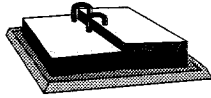




# SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

Newsletter of the Society Hill Civic Association  
Issued March 10, 1996

## Mark Your Calendars!



**Wednesday, March 20, 7:30 PM**  
SHCA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING  
"Get To Know Your New Councilman" Night  
Old Pine Community Center  
4th & Lombard Streets  
Guest: Councilman Frank DiCicco  
6:30 Board Meeting (All members welcome)  
7:00 Refreshments  
7:30 Meeting begins

**Sunday, March 24**  
RAISING DOUGH FOR NEIGHBORS DAY  
Baker Street Artisan Breads  
326 S. 5th Street (across from SuperFresh)  
Free tours, at 1 PM & 2 PM  
See article on page 4.

**Wednesday, April 17 at 7:30 PM**  
BOARD MEETING (ALL MEMBERS WELCOME)  
Old Pine Community Center

**Saturday, May 4**  
SPRING CLEAN UP DAY!  
Watch for announcements

### OTHER COMMUNITY EVENTS

**Tuesdays, March 12 & March 19**  
SEMINARS AT PHYSICK HOUSE  
321 S. 4th Street, 7 PM  
See page 8 for speakers & topics  
For more info: 925-2251

**Tuesdays, April 9 & April 23**  
SEMINARS AT POWEL HOUSE  
244 S. 3rd Street, 7 PM  
See page 8 for speakers & topics  
For more info: 925-2251

**Wednesday, April 24**  
GALA CELEBRATION FOR  
PHILADELPHIA OPEN HOUSE  
Independence Seaport Museum  
See page 3  
For more info: 928-1188

**Thursday, April 25 - May 29**  
PHILADELPHIA OPEN HOUSE  
30 Tours to benefit Independence Park  
See page 3  
For more info: 928-1188

**Sunday, May 5**  
SOCIETY HILL HOUSE & GARDENS TOUR  
See page 3  
For more info: 928-1188

## Message from the President

### Quality of Life Issues

With this endless and unforgettable winter, we can all look forward to spring, when our street trees and flowers begin to bloom and Society Hill is at its loveliest. But before we congratulate ourselves too much about surviving the historical Blizzard of '96 which was followed by floods (almost everything but locusts!), we should consider some things that definitely need our attention.

I refer to what I call "quality of life" issues. Individually, they may seem little; but combined they can have a drastic effect on how we feel about where we live. I have in mind these, among others: littering, graffiti, illegal parking on streets and sidewalks, excessive noise, panhandling, homeless individuals sleeping on grates, doorsteps, etc.; "soiling" of the neighborhood by dogs (and even by humans), in addition to the more serious matters of car thefts, thefts from cars, and occasional armed robberies (muggings).

There are ample laws to prevent these activities, but not ample enforcement of those laws. Too often, the police say, they are too busy with more serious crimes in other parts of the 6th District to be able to deal with these "minor" issues. Minor they may be when compared with murder, arson, rape, and the drug trade. But combined they become major as they injure the quality of a residential neighborhood. If we were a separate municipality, with a police force dedicated to our needs alone, these issues would be considered "major," and would be dealt with accordingly. But we are not an island. We are part of Philadelphia. The police are doing the best they can, and I suggest that we consider making more of an effort ourselves to stamp out these nuisances.

How shall we do that? I solicit your suggestions and efforts. A more active Town Watch might reduce the more serious crimes. More careful compliance by all will help. Consistently reporting to the police all irregularities and suspicious persons would also help. For example, did you know that there is a special, graffiti squad in each police district? Report graffiti damage as soon as you are aware of it to Edward Salamon and Stan Sheppard of District 6 at 686-3095.

Explaining the law, and the need for it, to offending neighbors might also yield some results. We might even take a tip from the scouts' two good deeds per day. How would our neighborhood look if everyone picked up at least two pieces of litter each day?

These, however, are just one person's musings. We ask for *your* ideas—both as to what are our problems and how we might deal with them. Send your comments to THE REPORTER or to the Civic Association office. Thanks in advance.

• • •

*I am pleased to announce that the General Membership Meeting on Wednesday, March 20, 1996, will feature our new Councilman, Frank DiCicco, and members of his staff in a "Get to know Our New Councilman" night. Mark your calendars.*

—MEL BUCKMAN

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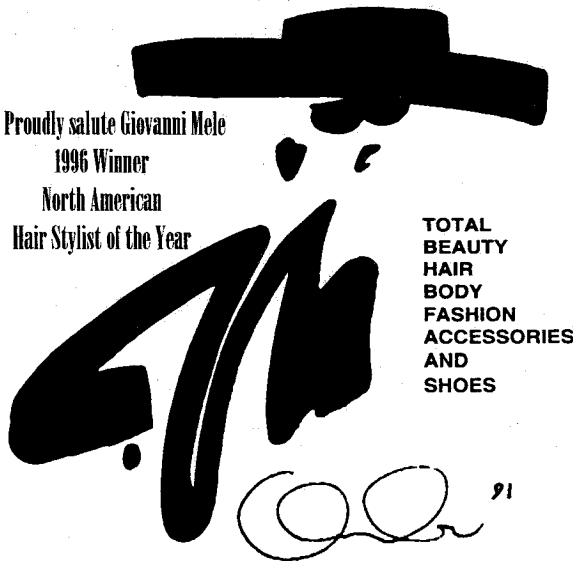
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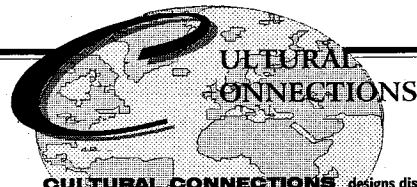
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# Bulletin Board

## OOOPS! CORRECTION

In the January issue we made a major and embarrassing error by listing 1996 SHCA Membership dues for Households as \$25 and Businesses & Organizations as \$50. We apologize, but due to increasing costs the Board voted to increase annual dues for Household Memberships to \$30 and Business & Organizations memberships to \$60. Sorry for the confusion. See the Membership Coupon on page 10. If you already mailed us a check for \$25 or \$50, we thank you and are grateful for your membership. But we would be delighted if you'd consider sending us the difference.



## ANOTHER CORRECTION

In the previous issue we printed SHCA Neighborhood Action Phone Numbers for future reference. It listed Joseph Vignola as our Councilman instead of indicating and welcoming our new District Councilman, Mr. Frank DiCicco, who was elected to office last November.

Mr. DiCicco's number is 686-3458, and he promises to be a very responsive representative for our community. Already he has made front-page headlines for promoting a bold new weapon in the fight against graffiti. He has proposed a bill to ban the retail sale of spray paint and indelible markers because he believes these contribute heavily to the graffiti problem which has a debilitating effect on neighborhoods.

Councilman DiCicco will be our principal speaker at the March 21 General Membership Meeting—Old Pine Community Center, 7:30 PM.

### SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

Society Hill Civic Association  
P.O. Box 3, Philadelphia, PA 19105  
(215) 629-1288

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Deadline for May issue: April 15  
Mail contributions to above address  
or Fax to (215) 925-0877  
or E-mail to: berniehamel@eworld.com

## LOCAL PINOCCHLE PLAYERS WANTED

Barbara Grabias of Lawrence Court wants to form a pinochle group which would meet in the evenings on a regular basis, perhaps weekly, bimonthly or monthly — to be decided by group members.

Barbara, who recently moved to the city, is looking for like-minded neighbors who enjoy the game as much as she does. To establish the "rules" of the new group, she suggests first meeting together at a neighborhood coffee shop or cafe. A minimum of four players are needed, but a desirable number would be eight. Please call Barbara at 923-3411 if you are interested, and then you can meet and begin shuffling the cards!



## 18TH ANNUAL HOMES & GARDENS TOURS

In May, Society Hill homes and gardens, as well as other wonderful residences throughout the metropolitan region will be on tour for the benefit of Independence National Historical Park.

PHILADELPHIA OPEN HOUSE is a nationally known series of tours that offers intimate glimpses into private and public spaces featuring art, architecture, gardens and interior design. The series of 30 different tours (bus, boat, guided and self-guiding walking tours) begins Thursday, April 25 through May 19. Society Hill's tour is on Sunday, May 5.

Several innovative new tours include:

*The Gilded Age* — visit private clubs and homes of Philadelphia's robber barons; *Historic Riverton*, a passage back in time to Victorian riverside homes, with a cruise along the Delaware; and *Fabulous Furness on the Main Line* — Frank Furness' incredible architecture, with brunch and lecture at the Merion Cricket Club.

Many popular bus trips, such as *The Main Line*, *Chestnut Hill*, and *Schuylkill River Cruises* sell out early — so reserve as soon as possible or you'll be disappointed.

The Gala Opening Celebration for PHILADELPHIA OPEN HOUSE will be held Wednesday night, April 24, at the new Independence Seaport Museum, here at Penn's Landing. This year's gala is being co-chaired by Society Hill residents Lisa Eizen, Becky Stoloff and Nula Thanhauser. They promise a very exciting party with interactive museum exhibits and a fascinating, hands-on, boat-building workshop.

The Opening Gala (\$75 per person) will directly benefit The Friends of Independence Park, which now more than ever — due to the Congressional budget situation — needs community support to assist the Park's programs.

For a descriptive brochure of tours or for an invitation to a fun-filled gala, call The Friends at 925-1188.

## Historic Preservation Committee: Report of January meeting

Many attendees of SHCA's last General Membership Meeting at the Sheraton stayed for our "rump crisis session" to hear the current problems associated with becoming a city-certified historic district. Joining us were Dr. Richard Tyler, director of the Philadelphia Historic Commission and his deputy, Randall Baron, as well as Milton Marks, executive director of the Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia (a nonprofit organization that is acting as partner to the city's six nominated historic districts).

At this problem-solving session we learned that the Historic Commission is short of clerical staff, which means that professional personnel must spend time on tedious tasks, such as bringing old inventory up-to-date, matching photographs with inventory, and even answering phones.

This is where we offered to help. But before the Commission can accept our corps of volunteers, it must first conclude the designation process of the Rittenhouse-Fitler Square district, which is now in its final stage of becoming an "official" city historic district. Mr. Baron reports that with assistance from "Rit-Fit" volunteers, the process is moving along slowly but surely. Eventually the job will get completed and Society Hill will take center stage. Our committee is now waiting on the Historic Commission for a promised list of specific tasks required to get our nomination off the ground. Once these tasks are identified, we can begin assigning jobs to our volunteers.

For more information about how our community can benefit by historic designation or about the procedures involved in becoming a city-certified district, please call the SHCA office at 629-1288 and request the free booklet *Philadelphia's Historic Districts*. We're ready to begin working. Are you?

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## Raising Dough for Neighbors Day

**B**aker Street Artisan Breads, the award-winning bakery at 316 S. 5th Street, Society Hill, has designated Sunday, March 24, "A Day of Raising Dough for Neighbors" and will donate proceeds from its day's bread sales (up to \$1,000!) to the Society Hill Civic Association, announced Baker Street co-owners Tom and Tim Ivory. "We deeply appreciate all of the support the community has given us since we opened, and this is one way of saying thank you," said the Ivories.

Named "One of America's Best Bread Shops" by *Bon Appetit* magazine and three-time "Best-of-Philly" award-winner by *Philadelphia Magazine*, Baker Street features at least 25 varieties of hand-crafted traditional rustic breads, offering a wide variety of heart-healthy loaves made without preservatives, added fats, oils or sugars.

On March 24, officers of the Society Hill Civic Association and members of the Board and committees will be at Baker Street to greet you, talk with you about current projects and to hear your concerns about the neighborhood. Membership material will be available and people who join the Association on that day will receive a free brochure about Society Hill.

In addition, the Civic Association is sponsoring two free tours of Society Hill, at 1:00 PM and 2:00 PM, that begin at the bakery. The first tour, filled with history and stories, will be led by Ed Mauger; the second tour, highlighting distinctive architecture, will be led by Dan Heyden. Everyone is welcome. So come, buy bread, greet your neighbors, get involved and enjoy a pleasant Sunday in Society Hill!

Baker Street's hours: Sun. 7AM-5PM. Mon.-Sat., 7AM-7PM.

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## Professor Hershberg Gets Us Thinking About Cities, Regions & Global Economy

In a spellbinding presentation before a packed room of over 150 SHCA members at the Society Hill Sheraton on January 17, Professor Theodore Hershberg, of the University of Pennsylvania, painted an essentially pessimistic view of the trends facing most American cities, including our own, as we approach the next millennium.

A professor of Public Policy and History and Director of the Center for Greater Philadelphia, Hershberg has been intimately involved in promoting regional cooperation among government and the private sector, particularly here in greater Philadelphia. Professor Hershberg's provocative comments dealt with the impact of the global economy on our region's (or any region's) entire infrastructure, including our labor force, schools, transportation and the environment.

Essentially, he argued that if we do not stay competitive on all fronts—beginning with educating the labor force (which means improving all our city and suburban schools) we will not remain competitive with other regions (and countries) who will prevail. We are already way behind, he said.

For example, the academic standards of our very best suburban schools are substantially below ordinary schools in most European countries and Japan. And this does not take into account the inferiority of most city public schools! So he asked, where will an informed, 21st century workforce come from? If we don't have an educated workforce, our region and country will lag way behind in the global economy. It's a vicious circle, he argued.

Hershberg said that about three-quarters of suburban residents understand the interdependence of the "regional economy" of the core city/suburb. But the remaining 25% try to keep their enclaves separate from the city in an idealized kind of utopia, causing flight from the city in ever increasing concentric rings.

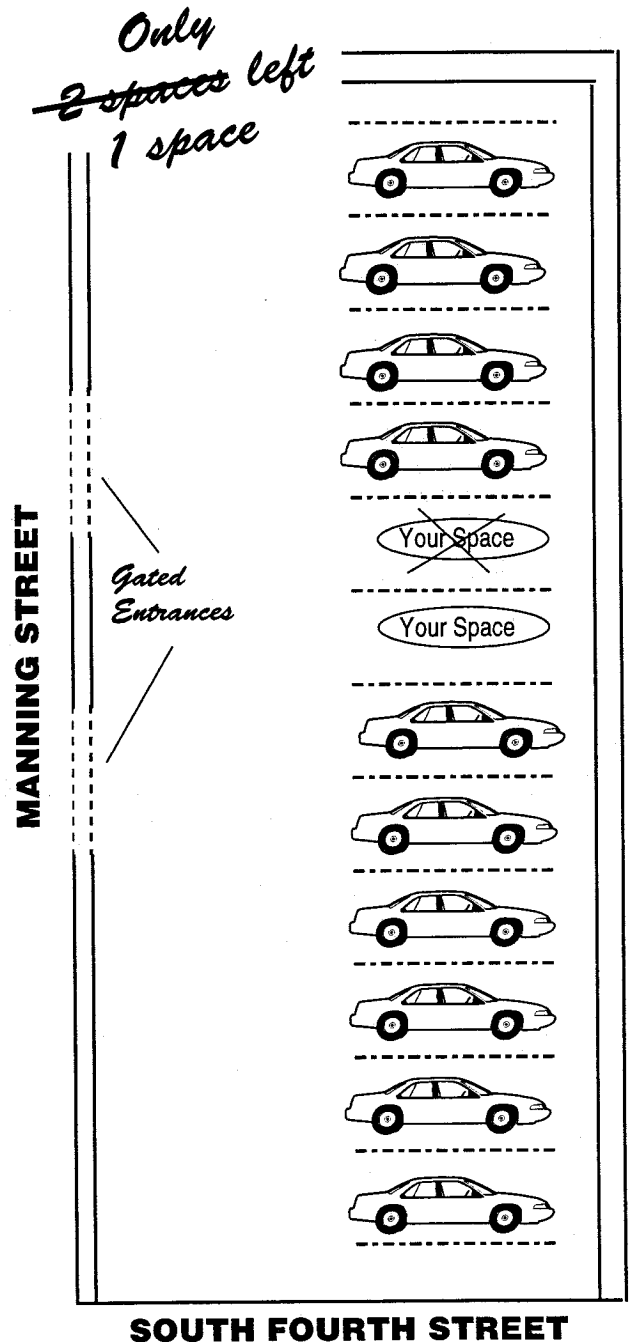
As suburban communities develop farther away from city centers, communities must keep reinventing themselves. (Witness the new and growing developments outside King of Prussia, already an outer suburban ring!) This is very destructive, according to Hershberg, since these communities develop redundancies throughout, as they must replicate existing infrastructure—roads, schools, hospitals, etc. with new ones. This is also wasteful and harmful to the natural environment.

Meanwhile the core city, with all its cultural resources and built-in infrastructure, goes hurting. Professor Hershberg said that, ironically, many close-in suburbs now suffer dramatically from lack of quality infrastructure more than do inner cities—because older, close-in suburbs never developed any cultural resources, as they depended on the riches of the nearby city's core.

Hershberg fielded many questions relating to Philadelphia and our own little corner of the world, Society Hill. He probably surprised many of us when he said he did not necessarily oppose riverboat gambling here in Philadelphia. In any case, he left us champing at the bit for more.

*If this summary of our recent SHCA forum has whetted your appetite, perhaps you will join us at our next SHCA meeting (March 20) to meet our new Councilman Frank DiCicco, who is already making headlines with his controversial anti-graffiti campaign. For more about him, see the Bulletin Board "Correction" page 3.*

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# Welcome New Civic Association Members

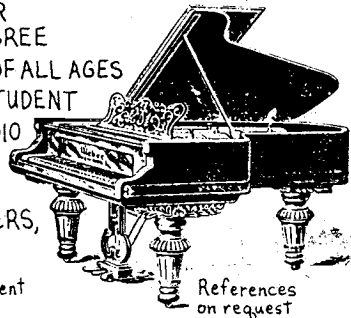
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Valerie Brown  
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Gordon & Sheridan Carr  
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Margret Dickerson  
Al & Joanne DiSanto  
Jeannette Dumas & Ed Winter  
Zorida Fiol-Silva, M.D. &  
Joseph L. Sparr, M.D.  
Robert Florentine  
Richard Gibson  
Robert J. Gill, M.D.  
Eugene & Caroline Gladstone  
Barbara Grabias  
Mary G. Gregg  
Mary Jo Harris  
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Peter Hiler  
Peter Jason  
Rick & Roz Jay  
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Robin Komita & Mario Moussa  
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Compiled on February 20, 1996

## An Open Letter To All Our Neighbors Who Have Not Yet Joined the Civic Association

We ask all who have not joined the Civic Association for 1996 to do so now, and send in your membership application and dues promptly.

We need your support to give us the resources to keep our neighborhood the premium place that it is. Your dues finance programs that benefit you in very tangible ways:

- Police on bike patrol, with bikes and uniforms paid for by the Association.
- Extra trash pickups at your corner.
- New trees.
- Rescue and rehabilitation of our unique Franklin Lamps which City Hall would have replaced with cheap, modern street lights.
- Attention to zoning laws, development problems, and liquor control.

The list goes on and on. These benefits come not only from dues but also from the efforts of many of your neighbors who consistently conceive methods to maintain and improve our community. It's a Sisyphean job, but hey, somebody's got to do it!

Not only do we talk about what needs to be done — we take the initiative ourselves (e.g., our twice-yearly Clean-Up Days), by communicating with and lobbying our public officials (e.g., working with the Historical Commission to become a city-certified historic district), by volunteering our skills and devoting hours of our time attending meetings and hearings, by staying current and keeping you informed on all things great and small that impact our neighborhood.

If you disagree with an Association position or if you take issue with an editorial in *The Reporter*—which is wholly the product of unpaid professional volunteers—your objections should not deter you from joining the organization. To paraphrase Lincoln, we cannot please all of the people all of the time. We have almost 600 households in our membership and we do not always speak with a single voice. But we do welcome your opinions and contributions to this newsletter. After all, you chose to live in Society Hill because of its beauty, history and gentility—the result of years of hard work, diligence and love—and you are a part of it!

In unity there is strength. Becoming an active SHCA member is the surest way to preserve and enhance your investment in **your** community for now and for many years to come. Let us know how you would like to help. Please clip the membership form (on page 10) and enclose your check to the SHCA today.

MATT DEJULIO & MARY STURDIVANT, Membership Co-Chairs  
MEL BUCKMAN, President  
BERNICE HAMEL, Vice-President & Editor



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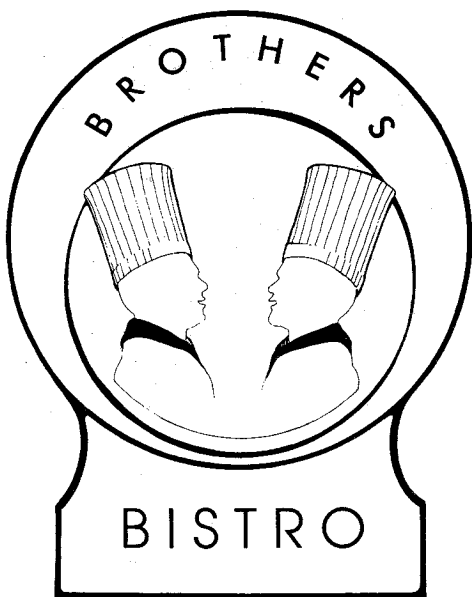
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## **Music, Medicine, The Mayor, & Mass Hysteria Life in the Premier City from 1770-1830**

Landmarks Society Tours, a program of The Landmarks Society, will present a four-part seminar called, "Music, Medicine, The Mayor, & Mass Hysteria." The programs will take place on four alternate Tuesday evenings — March 12 and March 19 at the Physick House (321 S. 4th Street) and April 9 and April 23 at the Powel House (244 S. 3rd Street).

By considering the lives of a doctor and a mayor in Philadelphia during the years 1770 - 1830, the speakers will provide an entertaining look into the daily life of America's premier city — within two outstanding houses in Society Hill as backdrops.

The doors will be open at 7 PM for light refreshments and informal touring of the houses. Each one-hour program will begin promptly at 7:30 PM. Admission to single programs is \$7 for Landmarks members and \$12 for the general public. Special discount prices for all four programs are \$25 for Landmarks members and \$40 for the general public.

### **ABOUT THESE HOUSE MUSEUMS**

The Physick House, built in 1786, is a free-standing Federal mansion. Dr. Physick's medical career began in 1793, the year the first yellow fever epidemic raged through Philadelphia.

The Powel House, c. 1760s, has been called the finest example of a Georgian home anywhere in America. Mayor Powel was in office during the Revolutionary War years, and he and his wife, Elizabeth, were friends and hosts to many famous Americans including George and Martha Washington and Ben Franklin. Incidentally, Mayor Powel was one of the 5,000 victims of yellow fever during that infamous year of 1793.

### **FASCINATING TALKS AND COLONIAL MUSIC**

The focus of the talks will be to describe life during the period 1770-1830 in all its richness and variety. Speakers for the programs will be Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., retired executive officer of The American Philosophical Society, who will speak on Dr. Physick; Frances Delmar, a Physick House Committee Member and ranger at Independence Park, who will talk about the yellow fever epidemic of 1793; and David Dashiell, assistant director of the Wagner Free Institute of Science and past site manager of the Powel House, who will speak about the lives of Samuel and Elizabeth Powel. The last program will be a performance of colonial music by The London Trio.

For information and registration materials call Colleen McAllister at Landmark Society Tours, 215 925-2251.



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## The Local Dining Scene

### Blue In Green: Breakfast All Day

A wonderful new place opened recently that offers breakfast all day long! Cornmeal pancakes with fresh fruit granola. Smoked salmon omelet with caramelized onion. Buckwheat pancakes with applesauce. Challah French toast, plus homemade soups, sandwiches and salads with organic greens. All the usual suspects, including side dishes such as potato pancakes and thick country-smoked bacon, which complement the variety of homestyle (but better!) creations.

Blue In Green is located just paces north of Market Street on N. 3rd Street in a very New York, So-Ho kind of setting, furnished with a collection of antique tables and chairs. Owned by chef Michael Baer, the restaurant was beautifully designed by one of our own "homegrown" neighbors, Lené Copeland, who lives in Society Hill. She and Baer have created an original restaurant concept that fills a niche: comfort food with flavor and panache.

You can drop in for take-out as a member of the coffee club in this inexpensive yet aesthetic environment. (Buy 9 cups and get the 10th one free.) Check out the lighting fixtures Lené designed and the counter's ingenious built-in magazine racks that contain a selection of current favorites. Sit at the counter while you eat and read *Vanity Fair*. Or for an early supper, come with family and friends. If you're wondering about the name, it comes from a Miles Davis composition. Oh, and the music is cool, too!

Located at 7 N. 3rd Street, the restaurant is open weekdays from 7 AM - 5 PM, Saturdays from 9 AM - 6 PM, and Sundays from 9 AM - 3 PM. Phone: 928-5880. Enjoy already!

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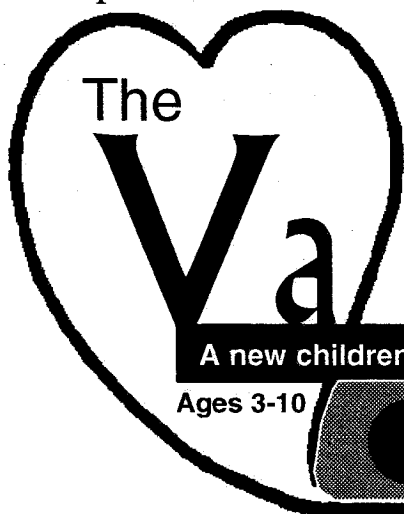
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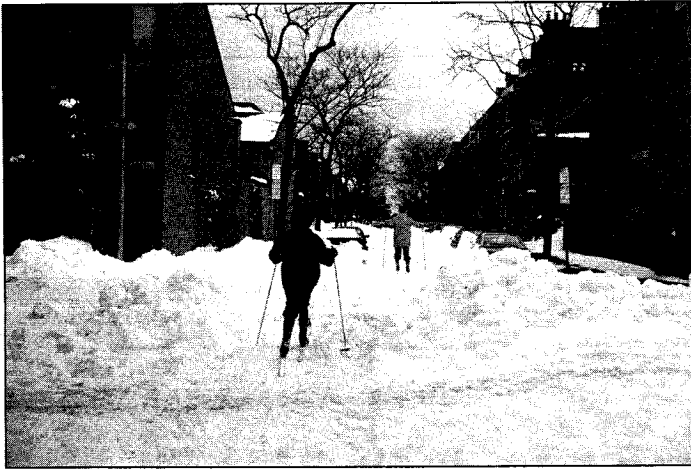
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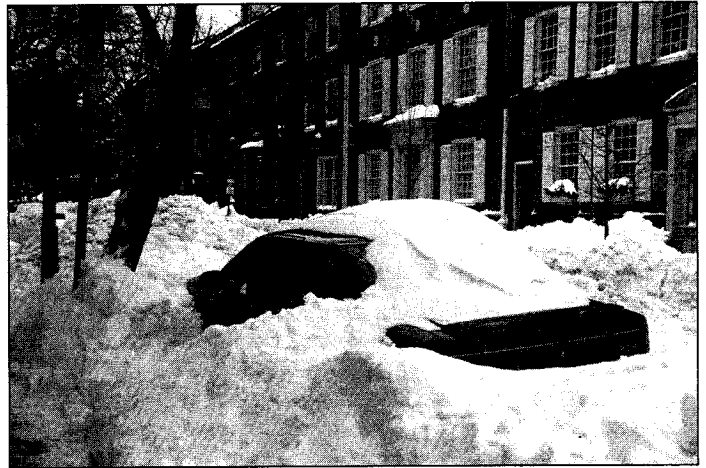
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Above: Cross-city skiers make a playground of our neighborhood. Can you identify this street?

Below: A typical street scene. Was that your car?



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Three letters were received in response to the *Darts & Laurels* column in our January issue — published here with our responses.

### Letter Numero Uno, dated January 17, 1996

Dear Mr. Halpern:

Your recent Dart condemning curb cuts which allow access for the handicapped was timely and correct. We would like to share several related improvement suggestions. Lets get rid of the sidewalks our city fathers imposed on the community so many years ago. We have heard of the three matrons awakened from afternoon siestas by foot traffic. And the trees...they encourage birds who are not potty-trained to nest. We have seen two navy blue pin-striped Brooks Brothers suits you wouldn't give to the Salvation Army. Maybe we can isolate and quarantine the entire neighborhood.

—JULIE AND WALT JACOBS

### Letter Numero Two, dated January 24, 1996

I really wish the Association could strike a more positive tone in the *Society Hill Reporter*. The recent comment concerning the curbs for handicapped was a new low. I think this old-fashioned, negative attitude toward any change drives away potential volunteers. I think being more inclusive and open to new ideas would be helpful to the organization in the long run. This is not an organization that feels warm and inviting to young, new people in our community.

Finally, the neighbors of Three Bears Park on Delancey Street got their way and had the plastic equipment painted. Where are they now that it has failed and looks worse than the original? Oddly quiet after such a big fuss.

Best of luck. We'll be leaving the neighborhood this year. I am passing along membership information to new owner.

—JO BUTLER

### Editor's Reply:

We always make a sincere and best effort to report fairly all issues that can affect the community, and we present opposing sides as accurately as possible. The views expressed, however, in our less serious columns such as *Darts & Laurels* are the opinions of the writer or editor of the column and not the views of the Civic Association as a whole.

There had been a long period when we dropped *Darts & Laurels* because some neighbors felt left out if we didn't give them laurels or others felt angry because they were targeted with darts. It was a no-win situation. But, so many people kept asking us to reinstate the column for its sheer whimsy, that we have accommodated them. All residents are invited to call or write in with their own suggested *Darts & Laurels* — to be included by the discretion of the editor depending on space.

*Re: Three Bears Park*

A group of concerned neighbors have been making plans to improve the appearance of the playground equipment, and the issue was included on the agenda for the February SHCA Board meeting. We'll keep you posted.

Meanwhile, for recently arrived folks who wonder what the problem was: Ms. Butler referred to a conflict a few years ago regarding the objection of nearby neighbors to the excessive

scale and the bright colors of new plastic playground equipment—installed without any input from the community or Civic Association and with disregard for the aesthetics of our historic neighborhood. A settlement was reached and the harsh colors of the equipment were then painted with colors more appropriate to the streetscape.

Alas, the problem now is graffiti. Our new Councilman Frank DiCicco (See the Correction on page 3.) has just introduced a daring new ordinance intended to stop graffiti vandals by banning the sale of all spray paint in the city. Personally, I think we may have to be tough with graffiti vandals. In any case, we must always remain vigilant in cleaning up any damage that occurs, because it spreads like a virus.

—BTH

• • •

### Letter Numero Three, dated February 1, 1996

To Mr. Halpern and contributors to the *Society Hill Reporter*: As residents of Society Hill, we read with dismay two items in your January 10, 1996 edition of the *Society Hill Reporter*. In your *Darts and Laurels* section, on page 6, you gave a dart to the "federal entitlement czars who dreamed up the idea of sloping the corner curbs." We find it unfortunate to note that several of our neighbors without disabilities have had trouble navigating our wheelchair-accessible curbs. Yet supposedly, we encourage visitors to our historic and beautiful area. However, imagine the difficulty with which a person in a wheelchair would navigate our sidewalks without these curbs. Even worse, had these wheelchair-accessible curbs not been constructed, people in wheelchairs would be prevented from moving to Society Hill. Or is this what you intend?

Secondly, on page 11, although your promotion of AIDS Thrift Shops on South Street is admirable, we object to your callousness in calling people with AIDS the "indigent stricken with the plague." The "plague?" Your insensitivity in light of the seriousness of AIDS is uncalled for.

Your presentation with regard to the above issues is appalling. In future issues, you need to show more respect for *everyone*. [Co-signers' italics.]

—STEFANIE BERNARDO AND MICHAEL WASHBURN

### Editor's Reply:

Dear Miss Bernardo and Mr. Washburn:

For this March issue, Alan Halpern is away on vacation—so I will respond, as we often alternate the writing and editing of this *totally volunteer neighborhood newsletter*, which is a major source of communication among Society Hill residents. I'll start from bottom to top.

We respectfully disagree with your views. Although AIDS does not meet the strict definition of a "plague," Mr. Halpern considers it a plague, whereby indigent persons who have it are terribly and especially disadvantaged. If stricken, the costs of medical care can reduce any person to becoming financially indigent. That's not "callousness," that's tragic reality.

*Re: Those curb cuts about which we received three letters.*

Obviously, everyone does not have the same view. But, again, the *Darts & Laurels* column is not the official voice of SHCA. Mr. Halpern is known for his acerbic style and inimitable humor. I am sure he meant no disrespect to our wheelchair-

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(Continued)

dependent neighbors. His comment was aimed at the mess and disruption caused by the curb-cut project, which, incidentally, was monitored very closely by the Association to make sure that brick corners were not replaced with concrete ramps. Here, we give a Laurel to the Historical Commission, particularly its Director, Dr. Richard Tyler, who worked with us.

So, folks, lighten up. And, by the way, we note that you are not SHCA members. Do think about joining us. (We could certainly use more writers, editors and proofreaders for the newsletter). Give us credit for what we do get done and what we get done right. Enough complaints already. Send in your membership dues!  
—BTH

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### WE DON'T HAVE GLORIA LEVIN TO KICK AROUND ANY MORE

We recently got word that Gloria Levin has sold her share of NewMarket to her partner Mike diPaulo. Good luck, Mike. We're on your side, and we hope to see genuine improvements in this valuable, central piece of property of Society Hill that you now own — on your own! Anything we can do to help, just let us know.

It is to our mutual benefit to see NewMarket thrive again, as it originally did over 200 years ago, and more recently just 25 years ago when the businesses on Front and 2nd Street, from Delancey to Lombard, were viable stores that serviced our community. Please stay in touch.



### BANKING AT 2ND & PINE

With a CoreStates take-over of Meridian, there have been fears and rumors that CoreStates might close the community's important 2nd & Pine Streets bank in April. SHCA President, Mel Buckman, has written to the President and CEO of CoreStates, Rosemarie Greco, indicating that it would be a great handicap to most of Society Hill if we lost this busy bank that services so much of our neighborhood. We'd also hate to see a wonderful building in the heart of Society Hill become vacant.

Should the bank remain open, CoreStates can be certain that former Meridian and Society Hill CoreStates customers will do their banking there and contribute to its profitability.

Letters from neighbors to CoreStates might be a good idea. Write to: President & CEO Rosemarie Greco, CoreStates Bank, Broad and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

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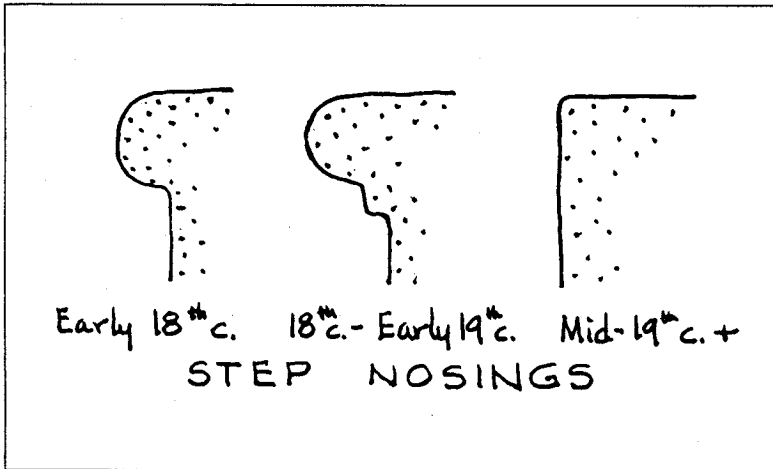
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# Front Steps & Their Care



by Penelope Hartshorne Batcheler  
Retired Independence National Historical Park Architect

*This is the third in a series of articles relating to the challenges and rewards of stewardship of historical homes.*

Not all steps were of marble. The 1732 Pennsylvania State House (Independence Hall) was built with soapstone steps and thresholds. The 1762 Powel House on 3rd Street (home of the remarkable politician, Samuel Powel, who was mayor of Philadelphia both before and after the American Revolution) has front steps which appear to be made of the local Wissahickon schist that was used throughout the region. Most of the rest of us in our immediate community have, or had, white marble steps—often known as “King of Prussia” marble. Judging by the quantity of marble needed for all of

Philadelphia’s row houses, many quarries must have been farther afield.

Many of us in old Philadelphia have marble front steps. If we don’t clean them periodically they can become quite grungy. We’ll get to the do’s and don’ts of that later, but first let’s give you a bit of background on old steps.

Nosings were carved into the front edges of stone steps through the early nineteenth century. (See sketch.) By the mid-nineteenth century, the front edges were square. Probably cognizant of how nosings can break off, the financier and philanthropist Stephen Girard, in the 1820s, replaced the 1795 front steps of the First Bank of the United States, on 3rd Street, with the current square steps.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century row house builders raised their first-floor levels well above grade to keep the first-floor wood joists high and dry. Thus a few steps were always necessary. If the kitchens and service quarters were in the cellars, there might be more than just a few steps. Sometimes a top landing slab bridged over front cellar entryways.

Marble is a serviceable material, but it does have drawbacks. Over time, it wears. Many of us have dish-shaped top steps or platforms that do not drain melted snow or rainwater. The best way to prevent tracking the water into your house is simply to get out there with a broom and sweep the water away!

If water does accumulate and freezes on your steps and sidewalks, *do not use rock salt* to melt the ice. Salt is corrosive to marble, bricks, cast stone and concrete. It also kills vegetation, and you don’t want salt tracked into your house onto your wood floors and carpets.

Not perfect, but much better, get instead the calcium chloride de-icer products available at local hardware stores. When mixed with water, calcium chloride heats up and melts the ice. After it melts, sweep away the slush and water to prevent re-freezing. But even this material comes with cautions. It’s harmful to leather shoes and concrete, and it also burns vegetation and is toxic to your hands.

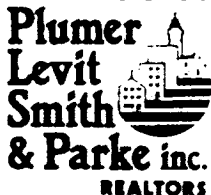
Independence Park has started using, and is pleased with, a magnesium chloride de-icer. Sold as “Freezgard” or “Mag” (from the Philadelphia Salt & Industrial Supply Company—telephone: 364-8588). This product claims to be more environmentally friendly, less toxic, less corrosive for masonry and metals (tin and aluminum), and also does not leave an oily-sticky residue on floors. We must ask our local stores to supply this product.

Now about those grungy steps! There is no magic way to clean them. Get out there on your hands and knees and scrub them. (Very low-tech, very eighteenth century!) Use powdered cleansers such as “Comet” or “Ajax,” and then rinse thoroughly with clean water. If there are stubborn stains, try bleaching them with Clorox solutions followed by thorough rinses.

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# ZONING MATTERS

What seems like an ordinary zoning variance has raised a vital question in our community, rousing the ire of many neighbors and involving several City agencies.

The issue is: As a community, how can we temper our desire for convenience with our need to guard pedestrian safety and comfort while preserving open space and our history? Anywhere else, perhaps, the desire to trade a garden for an auto parking space would not cause quite such a stir. But this is no ordinary neighborhood. Here's the story:

On January 17, 1996, owners of 229 Delancey applied to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) for a variance to allow for a one-car parking space in the rear yard that runs north along American Street. This proposal would increase the height of an existing garden wall to nine feet so as to accommodate the mechanism for a roll-up garage door.

Licenses & Inspections (L & I) refused the application on January 22 strictly on technical grounds—because the proposal would reduce the rear yard to one foot depth, whereas nine feet is the ZBA requirement and also because the masonry wall would exceed the allowable height by three feet.

Concurrent with the zoning application, the owners applied to the Department of Streets to obtain a separate permit for the curb cut for this parking space. The engineer who reviewed the application did not realize that 229 Delancey is a corner address requiring a curb cut on American Street. So he issued the permit.

## ON A SPECIAL LIST OF STREETS

American Street, between Spruce and Delancey, is an exceedingly narrow street, paved with granite blocks, that is barely a few inches wider than a car (eight feet at the proposed driveway). It is on a special list of streets requiring extra scrutiny by engineers for any application of alterations, requiring a careful review as well as a vote from the Board of Highway Supervisors. Through the diligent and persistent questioning of an American Street neighbor, the Streets Department revoked the permit made in error and initiated a more thorough review process which is now underway.

Potentially hazardous conditions of the curb cuts that must be addressed by the Streets Department include (1) the narrow turning radius of a vehicle at that corner; (2) the height of the curb; (3) the problem of removing the curb, which is very deep and helps to retain the brick arch of the sewer below; (4) the relocation of one of three existing Franklin Lamps on American Street. Moving the lamp north would interfere with a tree, but moving it south, would compromise street illumination and security; (5) overall safety for both pedestrians and vehicular traffic.

Meanwhile, on January 30, and with a revised application sent to the ZBA, the owners and their architect presented their design plans to the Historical Commission's Architectural Review Committee. They offered to eliminate the overhead garage

door, thinking that this might be more acceptable. The session at the Historical Commission was attended by American Street residents, SHCA's Zoning Co-Chair Lorna Lawson, and representatives from Center City Residents Association and historic preservation groups.

Focusing only on the historical aspects of the proposed design, the Architectural Review Committee recommended that—contingent on ZBA granting the desired zoning variance—the roll-up garage door should be substituted with wooden, garden style gates that open out onto American Street. But then, on February 14, the Historical Commission voted to table any recommendations contingent on a zoning variance.

## SUMMARY TO DATE

In a conflict such as this, which could have long-term consequences for the character of the neighborhood, SHCA usually supports the position of the majority of nearby property owners who are most directly impacted. One resident summarized the situation this way: "The parking space would be in the backyard of 229 Delancey, but in the front yard of all of American Street!" Since twelve out of sixteen American Street neighbors oppose the variance—as the door to the parking space would open out onto their narrow street—the SHCA has voted to oppose the petition and support the American Street neighbors.

Residents on both sides of the controversy have retained legal counsel and a hearing was held before the ZBA on February 21, where both sides argued their case. Councilman Frank DiCicco submitted a letter supporting the position of our community, and the Philadelphia Planning Commission went on record at the zoning hearing to oppose the variance and support the community.

Even if the Board of Highways votes that there is *no reason not to issue a curb cut*, the Streets Department will not issue a stamp of approval unless and until a variance is granted by the ZBA. At press time, we are waiting to hear from the ZBA, which will decide the issue in two weeks—about the time this newsletter will be distributed. So, stay tuned.



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