

# SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

*A newsletter of the Society Hill Civic Association*

VOL. 4, No. 7  
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## Notes from SHCA President

DICK OSTRANDER

**B**ack to the real world! Summer vacation is mostly a memory. The calendar is filling rapidly with meetings and fall events.

This issue of The Reporter starts a new phase for the publication. The eight-page format will be printed every other month. We will mail it to all our members and distribute about 2,500 copies throughout the neighborhood. We need volunteers on both the editorial and advertising end. Please support our advertisers.

The General Membership will meet at Pennsylvania Hospital's Preston Auditorium on Wednesday, September 21, at 7:00. Refreshments will be served. Hospital president Cliff Eldredge will address us, present his plans and take questions. Anne Marie Descerafino of the National Park Service will update us on the development of the new general management for Independence Historic Park. Susan Gross from the Valley Forge Music Fair will talk about the October reopening of the NewMarket cabaret theatre and respond to your questions. Anne Hagele will tell us a little about the city's oldest and largest Senior Center at Broad and Lombard, which she directs.

Board meetings are the third Wednesday of every month at 7:30 at the Old Pine Community Center. They are open to members.

Special kudos to all those who planted and watered all the flowers which seemed to exceed past years. Sixty new trees went in as part of Project Street Trees. You'll hear about that on the 21st, too. Wear a name tag that expresses the real you. We'll have a prize or two. Ciao!

### The Site at Third and Lombard Streets

## “Deja Vu All Over Again”

*By Bernice Hamel and Mary Sturdivant*

**W**ith less than 24 hours notice, over 120 neighbors packed the Old Pine Community Center on a hot August 24 evening. Chaired by the Zoning Committee of Queen Village Neighbors Association, the meeting was called to give a group of developers the opportunity to present preliminary development plans for the 1.5 acre site on the southeast corner of 3rd and Lombard Streets.

The community opposed construction of a parking lot on that undeveloped plot of land just a few short years ago. The site was the scene of a bitter and protracted legal battle between its former owner, Gloria Levin, and the community, galvanizing many neighbors into action. Eventually the land was zoned for residential use only, R-10-B. The existing parking lot, however, was grandfathered into the final legislation, Bill # 430, dated May 1989.

The site is currently owned by a limited partnership consisting of Bernard Cohen, Elliot Davis, Marvin Katz, and Sam Rappaport. Sam Rappaport, who died just last week, was the land and property speculator who almost single-handedly contributed to a systematic loss of some of Philadelphia's most important Center City and historic buildings. It is not known what, if any, effect his death will have on the sale of this site.

At the August 24 meeting, Jerry Batoff, the project's counsel, tried to present very primitive plans for development of the site. He claimed to be unaware of its current zoning — although he said his group had made a six-month study about the viability of retail development for it. According to this early plan, the site would likely consist of retail shops — totalling 53,000 square feet — in one- and two-story buildings,

whose anchor tenant would be a natural foods supermarket from a national chain, called Whole Foods. Parking for the shops could accommodate 100 cars on Lombard Street, less than now available.

“How much of the site would be building and how much open space?” he was asked. He could not say.

Queen Village and Society Hill residents joined together vehemently objecting to construction of this retail space — primarily because the site is just one block from South Street, which already has vacant space and activity that impacts on the neighborhood. Neighbors objected to the developer's commercial proposal for a host of reasons, including the following:

1. It would bring heavy delivery trucks into the neighborhood, which would undermine the historic buildings and streets.
2. It would attract additional shoppers from outside the area, creating additional traffic in what is already a congested area — across from a school and playground at St. Peter's.
3. Retail activity would be determined ultimately by the reality of the marketplace — if shops go vacant, economics would dictate that they be filled by any willing and available tenants. It would be impossible to exclude every possible undesirable commercial use for the future, since these would have to be specified in the covenant.
4. Nearby NewMarket, which is zoned commercial, sits empty and waiting for commercial development.
5. The neighborhood can support only so many food markets, as a plethora would undercut the success of those already here: Chef's Market on South Street; SuperFresh on 5th Street; Essene, a su-

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# Historic Preservation Committee

by Bernice Hamel, Chair

Activities of the Historic Preservation Committee and its three subcommittees have slowed down a bit over the summer, but look for another round of enthusiastic, pro-active work — on several fronts — in the coming months.

We are delighted to report that SHCA's Historic Preservation group has been invited to hold future meetings in the lovely Cincinnati Room of the Physick House. This invitation has come from Donna Thomas, who is president of the Physick House Committee of the Landmarks Society. Barbara Epstein, the new site manager of the Physick House, also welcomes us to hold our meetings in this elegant Federal mansion in our community (321 S. 4th Street).

### Committee Members:

Please note the following two upcoming meetings at the Physick House to kick-off the fall season:

On Tuesday, September 20, at 7:30 p.m., the Oversight Subcommittee will meet to evaluate and review its pilot program designed to stabilize and improve the appearance of our neighborhood. Bob Butera, director of the Pennsylvania Convention Center and the person who inspired the Oversight program, is expected to add his thoughts to the proceedings. George Scarpulla, Oversight co-Chair, urges all program volunteers to attend this important meeting. Any questions? Call him at 925-3003.

A full agenda is expected for the next meeting of the Historic Preservation Committee, scheduled for Tuesday, October 4, 7:30 p.m. Topics of concern will range from the "Man Full of Trouble Museum" (how our Political Advocacy Subcommit-

tee tried, but nonetheless lost the museum to the University of Pennsylvania as a scholar's residence); to an update of the Franklin Lamps (this time our work was more successful—the lamps will be modernized yet preserved in appearance!) If you need more information prior to the meeting, please do not call the Physick House. Call Bernice Hamel, committee chair, at 925-4363.



## Unightly Cable TV Connections

The Historic Preservation Committee of the Society Hill Civic Association is taking steps to eliminate the many unightly cable TV connections on building facades in the our area.

Recent discussions with the Greater Media Cable Quality Control inspection staff has resulted in a planned cooperative program to correct the current unacceptable conditions.

A city ordinance prohibits placing utility wires of any kind on the outside of buildings in Society Hill. That includes visible cable TV installations. Arrangements have been made for a Greater Media/SHCA cooperative program which is expected to preclude the need to involve city officials to correct the present unlawful conditions.

Volunteers of the SHCA Preservation Committee surveyed the area to update a list compiled a few years ago which revealed more than 160 TV cables illegally strung on building facades and hidden behind drainpipes. Fifty-four sites have been corrected.

Residents are requested to cooperate with the technicians who will be making the changes. Call Dominic D'Aurizio at 952-4934 to arrange appointments. Your neighborhood Historic Preservation Committee is taking a keen interest in this program to provide another factor which will help lead to city certification for historic designation of Society Hill.

## National Night Out Brings Out Cohen and Curtis

The Town Watch National Night Out committee boarded a Philadelphia tourist trolley to cruise Society Hill and serenade neighbors with the plaintive notes from Rufus Harley's bagpipe. The Society Hill Sheraton hosted the meeting on Tuesday, August 2, and provided the refreshments. About fifty neighbors attended.

David Cohen, representing City Hall, got sidetracked by questions from the audience and addressed other issues like the installation of the very expensive self-cleaning toilets for the South Street area and the Columbus Blvd. footbridge.

Representative Curtis Thomas, who shares this area with Marie Lederer, stayed focused on crime and wants a special meeting of the legislature this fall to discuss only this topic. His main goal is to educate his fellow legislators to the unique problems posed by some weapons to an urban environment as opposed to the rural and "hunters' playground" counties. About five crimes involving knives or guns occur on Society Hill streets every month.

Captain Joseph O'Donnell of the Sixth Police District and Lt. Robert McCarthy of the Third at the South Street mini station mentioned how much more effective the bike patrols are than cruisers. The cyclist cops can sneak up on perpetrators without being spied by spotters more easily than can the patrol cars. Neighbors voiced concerns about the numbers of officers assigned to this area as being inadequate, but the statistics available did not warrant more for this low crime area.

Dick Ostrander addressed the group in his role of public safety director for the South Street Head House District. He touted the success of the bike patrols and the mini-station. Cohen had also stressed that community policing in Philadelphia has been used as a model throughout the country. The audience felt coverage on South Street was good, but not adequate for the spillover onto the side streets in the residential areas.

Some isolated incidents of neighbors feeling intimidated by the size of the crowds for Greek Week were also brought up. One estimate put the crowds on South Street at 70,000. Cohen volunteered that the city is anxious to work with the organizers to keep problems to a minimum.

Everyone got a whistle and went home. They seemed to feel safe walking.

### SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

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# Deja Vu All Over Again

Continued from page 1

perior natural food store at 4th and Bainbridge Streets, whose existence the developers claim they did not know about at the time of the meeting. This raised concerns about the reliability of their 6-month-long marketing research.

- 6. Dumpsters at commercial sites are always sources of contention for the residents.
- 7. Neighbors fought hard and long for the residential zoning, and they want this to be maintained. As to the developer's response that we are now living with an unattractive parking lot in our midst, neighbors expressed comfort with "living with the devil they know rather than

living with the devil that they don't know."

When the developer asked, "What would make you happy?" many people simply said, "Build houses." In fact, one person promised that he would be the first to buy one if townhouses were to be built.

Although SHCA President Dick Ostrander had distributed fliers announcing the meeting only to nearby neighbors of 3rd and Lombard Streets, the room was filled about equally with Society Hill and Queen Village residents. When word got out about the potential for commercial encroachment of our unique historical residential community, Society Hill neigh-

bors came out of their summer slumber to oppose it.

Officially representing SHCA at the meeting was Lorna Katz Lawson, architect and co-chair with George Compton of SHCA's Zoning Committee. In zoning matters, the position of the neighbors most immediately affected by the change — if a consensus is reached — is supported. The vote taken at the end of this heated meeting was unanimous: Those in attendance were opposed to the proposal of any commercial development of the site.

The developers promised to return. As did the neighbors. So stay tuned.

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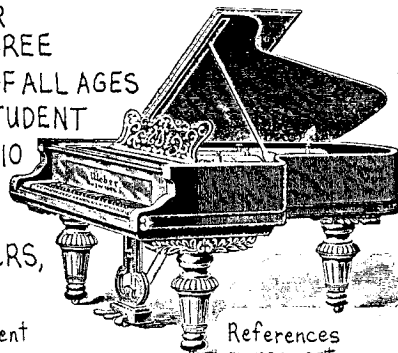
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References on request

## SHCA Calendar

Tuesday, Sept. 20  
Physick House  
321 S. 4th St.  
7:30 PM

Meeting: Oversight Subcommittee, Historic Preservation Committee

Wednesday, Sept. 21  
Pennsylvania Hospital  
8th & Spruce Sts.  
7:00 PM Refreshments  
7:30 PM General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, Oct. 4  
Physick House  
321 S. 4th St.  
7:30 PM  
Meeting: Historic Preservation Committee



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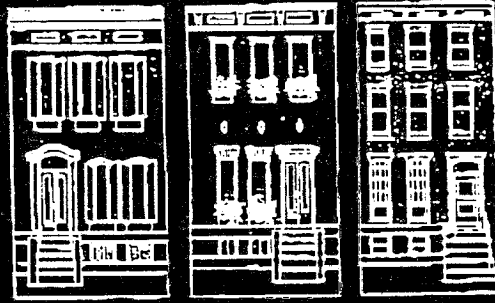
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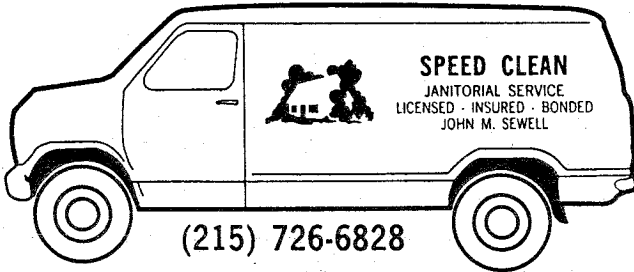


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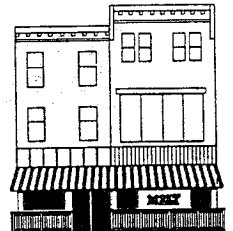
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## Profile of the Directors

Part of a Continuing Series

### Helen-Ann Comstock

For the past several years, Helen-Ann Comstock has represented the residents of Independence Place on the Board of the Society Hill Civic Association.

A native Philadelphian, Helen-Ann Souder was born at Pennsylvania Hospital, graduated from Germantown High School and Gettysburg College, then enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania in political science. But by then, she had met the tall and handsome Craig Comstock at a dance at the Philadelphia Cricket Club and was more interested in seeing him at Cornell than pursuing a post-graduate degree.

#### Clark & Dilworth

After finishing courses at the Levitan Business School so she could type, Helen-Ann joined the Clark administration as administrative assistant to the ceremonial secretary. Soon she was the ceremonial secretary in Richardson Dilworth's administration. Dilworth as mayor was a prime mover in the redevelopment of Society Hill. Highlights from those years include dinners for the late Princess Grace of Monaco and the former president of Indonesia.

After her marriage, Helen-Ann and her naval husband moved to Newport, Rhode Island, and moved into an apartment on the fabled Ocean Drive. After trips to Europe, the next assignment was Monterey, California. "I was having fun, being a naval wife, a Girl Scout leader who had never been camping, a volunteer with the visiting nurse association, and playing bridge." A pattern for travel, volunteerism, and having fun was set.

When Craig decided to get his Ph.D. in mathematics from Harvard, Helen-Ann moved with him to Cambridge. Even with two babies, she continued volunteering. She became president of the Harvard Dames, entertained, had more fun with a husband who loved to socialize.

#### University days

After graduation, Craig taught at Penn State from 1964 to 1968, and Helen-Ann became president of the Faculty Wives' Club. Next was the University of Michigan, but just before she was to be inducted as president of their Faculty Wives' Club, Craig grabbed a chance to go back to California at the Naval Post Graduate School. Nestling on Pebble Beach, Helen-Ann learned a new, more casual way to entertain, almost living on the patio room. Guests and students arrived from around the world. She became a docent and board member at the Monterey Museum of Art, and Craig sat on the board of the Pacific Grove Art Center. It was "their art years." Their third child arrived.

Then in 1970, tragedy struck. The tall, good looking and incredibly bright man who had taken her breath away in his Navy whites was diagnosed with Pict's disease. There was little known and no way to prepare for his gradual descent into dementia. Because so little was known, Helen-Ann and the children almost blithely set off with Craig to Switzerland for him to perform some research. But it was soon apparent that this was too much.

*Continued on the following page*



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## Helen-Ann Comstock

*Continued*

### Rehabilitation program

Helen-Ann read everything she could and devised her own rehabilitation program. With this steadily deteriorating disorder, rehab was not reality. After three years, Helen-Ann felt she had exhausted her friends and options. She sold the home in Pebble Beach and brought her husband back to this area, where most of his naval family and hers had settled. Craig died in 1984.

Life was very different for the family than what they had anticipated because of Craig's illness. Today, Doug attends the Darden Business School at the University of Virginia, having graduated from his father's alma mater. Earl, who graduated from the University of California at Santa

Barbara, works for an Alaskan senator in Washington, D.C. Beth, who graduated from Oberlin, works for the William Morris agency in Beverly Hills. Helen-Ann put all the skills developed as president of the various wives' clubs to good use and is Executive Director of the Alzheimer's Association of Greater Philadelphia, which serves the five-county area.

She gets away on weekends to a family cottage on an old camp meeting ground in Perkasio, Bucks County. She is still an avid reader, does not travel as much as she would like, but she will be presenting a paper in Scotland later this month at an Alzheimer's Disease conference.

### Memory Walk

Besides being on the boards at Perkasio and Society Hill, Helen-Ann's time is spent raising funds for the Alzheimer's Associa-

tion. Their biggest event is coming up on Sunday, October 2, at Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park at 8:30 a.m. This is the Memory Walk, where Philadelphia led the country two out of three years and wants to be number one again. Claude Lewis, Julie King, and Orien Reid work hard to make this fun with T-shirts, food, entertainment, goody bags, prizes, a picnic and concert. It is a 5K walk and fun run. For more information, call 568-6430.

Helen-Ann with her willowy height and salt-and-pepper closely cropped curly hair conveys a sense of purpose and professionalism. When her husband's illness robbed her and her children of him years before his death, you sense she accepted it, felt the loss keenly, did what she could, and kept trying to move forward. Her attitude seems to say, "This is what you do."

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