

SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

An independent newsletter published by the Society Hill Civic Association
in cooperation with the East Philadelphia Sun

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NOTES from SHCA President

Well! It's sixty degrees, sunny and cool with a nice NW breeze and humidity as I write this. It's exactly the kind of day we're hoping for on Saturday, October 3rd,

we'll have two days of Frank's Day and the SHCA Family Picnic in Starr Garden.

Frank's Day is the ceremonial unveiling of the Historical plaque honoring the 200th anniversary of the birth of composer/musician, Francis (Frank) Johnson near his home at 1st and Pine Streets. Mr. Johnson spent all his life within a few blocks of his birthplace, 536 Pine Street. He was a member of the United States Military Acad-

emy Band and numerous dignitaries will meet at 11 am Saturday morning for this celebration. McCall School will have an interesting exhibit of Frank Johnson memorabilia on display all week, and WFLN has been playing some of his music. Stop at McCall during school hours to see the display near the auditorium.

At noon, following the ceremonies, Society Hill families are invited to Starr Garden, at 6th and Lombard Streets, for our annual family picnic. We'll have hot dogs & sodas plus fun games for moms, dads and kids. Borrow a kid if you

don't have one, or bring a grandchild. It's all about having FUN! Sally Smith has been lining up this event.



The proposed partial fencing of the grounds at Society Hill Towers proved as controversial as anticipated at our last General Membership Meeting, and is expected to be on the next and future SHCA agendas. (The lead article explains why.) Meanwhile, a committee is being formed to try and find alternative solutions to the Towers' perceived security problems.

Consensus on the Route 42 bus stop routing came apart, as 2nd and Spruce Street neighbors opposed the stop moving to the NW corner. This, too, will appear again on the October agenda of our Board meeting.

To enable power cleaning of our neighborhood's streets on a regular basis, an organizing committee of the proposed South Street/Head House Special Services District recommends the possibility of instituting alternate-side-of-the-street parking regulations. George Scarpulla will be investigating the feasibility of this idea in Society Hill. Queen Village is also working on this, and we'll dialogue with them soon.

A Theater Party to benefit SHCA is being planned by Joy Lindy and Fluffy Palmer. Save the date: Thursday, November

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 presentation 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 best, support for his proposal, or, at the minimum, no opposition by the community association.

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.

In a two-to-one majority, the SHCA voted to "vigorously oppose" the fence, while also urging the establishment of a joint SHCA and Towers committee to find alternative ways to cope with their security problems.

A response given by Stanhope Brown, Esq., Chairman of the Penn's Landing Corporation and a South 2nd Street resident, summarized eloquently the reasons why Society Hill neighbors oppose the fence. (The meeting was videotaped for cable TV, and so we have transcribed his comments, edited slightly for length).

Here is what Mr. Brown said:

"Society Hill was created in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was recreated in the 20th century by some of the smartest city planning brains the world has ever known. Edmund Bacon, a visionary planner who helped create the design of modern Society Hill, was involved in the placement of the Towers, which, of course, was designed by the great architect I. M. Pei. One can't help but be struck by the extraordinary care and planning that went into the total concept of the Towers design.

"One of the primary principles in guiding its design was the concept of openness. The greenway system.

"If we build fences today, what can we expect will happen tomorrow? You can almost hear people say that we'd better close the greenways, because burglars and muggers can run us down and take over these green, open spaces.

Continued next page

5th. A romantic comedy, "Beau Jest," currently enjoying rave reviews in New York is the attraction at the Society Hill Playhouse. Package rates with an optional dinner at Montserrat Restaurant promises to be a delightful evening to benefit our community organization. Tickets available from either SHCA Board members or the the SHCA office. Call 629-1288 for more information and reservations.

Finally, THE THING at Penn's Landing is nearly complete. The tower (commemorating the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' 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 reprinting an article she wrote—probably in 1974—for our community association reminiscing about her early days in the neighborhood, and particularly "Christmas in Society Hill". Contributions in her memory may be made to the Head House Conservancy 302 South 2nd Street, Phila, PA 19106.

SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

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Continued from previous page
 My wife and I moved here 28 years ago when we fell in love with Society Hill Towers and with the park-like atmosphere around it. When we decided to move to a home, we were only a few feet away, just down the street. We envisioned a time when trees would grow and the community would become a beautiful urban setting. Our dream is a reality.

Openness! That's why Society Hill is so wonderful. The concept is that of an enclave mentality. It means we have been defeated! It means that we are advertising a world that crime has taken over. This will start the perception of Society Hill as we know it.

Mr. Siegel tells us that he has spoken to security people. What do security people do for a living? They think in terms of locks and handcuffs, guns and electronic security systems. But, we should be thinking about something much more important than simple barricade solutions. We should be thinking about urban design and aesthetics, about real values.

Two very strong negative messages will be delivered if a fence is installed. First, a big, black fence suggests a 'siege' mentality. And, more important, second, it sends a message—a disastrous psychological message—that we've closed the gates, that we're afraid and that crime will come over our community.

Who am I? I happen to live around here and I care about what 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 property values for the Towers would go down. And we also spoke to Denise Scott Brown, one of the most illustrious urban planners. She said that when people become concerned for their safety, they often resort to solutions—like putting up fences. But, she said there are many other ways to solve security problems. These ways require imagination and effort.

Let's talk about a few of the specifics:

I'm sensitive to this issue. I have a daughter and I walk around the neighborhood and the Towers 24 hours of the day, all the time. Have you ever watched the scene in a movie? Would a seven-foot fence stop an eight-foot young man from leaping across the fence if he had the ability to do just that?

Isn't the way to solve the problem of security in an enclave to bring more people, more traffic in the walkways! Instead of closing off the area, let's put more pathways down where more people can walk through. And maybe clean out the underbrush—so 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 in the daytime, as well.

"Regarding once-a-year events, such as the recent Tall Ships event. As chairman of the Penn's Landing Corporation, I am very aware of these events and am 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—I can assure you that 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.

"Mr. 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 amicable to us all. Perhaps we 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."

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 Sts.**
—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. L & I's 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.

THE SOCIETY HILL CIVIC ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Tear off and mail to:
 Society Hill Civic Association
 P.O. Box 3, Philadelphia, PA 19105
 Attention: Treasurer

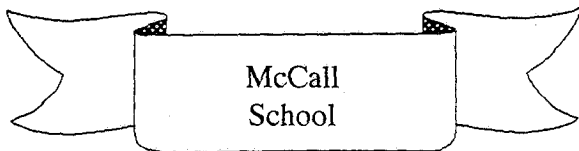
- New Member — Household \$25
- Membership Renewal — Business/Corporate \$50
- Corporate Sponsor \$100

Phone (day) _____ (eve) _____

I would be interested in working with the following committees:

- Membership _____ Liquor Control _____
- Neighborhood Maintenance _____ Town Watch _____
- Recycling _____ Reporter/Sun newspaper _____
- Zoning _____ Legislative _____
- Preservation _____ Other (please specify) _____

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PROJECT STREET TREES Keeping S.H. Green

Trees in our neighborhood are suffering from mistreatment and neglect. Though they can be made healthy and lush again, many are seriously endangered. Project Street Trees—a group effort dedicated to promote their health—is trying to the rescue. This voluntary SHCA project, initiated by Society Hill resident Jean Bodine, has organized nine teams of volunteer "census-takers" who have been collecting data pertaining to every sidewalk tree in the neighborhood—determining variety, health, and environmental conditions. When the vast amount of information is collected, the Project Street Trees committee will prepare plans on how best to care for each problem tree. The committee is being assisted by the Horticultural Society, whose knowledge and experience can help recommend varieties of trees to replace your dead or dying ones, and how best to replant empty

pits. A member of the committee will be available to discuss your property's trees when the survey is completed, and will offer advice in pruning and caring for it.

A brief reminder:

- Sidewalk trees are the responsibility of all property owners.
- Without proper care and maintenance the life expectancy of a city tree is only 7 to 10 years.
- Removing stumps and replanting is expensive for the individual homeowner. Project Street Trees will reduce that cost considerably.
- Trees help the environment, are aesthetically desirable, and increase the value of our properties.

This voluntary, completely cooperative venture needs your enthusiasm and expertise. Please be a part of the effort. If you can help the committee in any way (public relations, fundraising, volunteer tree workers and pruners, etc.) please call 629-1288.

Good trees make good neighbors! Don't you agree?

TREE WORK

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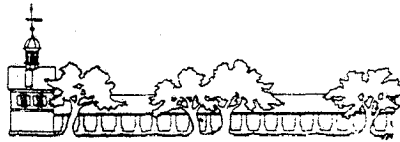
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HEAD HOUSE Effort Continues to Restore It

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 rebuilt 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 \$75,000.

However, the ancient, peeling paint under the market Shambles 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 overhauled.

But the Head House Conservancy is now scraping 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.

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Hours Daily By Appointment • New Patients Only • Good Thru Oct. 31.

SHCA Calendar

(clip & save)

- 7:30 pm
Old Pine Community Center
Board Meetings Open to All!
- Saturday, Oct. 24
(Raindate: Oct. 25)
3RD ANNUAL FALL FESTIVAL
AT THREE BEARS PARK
11 am to 4 pm
Proceeds used to maintain the park. No entrance fee.
- Sunday, Oct. 25
4TH ANNUAL NEIGHBORHOOD CONSORTIUM'S OPEN HOUSE OF MUSEUMS & TREASURES
1-4 pm Free Admission.
(sponsored by Friends of Independence Park)
Maps & info available at Park Visitor Center: 3rd & Chestnut Sts.
- Saturday, Oct. 31
HALLOWEEN FESTIVAL AT STARR GARDEN
Costume Parade, Entertainment, Food!
600 Lombard St. 1-4 pm
- Thursday, Nov. 5
SHCA THEATER PARTY BENEFIT
Society Hill Playhouse
"Beau Jest"
Call 629-1288 for more info
- Saturday, Oct. 3
FRANK JOHNSON'S PLACE—CELEBRATION & DEDICATION
11 am, 5th & Pine Sts.
** followed by **
SHCA'S ANNUAL FALL PICNIC
AT STARR GARDEN
600 Lombard St., noon
(Both events feature the West Point Band!)
- Saturday & Sunday Oct. 3-4
CRAFTS FAIR
Head House Square
Sat: noon-12 pm; Sun: noon-6pm
Free Children's workshop
Sunday from 1-3 pm
- Saturday, Oct. 17
ST. PETER'S SCHOOL HARVEST FESTIVAL
at historic Head House Square
11 am - 4 pm
- Wednesday, Oct. 21
SHCA BOARD MEETING