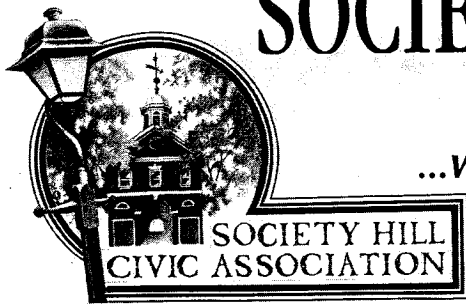


# SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

Newsletter of the Society Hill Civic Association

March 1998

...Working Together For a Better Place To Live



## Library Project Update

### Before Rendell, Hope; With Rendell, Money Mayor Will Fund Library For East Philadelphia

Readers, rejoice! Mayor Edward G. Rendell has agreed to support a new branch of the Free Library in East Philadelphia. The Mayor announced this good news during a meeting on Friday, February 13, with Councilman Frank DiCicco, Free Library President Elliott Shelkrot, the Mayor's Budget Director Dean Kaplan, the Mayor's Chief of Staff Greg Rost, plus six representatives of the East Philadelphia Coalition for a Free Library Branch. The East Philadelphia Coalition is comprised of over 65 members from the following organizations: the Society Hill Civic Association, Queen Village Neighbors Association, Washington Square West Civic Association, Old City Civic Association and South Street Neighborhood Association.

The Mayor needed little convincing that East Philadelphia should have its own library branch. Dozens of letters from the community have reached his office urging his support for the project as a result of the East Philadelphia Coalition's letter writing campaign (thanks to all of you who wrote!). Mayor Rendell ac-

knowledged during the meeting that residents in neighborhoods like ours deserve to have adequate library facilities within walking distance, a convenience that most other neighborhoods within the City enjoy. Most East Philadelphia neighborhoods have not had convenient access to a library since the Mercantile Branch in the 1000 block of Chestnut Street closed several years ago.

Specifically, the City will provide the funding necessary to operate the new branch, estimated to be approximately \$350,000 per year. The East Philadelphia Coalition will work closely with Councilman Frank DiCicco and the Mayor's office to identify an appropriate site and seek either a donation of 10,000 square feet to the City, or a lease that requires virtually no capital spending by the City. (The Philadelphia City Institute Branch at 19th and Locust operates under such a lease.) According to the East Philadelphia Coalition, the ideal site for the new branch is on or near Washington Square; a number of properties in this vicinity are candi-

dates. If an appropriate site can be identified soon, the new branch should be operating by late 1999 or early 2000.

The Mayor's decision promises to be an excellent investment for the City and a major contribution to quality of life for residents of East Philadelphia. While there are a few hurdles that will need to be overcome before we can visit our branch's circulation desk, we must quote the Mayor in saying, "We're going to make this happen!"

Readers should be proud that the Society Hill Civic Association was instrumental in getting the Mayor's support for the project. The East Philadelphia Coalition was the brainchild of SHCA President Mel Buckman; and the Coalition's Coordinator, Liza Seltzer, is a SHCA Director. Most of the Coalition's 65 members learned about the project through the REPORTER or SHCA meetings and are also members of this organization. Reaction to the news has been a very joycean, "Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes..." (For a dissenting opinion, see page 15.)

## More Than a Prayer Is Needed

Crime is down; real estate investment is up; taxes and city exodus are dirty words; the streets are clean places ... and the City has a plan for the future — tourism and entertainment. The people who made this happen have an ear, advocate and leader in Mayor Edward G. Rendell. But by the City Charter, he cannot run again after this term. "So after Ed, who" has become a popular guessing game.

With an election still two years away, maybe "who" is too soon to ask. "What" do we want for the future? The Board of Directors of the SHCA has invited Councilmen Frank DiCicco and Jim Kenney and State Representative Curtis Thomas to address the neighbors at the Wednesday, March 18, General Mem-

## After Rendell, What?

bership meeting. Each elected representative will give a short description of their vision for the future of the city, but the discussion will really be your chance to ask questions of people who have shown they can make a difference.

Please bring your concerns and your ideas to the Wednesday, March 18, meeting, at The Athenaeum, 219 S. 6th Street at 7:30 PM for an open forum. Whether your concern is the stench from horse urine in front of your house to protection of our Second Amendment rights if we try to limit handguns in the City, your voice needs to be heard. Every issue and concern weaves the design into the tapestry of life in our City, and if one thread breaks, the whole starts unraveling.

Members and non-member neighbors are welcome, but please bring identification for security sign-in at this historic structure.

(See page 2 for more information about the site of the meeting).

## Mark Your Calendar

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Wednesday, March 18  
7:30 to 9:00 PM

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia  
219 South Sixth Street  
Town Forum, Exhibit, and Tour

## Elections May 20th

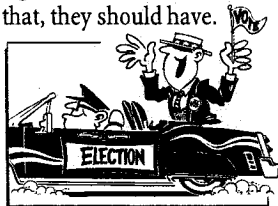
The President is on vacation (resting on a well-earned laurel). Mel Buckman set a goal for his presidency of getting a library branch for this area. He has gone far in achieving that.

While he is away, please remember that elections for a new president, vice-president, secretary and quadrant directors will be held Wednesday, May 20, at the General Membership meeting at the Society Hill Sheraton. You, too, can set goals and work with a wonderful group of people to meet them.

Mel is heading the nominating committee who will prepare a slate of candidates, but if you have the urge to run for office, you need only ten signatures of SHCA members on a petition that should be received by the office (P.O. Box 3, Philadelphia, PA 19105) by April 1.

State your name, address, phone, and the position you are seeking. The slate of candidates will be in the next REPORTER and announced at the General Membership meeting without reference to whether they were nominated by the committee or by petition.

*It is a privilege to serve.* If someone famous didn't say that, they should have.



**Wednesday, March 18**  
**6:30 PM SHCA Board of Directors**  
**7:30 PM General Membership**

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia  
 219 South Sixth Street  
 Town Meeting, Exhibit & Tour

**Saturday & Sunday, March 21 & 22**

13th Annual Old House Fair  
 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM  
 The National Guard Armory  
 33rd Street (Drexel Campus)  
 \$5 (call 546-1146 ext. 16)

**Friday to Sunday, April 23 to 25**

Physick House Plant Sale  
 341 S. 4th Street in the Garden  
 Replant or purchase hanging baskets for the Franklin Lamps here!

**Sunday, May 3, 1 to 5:00 PM**

Philadelphia Open House Tours  
 Call 928-1188 for Reservations and information about other tours

Sponsored by the Friends of Independence  
 National Historical Park

**Saturday, May 16**

**7:00 AM to 3:00 PM**

**Clean-Up Day**

**Wednesday, May 20**

**7:30 General Membership Meeting**  
**Society Hill Sheraton**

Elections!!! Program to be announced.

**Town Watch:**

**March 27, April 14, April 30**

**7:30-8:30 Head House**

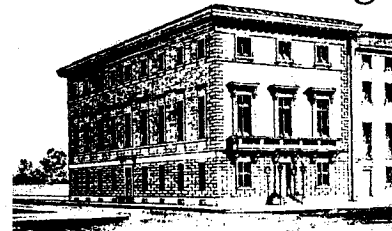
## Check out the Independence Seaport Museum on Saturdays & Sundays

They have loads of programs for adults and kids and have gone mad about pirates — dramatization of woman pirate Anne Bonney's life, making 3-dimensional marinescape of the Delaware, ship model extravaganza, sail on the Pioneer, entertaining lecture by Francis M. Carlin, CEO of Wilson Cruise Line, about commuter traffic on the Delaware.

WOW — so much to do, so little time!  
 Call 925-5439 for calendar.

## Giovanni's Room

### The Athenaeum Hosts Meeting



The Athenaeum will host the **Wednesday, March 18, SHCA General Membership meeting.** The imposing structure on the east side of Washington Square was designed in 1845 by the innovative architect **John Notman** (1810-1865). It is hailed as the seminal American structure in the **Italianate Revival Style** and is one of the first Philadelphia buildings built of brownstone. The library houses the "source of first resort" for designers researching American decorative arts from 1800 to 1845.

Executive Director Roger W. Moss, the prominent historian and writer, will comment on the significance of the structure and the current exhibit. An opportunity to tour will be offered.

The Athenaeum is a private library, founded on February 9, 1814, to collect and organize almost anything associated with Americana and to provide the members with well-stocked reading rooms. Membership is by nomination only and is limited to 1,375 shareholders. Four shares are still held by descendants of founders.

This provides SHCA members and neighbors, who are not members, with a unique opportunity to peer into these hallowed halls. Notice the original gaslights on the facade as you enter.

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## For Whom the Bell Tolls

### Alfred Ottaviano Society Hill Barber 1917-1998

On January 15, Alfred Ottaviano died of cardiopulmonary arrest at Pennsylvania Hospital. He had spent most of his life in Society Hill. He was in the electrical construction business prior to taking over the barbershop which his father, Felix, had founded in the early years of the 20th century. When he retired in 1982, one of the last barbershop poles in the neighborhood disappeared from the streetscape.

You always got more than a haircut at his shop. You got conversation, an exchange of opinions, the status of neighbors and the neighborhood. Mr. Ottaviano and his family were true pioneers in the rebirth and development of Society Hill. He was interested in both historical architecture and craftsmanship. He restored several homes in the area, including his own home on the 500 block of Pine Street, and consulted with dozens of others restoring their homes. But it is his gentleness that one neighbor recalls, how he visited her husband in the hospital and the kind way he shaved him.

Our condolences are extended to his wife of fifty-nine years, Sophie, his son, Fred, and his daughters Phyliss Donahue and Susan Burke.

## SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

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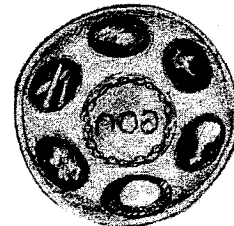
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## Washington Square — Redux

The good news: According to Win Carroll of The American Revolutionary Patriots' Fund (ARPF), the long-awaited rehabilitation and improvements to Washington Square will commence this spring. The bid process for a contractor is complete. The first shipment of blocks of bluestone are scheduled for delivery in March from two quarries in New York state. Subsequent shipments will be made monthly over the next 19 months.

The bad news: Apparently, the Square will be closed off — perhaps entirely surrounded by a chain-link fence — and the work could take up to two years! It also could mean the loss of parking spaces on Walnut and 6th Streets, the loss of sidewalks, not to mention the mess that always accompanies construction.

It also means we will be without one of our parks until well into the year 2000. The tree population also will be reduced — the plans at the INHP appear to indicate 20 fewer trees by the time the project is complete, in particular the female ginkgos. This is of concern because the Olin plans for Independence Mall also call for the uprooting of many of the trees there.

### What's planned

The improvements are meant to enhance the historical importance of the Park (one of the four original City parks) and the quality of visitors' experiences. Once the construction is com-

pleted, Washington Square will officially become part of the Independence National Historical Park (INHP). The Delta Group's planned changes include:

- Replacing the slate with bluestone;
- Rebuilding the wall;
- Improving the lighting;
- Replacing the limestone monument with granite (the tomb of the Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution);
- Ensuring the eternal flame lives up to its name; and
- Establishing an Honor Guard.

The final cost is unknown. This first construction and quarrying phase is approximately \$5.5 million — the Feds and the City have kicked in \$3.6 million, and the balance hopefully will come from the State, foundations, patriotic lineage groups, residents and businesses. Now that the ARPF has its non-profit status, it can begin to solicit those additional funds. Plans include upgrading the park's current status, from National Lists Registry to National Landmark, and being listed as a Commonwealth Treasure.

### Another view

Some citizens treasure it just the way it is:

a city park. Besides residents and tourists, the Square will be inaccessible to dog-walkers and those who enjoy feeding the squirrels that delight so many of our visitors. While we all agree that the condition of the slate slabs on the paths is disgraceful and that other repair work is needed, issues by many residents regarding the extent and the duration of the work have so far gone unheeded. Why not do the work in sections, so that the Square is not completely off-limits for so long? Why not a more scaled-down approach? When Tom Foglietta was our congressional representative, he worked tirelessly to secure the funding and tongue-in-cheek promised that the people at Independence Place would still have a direct path to Pileggi's during construction. Does anyone know the phone number at the American embassy in Rome?

Come to the meeting March 18 and tell us what YOU think, or write anytime.

### **I Never Promised You a Rose Garden**

## Where the Hanging Baskets Grow



Opening Friday, April 24, from 1:00 to 7:00 PM, and Saturday and Sunday, April 25 and 26, from noon to 4:00 PM, the petal pushers at the Physick House will sell bedding plants, herbs, perennials and annuals for your pots, window boxes or shady gardens, as well as supplies, potting soil, fertilizer, etc.

This is where you get those great moss lined baskets for the Franklin Lamps. For shade, they recommend wax begonias and ivy, and for sunny spots, the superpetunias in white, pink or purple. This year, please pre-order the baskets by calling 627-1356. Price is \$35.

If you need to replant a basket, bring it to the Physick House on Sat., April 11 or 18, from 10 AM to 1:00 PM. Put a waterproof tag on your basket with your name, address, and phone number, sun/shade preference, and color. For \$20, they will reline the basket with moss, treat the soil and waterproof the basket, plant it and have it ready for pick-up. Leave the old soil in the basket when you drop it off. Pick up the basket during the sale.

Fifty percent of the sale price is tax deductible. If you know what you want, don't take a chance they will run out. Pre-order checklists will be available by calling 627-1356.



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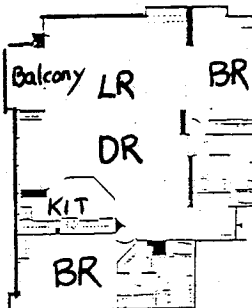
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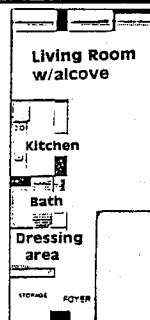
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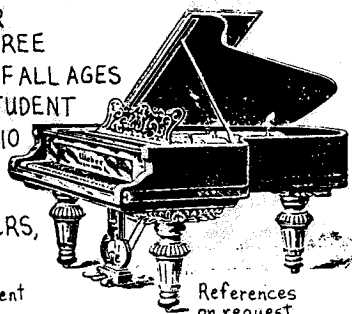
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## Residents Nag Carriage Companies

The City Council's Licenses & Inspections Committee will hold a second round of hearings with regard to the City's carriage horse trade — specifically, humane and enforcement issues.



For example, the current working temperature threshold of 94 degrees is just about the worst in the nation, so is the number of hours worked (10 hours, plus the trip to and from the Mall), often in incredible heat. Humane organizations from across the U.S. are asking Philadelphia City Council to improve the regulations and have suggested a National Weather Service Heat Index maximum of 94, and no more than 6-8 hour workdays.

Safety is the issue. Recently, this reporter observed a careless driver letting a child hold the reins while he turned around to take a photograph of the other tourists in the carriage. While a carriage ride can add to a tourist's wonderful experience of this city, one carriage ride in Boston last year traumatized visitors. A horse was spooked in traffic and took off, throwing the driver onto the street, and ending up in the back of a vehicle. The horse was impaled on part of the carriage and had to be destroyed. All the while, tourists were watching in horror.

Carriages going off-route, blocking side streets, congesting traffic on main streets, not to mention fouling the air with the odor problems in the warmer weather, have made a lot of residents angry. Enforcement complaints should be directed to Captain Brian Korn, Sixth District Police, tel. 686-3060.

To voice your opinion on this issue, write or call the offices of L&I Chairman, Councilman Jim Kenney (Room #586/tel. 686-3450), our own Councilman Frank DiCicco (Room #332/tel. 686-3458), Council President John Street (Room #494/tel. 686-3442), as well as other Council members. Send letters to: City Hall, Philadelphia 19107, and copy us if possible. Or come to the meeting March 18!

## Town Watch

In January and March, District Attorney Lynn Abraham and her husband joined the Town Watch walkers. Town Watch officially became a Town Watch Group after twenty members completed city training in July.

Certain guidelines must now be followed. For instance, a patrol must consist of four walkers. They are urged to use radios instead of cell phones. Caps that are available to walkers help identify the group to their neighbors. Barbara Gelman, the committee chair of Town Watch, regularly meets with Art Potts, the city's Town Watch coordinator to discuss various issues.

Officer George McCardell, the community relations officer for the Sixth Police District, has invited interested SHCA members to accompany him in a patrol car on a Friday or Saturday night. If interested, please call the SHCA office at 629-1288. Debbie Robinson, director for the southeast quadrant, has toured with McCardell and reported it "was an eye-opening experience" and urged everyone to participate at least once.

Look at the calendar for dates for the next walks.



### Spring Clean-Up Day: May 16

- Watch for the flyer explaining opposite side parking and street cleaning.
- Sweep away winter debris from around your house.
- Plant flowers under your trees and in flower boxes.
- Organize the residents on your block to hang baskets of flowers on all Franklin Lamps.
- Join your neighbors for lunch at Pennsylvania Hospital at 12:30 PM
- Call Janet Cooke — 413-0918 — if you would like to help organize Clean-Up Day.
- Clean-Up Day Is sponsored by the Society Hill Civic Association and the Washington Square West Civic Association

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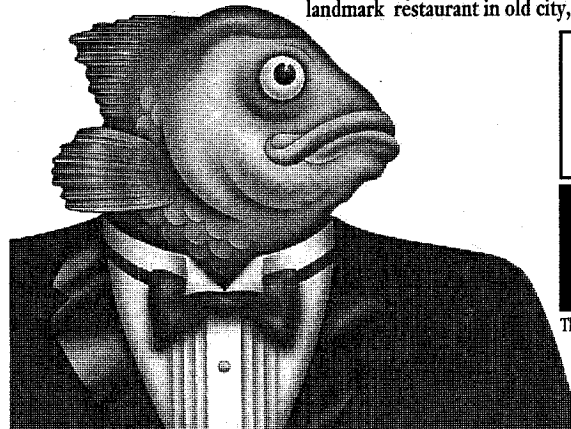
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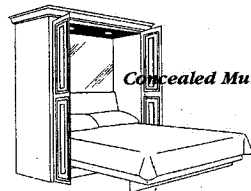
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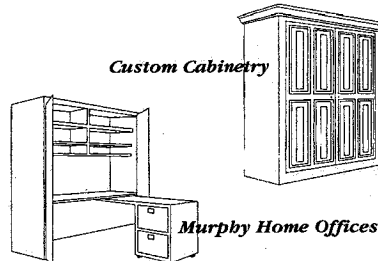
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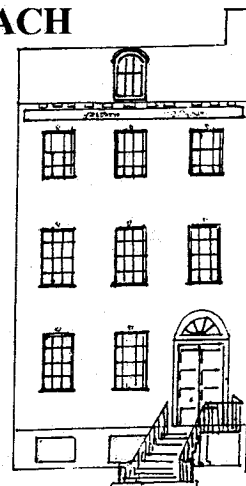
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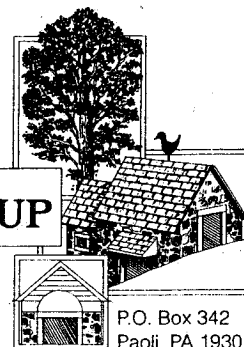
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## Noteworthy Neighbors

### Cirel and Howard Magen

By David Woods



A circulating library in a town, wrote the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, is like an evergreen tree; it blossoms through the year.

And nowhere is that truer than in this town where Benjamin Franklin planted the first seeds of that tree when, on his initiative, the Library Company of Philadelphia was chartered in 1732.

But those trees take a good deal of watering in the form of cash: Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie pumped some \$65 million into US libraries alone — and that was a century ago.

Today, Philadelphia has 53 branches of the Free Library, and nurturing the existing ones (each costs about \$300,000 a year to operate) — as well as planning for a new one near Washington Square — is the work of Cirel and Howard Magen.

The Magens recently moved here from the Rittenhouse Square area where they raised money for renovations to the local branch library ... and found an alternative site for it during the one-year refurbishing process ... as well as helping to attract \$20,000 — almost the entire amount from individual donations.

The Free Library received a million-dollar-plus grant with one stipulation being that each of the branches raise \$20,000 and the Foundation would give an additional \$7,000. Cirel is co-founder and president of the Philadelphia City Institute Library Friends, and, as well as her work with the libraries, she has been involved in many other charitable works, including ten years with a shelter for the homeless. She and her husband are members of the Athenaeum, the private library founded in the 18th century.

Howard Magen, a chartered accountant who serves on the Committee of 70, a nonpartisan political watchdog organization, is a member of the Friends of the Library of the University of Pennsylvania. He and Cirel, both native Philadelphians, are enthusiastic about their move from one part of the city ... and love the fact that they can walk to both Ritz movie theaters from their new home in St. James Place. Howard contrasts the crowdedness and noise of the Rittenhouse area with the tranquility of Society Hill. "Here," he says, "it's greener and prettier ... with more open space." Among their other interests are classical music and travel. Married for 43 years, they have a married daughter in Toronto and a married son in San Francisco.

A close friend from their Rittenhouse days says that that area's loss is definitely Society Hill's gain. "Cirel has worked with neighbors wherever she's been; she's interested in politics, culture, the illiteracy problem — and, of course, literacy. They're a wonderful couple and I hate to lose them," she adds.

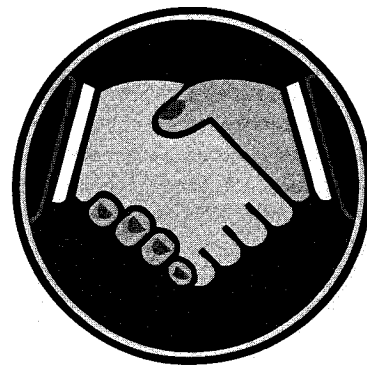
Cirel and Howard take it as a given that there will be a library in the Society Hill area. To be sure, there are obstacles to overcome: finding a suitable site; complying with regulations; and, of course, raising money.

But the seeds are already firmly planted for this Philadelphia tradition — and for the latest evergreen in town.

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The General George McCall Elementary School opened in 1909 and still serves an ethnically diverse student population. In 1996 and 1997, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 8th grade McCall students scored among the top of all public elementary schools in the Philadelphia School System on the SAT-9 (Stanford University Achievement Tests).

For many students, English is not their first language, and the school justifiably prides itself on its English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. Academic achievement is blended with real exposure to different ethnic cultures right on the playground, so students get to live diversity instead of being lectured about the concept.

The school has integrated computer technology throughout the curriculum with classroom computers, a computer lab, and a full-time computer science teacher. The liberal arts are also promoted with creative art, instrumental music, a modern foreign language program beginning in kindergarten and a classical Latin programming starting with fourth graders. The library houses more than 17,000 volumes and more state-of-the-art computer stations.

Pennsylvania Hospital, the Sixth Police District, the University of the Arts, the Biddle family, Independence National Historical Park, Curtis Institute of Music and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have all adopted the school by sponsoring collaborative programs with the students. As good neighbors, the school has always joined the SHCA for Clean Up Day, allowing the dumpster to be parked on their playground and coming out in force to rake, sweep, paint fences, and plant flowers.

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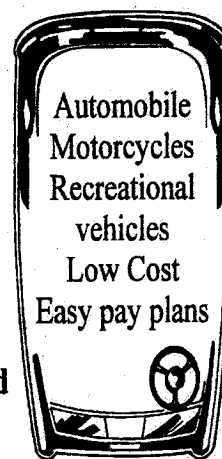
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## Thanks!

Since the last edition of the Reporter, the following neighbors have renewed their memberships and added an extra contribution for the various projects like sidewalk cleaning, tree planting, and Clean-Up Day, etc., that SHCA runs:

As of February 19:

Apothaker, Catherine	Levine, Martha
Bangert, Charles & Lucy	Lewis, H. Craig
Batcheler, Jr., George	Maguire, Catherine
Craley, Keith	Marks, Milton
Devoe, David	Moring, Norma
Dogen, Judith	Percival, John & Linda
Eisendrath, Craig	Robinson, Ed & Debbie
Fleming, N. Marlene	Samsun Footwear
Fusco, Michael & Patricia	Sedran, Howard
Hamburg, Morris & Jean	Semingson, Dianne
Horty, Peter	Serata, Dr. & Mrs.
Hurdle, Harvey	Shapiro, S
Kahn, Harold & Edith	Spivek, Roberta
Kogan, Mark & Ellen	Stoloff, Becky
Lane, Laura	Sturdivant, Mary
	Yoder, Kevin

## PLEASE ACT NOW

Make a wise investment TODAY by renewing or initiating your membership in the Society Hill Civic Association. WHY? Because caring for your neighborhood is in your very best self-interest. A strong and vibrant association makes our streets safer and cleaner by giving you a unified voice in speaking to government, legislators, businesses, and others who impact our area of town. A unified group of neighbors is the surest way to keep your investment in Philadelphia viable for many years to come.

Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Work \_\_\_\_\_ Home \_\_\_\_\_

New Membership  Renewal

Household Membership: \$40

Business Membership: \$80

\*Additional Contributions: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\*Earmarked for:  Project Sweep Stakes  
 Town Watch  
 Street Trees/Tenders

I/We would like to work on the following committees:

<input type="checkbox"/> Clean-Up Day	<input type="checkbox"/> Liquor Control
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic Preservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Society Hill Reporter
<input type="checkbox"/> Homeless Intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Street Trees/Tree Tenders
<input type="checkbox"/> Library	<input type="checkbox"/> Town Watch
	<input type="checkbox"/> Zoning/Development

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## Darts and Laurels

Inspired by the prospect of a local library branch in two years, these darts and laurels were pulled "off the shelf."

**Remains of the Day Darts** - to those residents who dumped their Christmas trees on the pavement *after* trash collection day. Some had the really bad form of dumping them in front of a neighbor's house! Remember the person's birthday you were honoring believed in "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

**Amy Vanderbilt's Book of Etiquette Laurel** - to Mayor Rendell who told the media he found their behavior outrageous in regard to the Clinton intern scandal. In speaking for our city of grace and refinement, he said, "The people of Philadelphia don't care." Actually, most of us were brought up that not to ask and not to tell were hallmarks of good breeding. Of course, not committing adultery is a hallmark of good morals, as cited in **The Rules** from a *really* old book.

**Waiting to Exhale Laurel** - to our Asian American neighbors and recent immigrants who harvested much of the ginkgo fruit this fall. In some Asian cuisine, ginkgo is a prized ingredient. For the rest of us, it is just a smelly sidewalk mess by autumn. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

**The Idiot Dart** - to the mugger who robbed a neighbor outside the DA's house. Boy, is he in trouble when he gets caught! We're in favor of Charter Schools if they can at least turn out smarter criminals for the City — like illegal computer hackers, or other high tech crooks!

**The Borrowers Laurel** - to SHCA pres Mel Buckman and director Liza Seltzer for getting this library project launched.

**Six Degrees of Separation Dart** - to the window-washing scam artist who has been ripping off neighbors for \$70 for cleaning he doesn't do. He claims to be the son of the respected and well-known window washer, Curtis Johnson. If approached by this African American male, tall, with glasses and between 30 to 40 years old, call 911 immediately.

**Lassie Come Home Dart** - to the pet owners who (a) lose their pets; then compound the problem by (b) putting up notices on lampposts, traffic lights, and trees. We empathize on your loss, but it is against city ordinance to deface public property with these posters. It's not good for the health of the trees, either. Please, all pet owners: invest in collars with the pet's name and the owner's phone number. This is how **Phyllis Heimer** was able to reunite **Popcorn** with her owner. In fact, Phyllis deserves **The Shepherd of the Hill Laurel**.

**From Here to Eternity Dart** - to developer **Hal Wheeler**, who seems to be taking forever to settle on the Society Hill Club. Next hearing with the new parking garage owners over who is financially responsible for the leaking pool is scheduled for March 30.

**The Carpetbaggers Dart** - to the neighbor who started the rumor that a TOPLESS bar was planned for Second Street. It is a TAPAS bar, puh-leeese! Restaurateur and SH Tower dweller **Christ Dhimitri** assures us both are passé. Well, we have survived the fashion police, inaugurated the facade police, maybe we should have some food police. They can check out that the library branch serves good café latte. They will have coffee, won't they?

**A series of Jeeves Darts** - to the McCall School, because periodically their trash sits on the sidewalk. Yo, no butler lives on your block! If you want to know what McCall does right, read Linda Skale's article on page 10.

— MS, LM, ST

# CityKids

<b>School:</b>	McCall
<b>Grades:</b>	Kindergarten through 8
<b>Average Class Size:</b>	30
<b>Religious Affiliation:</b>	None
<b>What's the best reason to consider this school?</b>	McCall is our neighborhood's public school and it provides students with a well-rounded education. The school takes advantage of its Center City location by linking with many cultural resources. McCall values its diverse, multiethnic population as being a "microcosm of the world." Because of this, McCall students learn how to get along with each other. A diverse staff and parents who are actively involved in the school help meet students' needs. McCall offers advanced programs in selected areas of study, and the school prides itself on being "technology-based."
<b>For More Information</b>	Ms. Margaret Mullen-Bavwidinisi, Principal, 351-7349

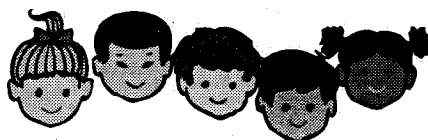
<b>School:</b>	St. Peter's School
<b>Grades:</b>	Preschool (beginning at age 3) through 8
<b>Average Class Size:</b>	11
<b>Religious Affiliation:</b>	None
<b>What's the best reason to consider this school?</b>	St. Peter's School is a non-denominational school for boys and girls, preschool through 8th grade. Founded in 1834, St. Peter's draws children of all economic backgrounds, races and religions from the metropolitan Philadelphia area. Strong programs in music, art, poetry and French enhance a curriculum firmly established in traditional academic disciplines. Science, computer and physical education are integral to the student's experience. Activities such as music theater, active games and creative movement are available through the After School Enrichment Program along with the computer club. Before- and after-school care and a summer program are available.
<b>For more information:</b>	Ms. Melissa L. Vosburgh, Head, 925-3963

September may seem far away, but trust us, it'll be here before you know it. If you've got your children enrolled in private schools, so will those tuition bills.

But before you despair over the high cost of private school or fall prey to the myth that the best schools are in the suburbs, please consider the schools right here in your neighborhood, both public and private.

As our friends at St. Peter's pointed out, there are many advantages to being able to walk your child to school in the morning and, depending on your schedule, to be able to attend your child's school events during the day. In case you're not familiar with all the options, CityKids wants to introduce them to you:

<b>School:</b>	Society Hill Synagogue Playschool 418 Spruce Street
<b>Grades:</b>	Preschool (ages 2-4)
<b>Average Class Size:</b>	7 for 2 year olds; 16 for 3-4 year olds; adult/child ratio: 1-5
<b>Religious Affiliation:</b>	Jewish (but open to all children)
<b>What's the best reason to consider this school?</b>	Society Hill Synagogue Preschool's goals are to provide a positive first school experience for children. The school is especially sensitive to parent-child separation issues; it offers a co-op program that regularly allows an adult from each child's family to assist with the class. Co-oping gives parents a sense of what goes on in the school and maintains an optimal adult to child ratio. The program's philosophy is that "play is the occupation of children;" teachers emphasize learning through play, with teachers guiding children toward learning.
<b>For more information:</b>	Ms. Kathleen Healy, Playschool Director, 922-6590, ext. 28



<b>School:</b>	St. Mary Interparochial School
<b>Grades:</b>	Kindergarten through 8
<b>Average Class Size:</b>	27
<b>Religious Affiliation:</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>What's the best reason to consider this school?</b>	St. Mary Interparochial is the descendent of the first free parish school in the United States, the oldest Roman Catholic parochial school in English-speaking America. The reasons most often offered by the parents of St. Mary's as to why they send their children to the school include the teaching and practice of Christian values within the curriculum, as well as the excellent basic academic program. Many parents are pleased with the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic composition of the school community. The school is proud of the quality and stability of its faculty and the individual attention given to each child.
<b>For more information:</b>	Ms. Alberta Porieta, Principal, 923-7522

<b>School:</b>	Old Pine Community Center Nursery School
<b>Grades:</b>	Toddler program, pre-school, before- & after-school programs for school- age children
<b>Average Class Size:</b>	8-15
<b>Religious Affiliation:</b>	Owned by Old Pine Church (Presbyterian)
<b>What's the best reason to consider this school?</b>	Old Pine Community Center Nursery School offers developmental and recreational programming for children as young as 18 months and as old as an 8th grader. They credit their skilled staff, safe environment, and flexible schedule as paramount in meeting the needs of families who use the school. The school also offers interest clubs, a lending library, a gym, and an outdoor play deck, all affording healthy, stimulating choices. A summer program is available.
<b>For more information:</b>	Mr. Bob Antonelli, Executive Director, 627-2493

# Project Neighborhood Pride Pens Message

The Historic Preservation Committee has three subcommittees: Education, Political Advocacy, and Project Neighborhood Pride. Project Neighborhood Pride has launched a letter writing campaign to remind neighbors of the importance of maintaining their facades. That letter should be in all residents' mailboxes by the time you read this.

The self-assessment checklist is reprinted here for your convenience. The Project Pride committee also is maintaining and expanding a list of contractors that neighbors have used and would feel comfortable recommending.

While the SHCA can in no way guarantee the work of these contractors, they offer the names to help those who are new to the area find workmen for their various projects.

For more information, contact **MARTHA LEVINE**, Coordinator, Project Neighborhood Pride, through the SHCA office at 629-1288.

\*NOTE: Some major repairs or additions may require permits. For information, please call the Philadelphia Historic Commission at 686-4543.

\*\*NOTE: Most major paint manufacturers have historic color charts for color choices appropriate for our historic neighborhood. We recommend selecting a color from these historic palettes.

\*\*\*NOTE: For any questions regarding tree pits or trees, please call SHCA's Chair of Project Street Trees: Jean Bodine at 627-8393.

Philadelphia Open House will be Sunday, May 3. Clean-Up Day will be Saturday, May 16. Get a head start!

## Society Hill Historic Preservation Committee Project Neighborhood Pride Maintenance & Repair Check List

### Facade needs repair(s) to: \*

- Cornice
- Windows
- Shutters
- Front door
- Wrought iron railings
- Dormer
- Downspout
- Cellar windows & doors
- Marble/brick steps, clean or repair
- Brick pointing
- Other

### Facade needs paint to: \*\*

- Cornice
- Windows
- Shutters
- Front door
- Railings
- Cellar windows & doors
- Other

### Sidewalk:

- Replace missing bricks on sidewalk
- Reset uneven sidewalk bricks
- Remove trash

### Street Trees: \*\*\*

- Weed & prune around tree pit
- Weed or replace trim plantings
- Enlarge tree pit

### Spit & Polish:

- Remove graffiti
  - Polish brass hardware
  - Remove protruding A/C units.
- Mount flush with facade

### TV cable wires on house facades:

- Call Greater Media Cable to re-route wires at no cost to you.
- (They're illegal by City ordinance!)

### Roof Repair or Replacement:

### Exterior Lamplights:

- Install on house facades for security purposes

Other items: \_\_\_\_\_

## Barbarians at the Gates

### St. Peter's Gates Stolen — Really!

Police believe a professional ring of thieves is working the neighborhood. They steal antique metal work, urns, grates and, most recently, gates from property to sell to out-of-state antique dealers.

Everyone should make sure their street "furniture" is secure. Next, everyone can help by reporting any noise or suspicious activity immediately! Call 911. The nice looking tourist who seems to be admiring your facade could be casing the joint.

It is too late for St. Peter's who lost their lovely wrought iron gates and one of SHCA's directors who is now grateless, so please take care, be observant, and don't fear about being alarmist. Better to call the police and have to apologize to an innocent suspect, than have something irreplaceable ripped off.

# Letters to SHCA

To Mel Buckman, SHCA  
Re: Library in Society Hill

As a long time SHCA member and a librarian, I urge you to stop campaigning for a public library branch in Society Hill. It would be wonderful if every neighborhood had its own branch, but we know that isn't feasible. It would be irresponsible for us to demand a branch in our neighborhood where we have the Athenaeum, school libraries, the economic freedom to buy books and spend time reading to our children, and can take a short bus ride to the Main Branch of the Free Library. If a new branch library can be established, it should be in a neighborhood that does not enjoy these benefits.

Matt DeJulio's suggestion that the proposed new branch house collections of historic material is misguided. No book collector would entrust materials to an institution that did not provide the elaborate facilities required for special collections. Conservation, preservation, thermal environmental controls, insurance, serious security, specialist catalogers and curators are sine qua non. Fortunately, our area is rich with organizations where these essential elements are in place — The Historical Society, The Library Company, Free Library Special Collections, to name just a few.

— Terese Mulkern Terry, M.A.  
Business Information Specialist.  
Lippincott Library,  
The Wharton School,  
University of Pennsylvania.

*Before going on vacation, Mel Buckman wrote a personal response to Ms. Mulkern Terry. However, we published the letter here because we thought it aired some opinions that others might hold. Liza wished to respond to those who might also feel as this librarian does.*

Dear Ms. Terry:

Thank you for sharing your concerns about the Society Hill Civic Association's efforts to establish a new branch of the Free Library. I am writing to clarify some of the points you made in your letter.

First, the SHCA is not campaigning for a library branch that would be located in Society Hill. Rather, the SHCA is a member of the East Philadelphia Coalition for a Free Library Branch. The Coalition is comprised of five civic associations that are dedicated to establishing a branch of the Free Library to serve the 25,000 residents of East Philadelphia, not just Society Hill. As mentioned in the various articles that have appeared in the REPORTER over the past few months, the Coalition is seeking a site on Washington Square.

Mr. DeJulio's letter to the REPORTER did not imply historic book collections should be donated to an inappropriate facility. Instead, his suggestion was that the new branch might be designed and appointed to properly house and display such collections so that the community might enjoy them in the future. Furthermore, this type of attraction on Washington Square could provide another destination for tourists visiting Independence Park. Mr. DeJulio and I understand and agree that special facilities and arrangements must be in place before any collections may be received by a new branch, but that doesn't make his idea "misguided".

As for your assertion that it would be irresponsible for us to demand a library branch, I must disagree. Although resources such as the Athenaeum and bookstores do exist, neither Society Hill nor the other neighborhoods represented by the Coalition are uniformly wealthy. Even if this misconception were true, that still doesn't mean that the families and individuals who live here and pay taxes don't deserve to have easy access to a library. If the City wants to keep people living in these neighborhoods, it needs to offer some basic amenities. The SHCA believes that a library should be one of these amenities. And, as you'll note in the article on the front page of this issue of the REPORTER, apparently, the Mayor does too!

We hope that you will enjoy the new branch once it is established, despite your reservations.

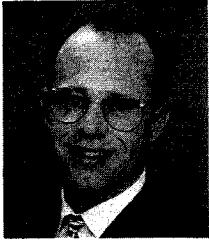
— Liza Seltzer  
Coordinator, East Philadelphia  
Coalition for a Free Library Branch



## Editor's Note:

I just plunked down \$34.00 at Borders for copies of *Men Are From Mars*, *Women Are From Venus* and *Prayer for the City*. These are not books I will keep given the limited shelf space in my home and should be available at the Book Traders in a few weeks for bargain hunters. I would have borrowed the books if a branch were more accessible. The Main Library branch is located off a pedestrian unfriendly (although strikingly beautiful) boulevard — the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The money could be put to better use, like a larger donation to Project Street Sweeps!

As for the Athenaeum, while a member was thoughtful enough to nominate me, I found their hours (only open on Wednesday evening till 8 PM) not suited to my work schedule. Most of the other school libraries mentioned are not open to the public. I have no guilt feelings about supporting this initiative.



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## For those too new to remember and those starting to forget

The first in a series of brief glances back at Society Hill's beginnings based on reminiscences and conversations with two neighbors: Charles E. Peterson, FAIA, first staff architect at Independence Hall and resident since 1952, and Leona ("Lee") Griswold, who moved into the "Hail, Columbia" house on Spruce Street on her wedding night in 1959.

Society Hill sounds and looks pretty ritzy these days. But neither was the case forty years ago. This area was known as "the bloody 5th Ward" for the knife fights every night and general bawdiness — a lot like The Badlands in North Philadelphia for police today. Boarded-up buildings surrounded Independence Hall, and a tacky wax museum defaced the Bourse. Washington Square was known as Pervert Park, because ... well, you can imagine why. Still, some original residents will insist blocks of Spruce or Pine were where "the nice people lived". You can guess where they resided.

If not an actual slum, the neighborhood

*This area was known as "the bloody 5th Ward" for the knife fights every night and general bawdiness — a lot like The Badlands in North Philadelphia for police today.*

was pretty tattered around the edges. Isadore Rugowitz was the biggest culprit, turning big old houses into one-room apartments where he collected cash rent on Saturday night. Charlie suggested to the mayor's wife at an Historical Commission meeting that old Ruggie was wired to City Hall. Mrs. Dilworth took great umbrage to this, gave Charlie a stern whatfor, but promised to look into it. The "wires" were cut, and Ruggie was stopped at the southeast border.

A little earlier, under the strong leadership of Judge Edwin O. Lewis, the Independence National Historical Park was created and several blocks were cleared and landscaped in typical urban renewal style of the time. Judge Lewis was both creator and de-

stroyer, lived to his late nineties and sent a lot of buildings to the brick pile before his death. But his demolition revived hope for Washington Square East, the common designation for this area.

Charlie suggested "Society Hill" to city officials, resurrecting a name given to the area earlier but that no one had used in ages. It originated after a shipload of mechanics, members of the very unglamorous Free Society of Traders chartered in London by William Penn, arrived in 1682 to carve a new capital out of raw forest. Led by Nicholas More, a practitioner of physick, they had the skills needed to build the new settlement. Apparently they didn't have the financial savvy to become profitable and went bankrupt.

Before they did, they managed to clear and settle this land; and they were on a hill if you look at the elevation from the river caves where the first arrivals lived — so logically it was referred to as "the Society Hill."

With an old name and new vision, the brave and foolish in the late 50's and early 60's dared to begin what is now a model for urban redevelopment.

*(To be continued)*

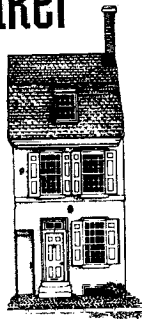


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## Society Hill's Little-Known Historic Synagogues

by Bernice Hamel

*This issue of The Reporter reintroduces a series of architectural "profiles" of important buildings in our neighborhood*

*Crew from Joseph Milano & Co., contractor, restoring stained glass at B'nai Abraham*



Photo: Michael Stern, Preservation Alliance

Society Hill is rich in historic religious buildings, some we have visited and supported over the years — as “good neighbors” rather than worshippers — while others we have barely noticed. Nevertheless, we all surely recognize that a religious building is more than a collection of bricks, stones and glass: it is a window into the heart and history of a community. A walk through our own little corner of the world reveals many such windows.

This article highlights two neighborhood synagogues (shuls) which you have probably passed countless times: Vilna Shul and Congregation B'nai Abraham. Within the last ten years the Rabbis Menachem Schmidt and Shraga Sherman, religious leaders of both congregations and co-leaders of Lubavitch House in Center City, together have re-created a vibrant Jewish community — providing daily services, classes and programs for people of all ages at both sites.

### Vilna Shul

On Pine Street (between 5th and 6th) there is a brick rowhouse with a stained-glass Star of David above its front door. Have you ever wondered about its origins? Are you at all curious to know if the building supports a viable congregation? In fact, this building is the home of a rare institution: one of the few remaining Orthodox synagogues in Center City, and a testament to the history of Jewish people in Philadelphia.

Between the 1890s and 1930s, Jewish immigrants followed their old-world tradition of converting homes to houses of worship. The brick building at 509 Pine Street was built as a single-family residence sometime between 1809-1816. But by the time of its conversion to a shul in 1922, the interior had been so thoroughly reworked that a congregant could have believed he was back in Europe.

In the early part of this century there were shuls on just about every corner in the Fifth Ward (Society Hill), as this was the most Jewish part of town. Over time, as neighborhoods have changed, nearly all of them have been reconverted back to private homes. In Center City only Vilna remains.

Enter and you'll find yourself transported to central Europe in a sanctuary that reflects the decorative traditions brought by immigrants from Vilna, Lithuania. Its entryway leads into a two-story temple with all original details: pews, balcony, “bimah” (platform where the Torah is read) and

*For mid-May or early June, we are planning a reception to show off these buildings. Neighbors of all religions are encouraged to attend.*

*More information in the next REPORTER.*

wooden Ark. Two historic murals decorate the walls, similar to the way paintings adorned walls of Lithuanian synagogues.

Today Vilna has a mix of young and old worshippers, with about 40-50 people showing up on any typical Friday night and Saturday: a few old-timers plus a contingent of young, Jewish professionals and students. It is a dedicated but small congregation, and so its limited resources are obvious. The building is in serious need of repair. Sadly the stained-glass Star of David above the front door was deteriorated to the point that it was removed and is currently awaiting restoration.

### B'nai Abraham

The striking Byzantine facade of B'nai Abraham synagogue at 521-527 Lombard Street cannot be ignored. Thousands of Jewish Philadelphians have their roots here, as B'nai Abraham was the center of Jewish life in South Philadelphia and Society Hill in the early part of this century. During the reign of Alexander II in Russia (1855-1881), Russian Jews suffered many atrocities and more than one million fled the “pogroms” in search of America's promise of religious liberty and freedom from persecution. By the 1870s, tens of thousands had arrived in Philadelphia.

An Orthodox congregation purchased the large old church at 521-527 Lombard Street in 1885 and adapted the building to its needs. For its first five years, this congregation had no rabbi, as it followed the tradition of every man age thirteen and above being able to lead services.

### “Rabbi Levinthal's Shul”

Eventually it elected Baer Levinthal as its rabbi in 1891, and he became so respected that he soon became the Chief Rabbi of Philadelphia. The synagogue was known then simply as “Rabbi Levinthal's Shul”.

The present structure was dedicated in 1910. Its design has been attributed to blueprints by Charles Lewis Bolton, AIA, a well-known architect who had designed more than 500 religious buildings in the United States.

*Continued on the next page*

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## Historic Synagogues

***"You don't have to be Orthodox (or Jewish, for that matter) to appreciate the cultural legacies of these synagogues, as they reflect the heritage of many of our neighbors."***

However, the Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects attributes the project to Barnet J. Medoff, an architect whose practice was largely confined to residential and commercial commissions for Philadelphia's Jewish community. The scale of the building and similarities of construction between B'nai Abraham and other projects designed by Bolton suggest the possibility of collaboration between these two architects.

### Fire and rededication

A fire in 1926 destroyed much of the synagogue, including its Russian "onion" atop the building, but within a year, in 1927, the building was rededicated.

The synagogue's dazzling facade was purposefully designed to incorporate Moorish, Roman, Jewish and American elements so as to express the collective history of the Jewish people.

The first synagogue certified by Philadelphia's Historical Commission, it features a distinctive design element: a pair of beautiful "rose windows" in the front and rear walls, named for their shape, not their color. Its grand, two-level main sanctuary, seating some 1,400 people, is a vision to behold — in spite of its vast need of restoration.

### Tour These Shuls With Us

We think you'll be intrigued by these two religious sites in our community. So for mid-May or early June, we are planning a reception to show off these buildings. Society Hill neighbors of all religions are encouraged to attend this event. Look for more information in the next REPORTER. Meanwhile, Rabbi Aryeh Wuensch, a relatively new arrival at B'nai Abraham, has offered to conduct personally guided tours for Society Hill neighbors. He can be reached directly at 627-3123.

Remember those ads that said "you don't have to be Jewish to enjoy rye bread?" Well, you don't have to be Orthodox (or Jewish, for that matter) to appreciate the cultural legacies of these synagogues, as they reflect the heritage of many of our neighbors.

For more information about how you can help support these buildings — directly or through the Historic Religious Properties Program of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia — please contact Bernice Hamel at 925-3285.

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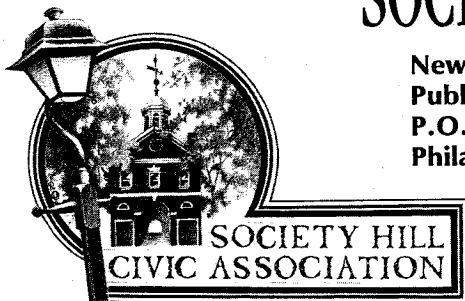
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