to establish a Preservation Committee as a new standing committee of SHCA.

A reminder about our next SHCA open Board meeting...the date is moved up to Wednesday, December 12th, 7:30 PM at the 4th & Lombard community center. Come if you can and let your quadrant directors know what your concerns are.

Let's make Society Hill clean, colorful and festive for the HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!

—Dick Ostrander

MEET MARTHA B. AIKENS

New Superintendent At Park

In October Martha B. Aikens arrived in Philadelphia to head the largest and most important national historic park devoted to preserving structures and sites associated with the founding and growth of our country. Superintendent Aikens, who succeeds Hobart Cawood as superintendent of Independence National Historical Park, has in this brief time exhibited leadership qualities that distinguished her for this vital post by her recent intervention regarding the Penn Mutual buildings on Walnut Street. (See Penn Mutual Update on Sun front page.)

Superintendent Aikens, whose career with the National Park Service spans 19 years, recently chaired the Park Service's Women's Conference, celebrating the Service's 75th anniversary. A native Mississippian, her background and work experience is filled with accomplishments. She was the first black woman to head a major historical site, and most recently she was superintendent of the Mather Employee Development Center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, a facility that provides training for park service employees. Ms. Aikens was selected for recognition in "Who's Who" in American Women and for the American



Jaycees' "Outstanding Young Women."

As a newcomer to Society Hill, Ms. Aikens was given an informal walking tour of the neighborhood's highlights, led by the park's preservation architect and local resident, Penny Batcheler. The tour, given on a bright but cold November afternoon, included a visit to the Hill-Physick-Keith house on 4th Street and a stop at Head House Square. It concluded with a before-and-after slide

show of the area's restoration given at the home of Becky Stoloff, past president of the Society Hill Civic Association. Other tour participants were Dick Ostrander, current president and Bernice Hamel, president of the Head House Conservancy.

Society Hill welcomes Ms. Aikens to our historic little corner of the world. We offer our support and we send to her our very best wishes for a rewarding and successful tenure at this challenging post. We are pleased that all neighbors will have the opportunity to meet Superintendent Aikens in the near future, as she has offered to speak at a General Meeting of the Society Hill Civic Association—date and time to be announced.

SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

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GOOD NEWS AT WASHINGTON SQUARE

Agreement Between City, Park Service

For eight years neighbors and friends have been lobbying the federal government in order that Washington Square would one day become a part of Independence National Historical Park. Now, thanks to the efforts of Congressman Thomas M. Foglietta and the late Senator John Heinz, this dream may one day become a reality.

On Monday, November 25, 1991, at a ceremony in Washington Square, a "Memorandum of Understanding" between the Department of the Interior and the City

of Philadelphia was signed which will give local officials ten years to renovate the square and transfer its management to the federal government.

About three and a half million dollars of yet-to-be privately raised funds will be required to accomplish the renovation, but at the ceremony last week there was a feeling of optimism that eventually the park will be maintained in a manner fitting the 2,000 Revolutionary War soldiers buried there in unmarked graves.

Season's Greetings From Head House Square

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Where The Seniors Meet To Eat

Stand on the corner of 4th and Lombard any Saturday around noon and see them as they come. Some with canes, some on crutches, some with walkers, they come alone or in pairs or threesomes. Some walk quietly with heads down, eyes on the pavement; some admire the trees, the busy squirrels, or the ubiquitous pigeons; some chatter and bicker with their companions.

All are old. And hungry. And lonely.

All are looking forward to another Saturday for Seniors gathering at the Old Pine Community Center (OPCC).

When we opened OPCC's doors in the fall of 1977, we had plans for just about every group in the community except the elderly. After some investigation, we found that while many publicly funded centers do a great job of providing meals and activities during the week, the doors close on Friday and stay shut until Monday—Tuesday if there is a holiday.

That means hundreds of the city's residents have no place to go for meals and to meet their friends. They stay in their rooms, apartments or row houses without a soul to talk to for several days at a time.

OPCC's board decided to do something and sent word to the Coffee Cup, St. Rita's, and the Philadelphia Center for Older People that we would begin serving free lunches every other Saturday to 24 seniors—eight from each of the weekday centers.

An April 29, 1978, the first group of seventeen old people arrived, suspicious and wary of the strings they were sure were attached.

Would we try to pass the hat after the meal? Was this some kind of scheme to pry into their lives? Would we try to turn them all into Presbyterians?

The answer was, "No." Saturday for Seniors was born. Today, nearly 14 years and about 18,000 chicken legs later, we serve lunch to two groups of 60 on alternate Saturdays.

On Christmas Day, we combine the two groups for a traditional Christmas dinner cooked and served by a very special group of volunteers of friends and neighbors and just plain folks from the community who have made a tradition of spending part of their holiday with the Saturday Seniors.

Our teen-aged next door neighbor, Sam Domski, began to volunteer in the mid-70's when Christmas dinner was still being held at the Coffee Cup on 11th Street. Sam now lives in Huntingdon Valley with his wife and young child. But he has never missed a year and has already called to say that he, Andrea, and the baby, as well as his two sisters, Terry and Debbie, will be on hand again this year.

He is just one of many Christmas "regulars."

Saturday for Seniors is still free. We have no means test, no religious or racial restrictions, no membership fee, and no special rules. Except the Golden one. We have never advertised for members but ever since that first day, the word has spread and each Saturday the folks—black, white, Asian, poor, not poor, come from South and West Philadelphia, and from the Northeast—some on as many as three buses or trolleys.

Most of the volunteers are from Old Pine but many come from other churches and, on Christmas, synagogues. Many a friendship has begun in the OPCC kitchen as the volunteers pour juice or cocoa, open cans, break eggs, peel, scrape, and slice under the Argus-eyed supervision of Mrs. Daisy Parks, our professional cook and back-up "kitchen boss."

Support comes from Old Pine, St. Peter's, and Old Christ Church, as well as from foundations and corporations. Every year, Episcopal Academy sends a truckload of canned goods which is being sorted even as I write today. Some of their huge donation goes to Saturday for Seniors as well as to several neighborhood food cupboards.

If you are out for a stroll on Christmas morning or on any Saturday, drop by the Old Pine Community Center and take a look. Better still, come in and see the folks in the dining room catching friends up on the week's news, singing along with the piano, sometimes dancing. Then come to the kitchen where the volunteers are preparing the food, fulfilling the take-home snack bags, and getting to know each other a little better.

Maybe you would like to join in. For more information about Saturday for Seniors, call Dick or me at 922-9179. —Liz Ostrander

CALENDAR

(clip & save)

Wed., Dec. 11:
Old Pine Community Center, 4th and Lombard Sts.
Board Meeting, 7:30 pm

Wed., Jan. 22:
Pennsylvania Hospital—Preston Hall, 8th and Spruce Sts.
Board Meeting, 6:30 pm
Refreshments, 7:30 pm
General Membership Meeting, 8 pm

ZONING

1) 701-702 Pine Street, owned by Pennsylvania Hospital: Voted to approve vacant site to be developed as medical office building.

2) Penn Mutual Buildings, Walnut & 5th Streets: See Sun front page.

3) 3rd and Walnut Street Parking Lot: Property owned by Posel (Ritz Theaters). Approved proposal for lot, but requested more accurate plan showing location of trees, signs, etc.

4) Abbott's Square, 2nd Street: Requested more detail and descriptive drawings for proposed sidewalk cafe.

5) 317 American Street: Zoning Board of Adjustment denied variance, as recommended by Zoning Committee.

6) St. Mary's Convent: Approved Convent's request for parking permit, and sent letter to Zoning Board of Adjustment so stating.

Membership Changes

Some SHCA members may be startled about January 1st when they are billed for 1992. The reason is the membership used to be on an annual basis from the date you joined. This method of billing seemed to confuse most of us—the Directors voted to go on a calendar year membership effective January 1, 1992.

Anyone who has joined since October 1st will be credited as paid for 1992. Your 1992 membership confirmation will include a new card, the calendar of 1992 meetings, a list of opportunities to join various SHCA activities and an invitation to a special, Members Only, party to be held in the first quarter of the year. Several other Members Only events are being planned for the year, including a 2nd Annual Picnic and Games Party at Starr Garden near Labor Day.

Starting next month there will be a Sun listing of all new memberships and after the 1992 membership drive is complete (about 3/1/92) we plan to print the full membership listing here.

NAME TAG NONSENSE

To make it easier for all to identify and know SHCA board members the directors and officers will be wearing name tags at all General Membership Meetings starting January 22nd when we will be hosted by Pennsylvania Hospital to meet its new president, Clifford Eldredge.

To encourage all to use name tags (and to have some fun) we'll give prizes for the goofiest, best looking and weirdest home-made name tags. Maximum size 4" x 6". No other rules!

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HOLIDAY EVENTS CALENDAR*

Independence National Historical Park

12/15, Bill of Rights Celebration
12/12 & 1/1/92, Special reduced hours
Call 597-8974 for details.

Friends of Independence National Historical Park

12/31, Gala New Year's Party—Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Atop The Bellevue. Reservations: 597-7919

National Museum of American Jewish History

Through 12/30, Contemporary Artifacts...a celebration of the Jewish ritual tradition (Hanukkah emphasis)

12/25, noon to 5 PM, Being Jewish At Christmas...story tellers, folk musicians, magician

Old First Reformed Church (United Church of Christ)

12/13-30, Nativity scene at outdoor creche, live animals

12/15, 4 PM, Advent Vespers, special service of Advent music

12/18, 7:30 PM, Caroling in Old City (refreshments follow)

12/20, 11-7, Holiday Festival—gift items, food, crafts

12/21, 1-4 PM, Children's Christmas Workshop—stories, songs, crafts

12/24, 6:30 PM, Live Tableau at outdoor creche; 10 PM, Traditional Candlelight service

12/25, 11 AM, Worship with the homeless—dinner follows

12/31, 9:30 PM - 2 AM, New Year's Eve Gala to benefit homeless. Tickets required, call 922-4566 for information.

Old Pine Presbyterian Church

12/15, 10:30 AM, Camille Saint-Saens Christmas Oratorio as a feature of Advent Worship service. 5 PM, Jazz Vespers, "Father John" D'Amico & friends. 6:30 PM, Community caroling.

12/24, 6 PM, Christmas Eve dinner. 7:30 PM, Tra-

ditional Christmas Eve Family Service.

12/31, 11:15 PM - 12:15 AM, New Year's Eve Watch-nite Worship.

Old St. George Methodist Church

12/8, 15, 22-11 AM, Advent Worship services. 8 PM, Special Advent Communion services.

12/24, 7 PM, Christmas Eve Worship service.

Old St. Joseph's Church (Roman Catholic)

12/24, 5:30 PM, Vigil of Christmas. 8 PM, Matins. 8:30 PM, First Mass of Christmas.

12/31, 8:30 PM, Solemn Vigil. 10 PM, Concert. 11:15 PM, Reception.

Old St. Mary's Church (Roman Catholic)

12/24, Midnight Mass
12/25, 9 & 10:30 AM, Christmas Masses.

Holy Trinity Church (Roman Catholic)

12/24, 8 PM, Christmas Vigil & Mass.
12/25, noon, Christmas Mass.

Sheraton Society Hill Hotel

12/8, 5 PM, Hanukkah Candle & Christmas Tree Lighting with Choral music and refreshments.

Society Hill Synagogue

12/8, 11:30 AM, Hanukkah Party—games, food, ventriloquist and bazaar.

12/14, 8 PM, Annual Jackie-Pack concert, Cantor Alan Cohn.

St. Peter's Episcopal Church

12/22, 11 AM, Christmas Pageant. 5 PM, Service of Lessons and Carols.

12/24, 10:30 PM, Concert (men's and boy's choirs). 11 PM, Holy Eucharist.

12/25, 10 AM, Holy Eucharist with Hymns.

*partial listing, call non-listed churches or institutions for additional information

Preservation Update

THE VICTORY BUILDING—NOT LOST YET

The Victory Building is a vacant, important historic structure at the corner of 10th and Chestnut Street. It has been a decaying eyesore for many years, but there is new hope that it can be saved.

In September 1991 the building's owner, Samuel Rappaport, had requested a demolition permit from the Historic Commission. The Commission granted instead a two-month delay, during which time a "Blue Ribbon Committee" of city officials was organized to appraise the building. Meanwhile several preservation and architecture organizations coordinated their efforts to rescue the building and worked to investigate leads that could generate a viable use for it.

On November 12—at the end of the Blue Ribbon Committee's two-month review period and just one day before the Historical Commission was scheduled to reconsider the demolition permit—a letter from the president of Thomas Jefferson University said that the university would be willing to consider locating campus office space into a restored Victory Building, providing that rental costs would reflect the market place. This letter was shown to Mr. Kevin Donohoe, developer of the Curtis Building and the Omni Hotel, who immediately indicated his willingness to become the building's developer, subject to a feasibility study.

At the November 13 meeting of the Historical Commission many hours of discussion ensued, with a plea by Mr. Rappaport for a demolition permit and counter pleas by preservation and architecture advocacy groups for denial of the permit.

The demolition permit was denied. Mr. Donohoe is now working to determine if a plan can be made workable to develop the Victory Building with Jefferson University as the lead tenant.

Thanks to Jefferson and Mr. Donohoe—for being good neighbors.

HEAD HOUSE

The Head House Conservancy is working hard to overcome liability obstacles interfering with emergency repairs to the structure. But the group is pushing hard and hopes that repairs will begin before the year is out. Look for signs of life, particularly the erection of scaffolding within the next two weeks. First on the priority list of repairs is the replacement of the building's roof.

Recycle

Plastic Bottles!

On the first Saturday of every month, the Reading Terminal Market recycles plastic bottles. Bring your plastic bottles to the Arch Street sidewalk between the hours of 11 AM and 1:30 PM

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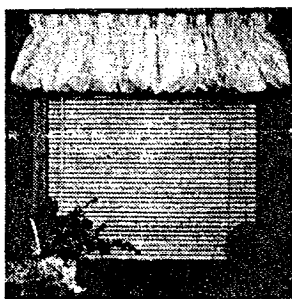
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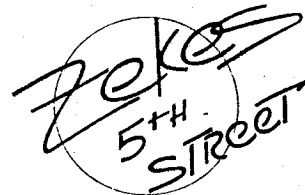
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