

SOCIETY HILL

Reporter

www.societyhillcivic.org

Doing Good in the Neighborhood

BY MARTHA LEVINE



Happy New Year!

JOIN TODAY

Without membership dues, SHCA would cease to function. Protect your neighborhood and your real estate investment by becoming a member or by renewing your current membership. See the form on page 28 or renew online at www.societyhillcivic.org.

Who cares about and values a neighborhood more than the people who live there?

Many people move to Society Hill for its historic character and its “village like” ambiance — truly a village right in the middle of a large city. It is a family neighborhood “without the hustle bustle of Rittenhouse Square,” as one young new homeowner recently observed. Although we have our share of highrises, most buildings are human scale, and this is why people chose to live here.

How SHCA Serves the Community

Did you know that the Society Hill Civic Association (SHCA) provides valuable services for all who live here? Society Hill is a desirable place to live and work, but we lack some needed city services. Over the last 20 years, funded by neighbor membership dues and donations, SHCA has created exceptional quality of life programs and services to fill that void. Without these, our quality of life would be compromised.

Weekly Sidewalk Sweeping: For over 20 years, we have hired Center City District crews to sweep our sidewalks on trash collection days, paid for by SHCA membership funds. This is not a city service — SHCA pays the bill. Without this, our sidewalks would be littered with debris.

Weekly Graffiti Removal: Starting several years ago, to rid ourselves of unsightly graffiti, we hired Todd Kelley and his team to remove graffiti and stickers from poles, mailboxes, trashcans, etc.

Graffiti is unsightly and a blight on a neighborhood. Graffiti that is not removed quickly invites more graffiti.

Fix the Brix: In 2009, to make our uneven sidewalks safer to navigate, we established a subsidy program that inspires owners to level their front sidewalks by

reimbursing them for 40 percent of the cost, up to \$400. Over 200 households have taken advantage of this program, but we have many more to reach. This helps prevent trip and falls. The city has no program to level sidewalks.

Tree Tenders: To deal with dead or overgrown trees, we established a new subsidy program that offers an incentive for homeowners to remove dead trees, plant new trees, and prune overgrown trees. We offer 50 percent of the cost up to a cap.

Franklin Lights Replacement Project:

Through fundraising efforts, we raised \$600,000 in 2006-07 to replace all of our 500 Franklin Lights with upgraded models for pedestrian safety and a more brightly lit streets.

Reporter Newsletter: We publish this informative 32-page national-award-winning newspaper which is hand delivered to every household and condominium regardless of membership.

Weekly E-Newsletter: Emailed to over 1500 households on request, the e-newsletter is filled with important news and timely events in the area.

Grants Program: In Spring 2019, SHCA started to distribute mini-grants, averaging \$5,000 each, to area nonprofits. Awardees and 11 projects are detailed in the September/October 2019 *Reporter*.

Washington Square: SHCA supports maintenance of this wonderful oasis, one of five squares in William Penn’s original plan for Philadelphia.

List of Contractors: Free on request for current members, SHCA provides a 14-page list of contractors of all types, all recommended by neighbors.

Welcome Basket Program: SHCA provides a welcome gift to new first-time home owners in Society Hill — a basket filled with fresh foods, neighborhood information, and many gift certificates, all generously donated by local businesses and cultural organizations. Approximately 40-45 baskets are presented by appointment and a personal visit each year.

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Support at City Hall



Thanks to the support of a petition signed by 270 people and the presence of over 40 residents at City Hall, the remapping portion of the SHCA Master Plan was voted out of the Rules Committee on December 4. Read more on Page 3.

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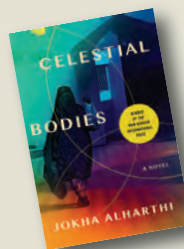
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SOCIETY HILL

Reporter

**NUSA
Award-Winning
Newsletter
2014 thru
2019**

Editor in Chief

Sandra Rothman

Columnists

Marilyn Appel
Claire Batten
Jane Biberman
Claudia Carabelli
Al Cavaleri
Matt DeJulio
Mike Harris
Martha Levine
Sandra Rothman
Larry Spector
Kelsey White, Keri White
Richard De Wyngaert

Contributors

Kayla Anthony, Mike Harris,
Fred Manfred,
Carolyn Stanish

Graphic Design

judy@parallel-design.com

Press Release Liaison

c/o Matt DeJulio
mattdejulio@aol.com

Advertising Manager

William Jantsch
wmjantsch@hotmail.com

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Society Hill Civic Association

P. O. Box 63503
Philadelphia, PA 19147
Tel. 215-629-1288

Website

Find past issues in color
at www.societyhillcivic.org.

The views set forth in the opinion articles are the views of the authors and are not necessarily those of SHCA.

Submissions

If you have news that would be of interest to Society Hillers, email Sandra Rothman at sandra.rothman@aol.com. Materials must be submitted in writing and include the name of a contact person. Edited submissions will be considered for publication if space permits. Letters to the Editor must be signed, with contact information.

SHCA Mission Statement

The aims and purposes of SHCA are: to promote the improvement of the Society Hill area of Philadelphia, including its cultural, educational and civic activities, and the preservation and restoration of its historic buildings; to represent the residents of Society Hill in matters affecting the City of Philadelphia generally and Society Hill in particular; and to interpret the value and significance of Society Hill to the public.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY LARRY SPECTOR

A Mission With Purpose

Over the last several weeks, SHCA has been involved in activities going straight to the heart of our mission.

We sponsored Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in showcasing its magnificent choir, as it inspired 15,000 passing Philly marathoners with glorious gospel singing on a cold, damp Sunday morning. Check out the fantastic press coverage for Mother Bethel and SHCA on the front page of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and elsewhere posted on our website, www.societyhillcivic.org.

We had one of our two annual Clean-Up Days. Thanks to Susan Burt Collins, Joe Dillon and all the volunteers they enlisted for clean-up duty.

Because of Claudia Carabelli and Bob Curley's Tree Tenders crew, we maintained a steady pace of reimbursing members for planting new trees.

Master Plan Comes Before Rules Committee

We capped years of hard work by Mary Purcell, Paul Boni, Rosanne Loesch and other members of our Master Plan Committee when Mary and I testified about our proposed Master Plan before the Rules Committee of City Council. Key elements had been opposed by the Planning Commission and criticized in the press. The unfair claim was that we were engaged in "exclusionary zoning" because we insisted on height limits and opposed one-size-fits-all zoning measures that do not account for the unique, historic fabric of our neighborhood.

Supported by over 40 residents who attended the December 4 hearing, buoyed with a petition signed by over 270 people and stewarded skillfully by Councilman Mark Squilla, we finally achieved enactment of the two essential elements of our Master Plan:

- An "overlay" that would limit building height between 2nd and 4th Streets on Walnut, retain parking minimums for multi-family developments in Society Hill, and prevent commercial uses that would have been allowed if bills to discourage demolition of dilapidated historic properties had been applied here;
- A remapping of numerous lots in Society Hill to make sure that they had a zoning classification conforming with the way they are currently used.

Thanks to Martha Levine, 57 block coordinators and everyone who made or responded to the call for support of our Master Plan legislation.

Bicycle Lane Delineator Posts

We met with officials of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia and Philadelphia's Office of Transportation Infrastructure and Sustainability (OTIS) about the absence of bicycle delineator posts on corners of Spruce and Pine Streets east of 8th Street, as compared to the west. We agreed that OTIS could conduct a pilot project to test an as-yet-unspecified alternative intersection safety measure that might satisfy concerns about both bike safety and the practicality of delineators.

I, for one, learned that the press is to be dealt with very carefully and that we should not be surprised by misleading characterizations of our positions. While others are free to criticize, we must remain intent on doing what we believe is right for our neighborhood. That is exactly what we will do.


Larry Spector is an attorney handling business disputes and related litigation. He has lived in Society Hill since 1976, married, and raised two daughters here with wife, Ann.



SHCA President
Larry Spector

My best wishes for a peaceful, happy and healthy New Year.

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2020 Washington Square Affair

Dedicated to Maintenance, Beautification and Restoration of Washington Square

It is with great anticipation that we look forward to the Washington Square Affair 2020 on Wednesday, June 3, from 6 to 9 p.m., under the tent in Washington Square.

Invitations will go out in early March, or you can go to www.society-hillcivic.org and sign up in advance. As in 2018, we expect the affair to be a sellout.

The Patron Party will be held on Wednesday, May 13th from 6 to 8 p.m. at the penthouse apartment of Zoe Pappas, hosted by Zoe and her daughter Aleni Pappas.



2018 Washington Square Affair

At the Affair itself, area restaurants will supply their delicious food and drink! Profits from this Affair go to the ongoing

improvement of the Square. A percentage of this year's proceeds will be used to develop a plan for the somewhat neglected Rose Garden, 451 Locust Street, which is also within our Society Hill borders.

This winter you will see the pruning of the tree canopy, which in turn will let in more sun and help the grass to grow and gardens prosper. Much work has been put into the Square over the past several years, and we are grateful to Sherley Young, Fred Manfred and their host of volunteers for the current improvements.



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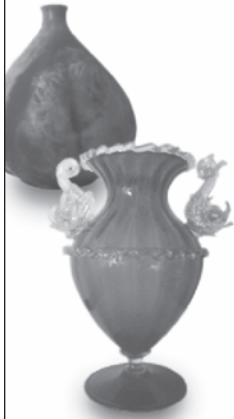
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TREE TENDERS

BY CLAUDIA CARABELLI

Plan for Greener Days

With a winter chill in the air and the chance of snow always on the horizon, it's the perfect time to plan for greener days. Society Hill Tree Tenders has some helpful information to share.

Who Are We?

The Society Hill Tree Tenders are just one of many Tree Tenders groups that are active throughout Philadelphia. We're an all-volunteer organization that works under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS). Most of us have taken the tree tender and pruning classes that PHS offers, and we abide by all their rules and regulations.

What Do We Do?

We **plant trees** in our neighborhood twice a year — spring and fall — that we acquire for free through PHS. This requires outreach to neighbors ahead of time to get a planting application completed and submitted. Empty tree pits have to be surveyed beforehand to be sure they're large enough and have had stumps removed. An arborist makes suggestion for species appropriate for each site. Owners must commit to watering the tree and caring for the tree bed by weeding and mulching.

We do **periodic pruning of the trees** we plant, unless owners opt out, and of trees we have not planted, with the owner's written permission. We're not

a substitute for a professional arborist, as we are only permitted to prune branches we can reach with both feet on the ground. No ladders allowed. We're happy to provide names of arborists who work in our area, should you require services beyond what we can provide.

Broken branch removal has become an ongoing task since the bike lanes were switched. Those trees that grew low over parked cars are taking a hit from delivery trucks. A torn branch can damage the tree. Let us know if you see one, so we can prune it properly.

We're always happy to **answer questions** you may have about your trees or refer you to someone who can answer your questions.

How Do We Help With the Cost?

Through the generosity of SHCA, we are able to offer subsidies to help defray some of the costs for you. This subsidy applies only to curbside street trees permanently planted in the ground. If you're not already a SHCA member, be sure to join to save even more money.

- **Tree Pruning:** We'll reimburse up to 50 percent of the total cost for a maximum of \$300 for members and \$200 for nonmembers.

- **Removal of a dead tree and re-planting a new one:** You can collect up to 50 percent of the cost for a total of \$500 for members and \$400 for non-members.

What Can You Do To Help?

It truly takes a village to keep Society Hill green and beautiful. Here's what you can do:

- Take care of the trees you have by watering, pruning and keeping the tree pit mulched and weed-free.
- Reach out to any neighbors with an empty pit and encourage them to have us plant a tree for them.
- Let us know if you see a tree that is dead or in need of pruning. Provide the address and we will inform the owner of available services.
- Go to www.societyhillcivic.org to make a contribution through SHCA to the Tree Tenders. We can always use new tools, safety vests, mulch and trash bags.
- Make a contribution to PHS to help pay for new trees at www.phsonline.org.

Questions? Suggestions? Want to join the Tree Tenders?

Contact co-chairs Bob Curley or Claudia Carabelli through SHCA Administrator Matt De Julio: MattDeJulio@aol.com.

DOING GOOD IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

continued from Page 1

Zoning and Historic Preservation Committee: Through this committee, we advocate for the preservation and restoration of our historic buildings, represent the community's interests in zoning issues, monitor residential and commercial applications for zoning variances, and report to the board on issues that affect the historic integrity of our neighborhood.

Fall and Spring Clean Up Day: A neighborhood-wide effort to remove debris and leaves from our sidewalks and streets of with the help of city trucks.

Parking Lot: SHCA leases a parking lot on Front Street near Lombard. The parking lot committee oversees its operation and makes monthly as well as short-term parking spaces available for members of the community at lower rates.

6th Police District: Representing our neighborhood, we attend monthly police meetings to track any crime or other problems in our area as well as support our police force.

Martha Levine is an SHCA Vice President.

More Big Bellies: In response to many neighbors' requests for much-needed trash receptacles, SHCA purchased three Big Belly Solar compactors with foot pedals for the following locations: 4th and Lombard, 3rd and Pine, and 5th and Addison Streets. The Sanitation Department had no extra units for us.



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Quality

Our recommendations are based on observations and a consultative approach that identifies your needs and expectations, tempered with our concern to maintain and improve the health, appearance and safety of your landscape. Custom pruning achieves the landscape appearance you desire while being performed to the specifications of proper arboricultural practices. Plant Health Care services include a thorough inspection before any

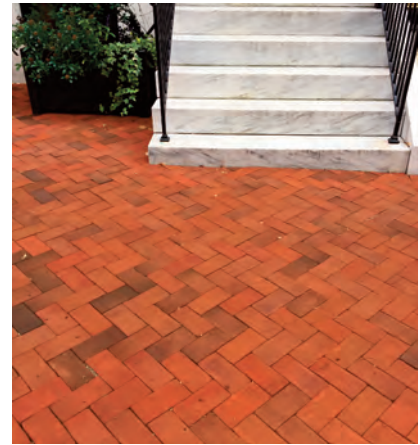
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Fix Your Bricks

Brick sidewalks in Society Hill and downtown Philly are being renovated to provide a smooth, safe walking surface for pedestrians. We have experience and have repaired many sidewalks and patios in the city. The upheaval caused by tree roots can often be carefully corrected without removing or killing trees. Call McFarland to inquire about fixing your bricks.

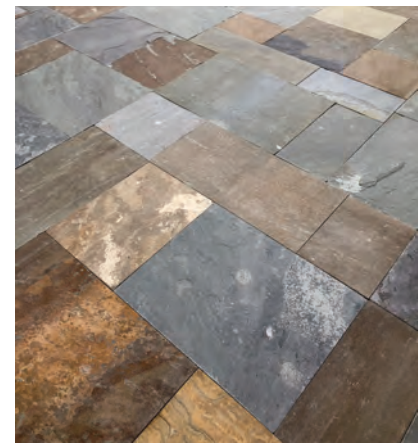
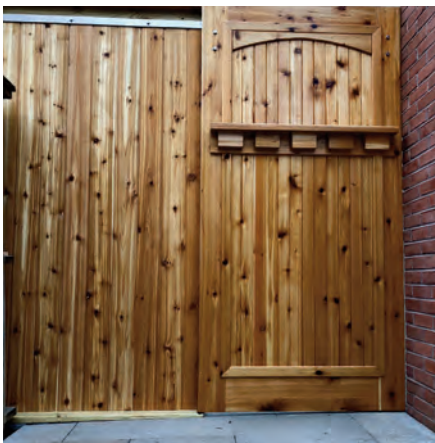


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KEEPING POSTED

BY AL CAVALARI

The Private Mailing Card

This old postcard is a rare find for three reasons. First, it's in good condition. Second, it gives us a glimpse of Chestnut Street in front of Independence Hall, before the neighborhood across the street was razed to create the park we have today. Third, it is a Private Mailing Card (PMC).

History of Postal Cards

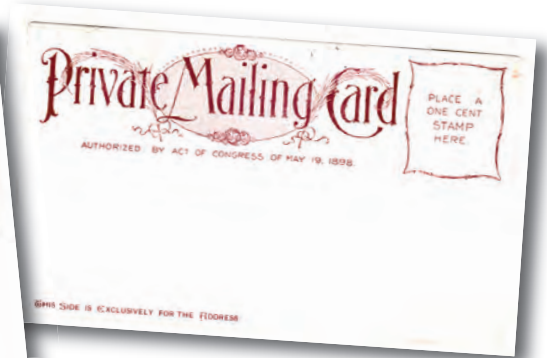
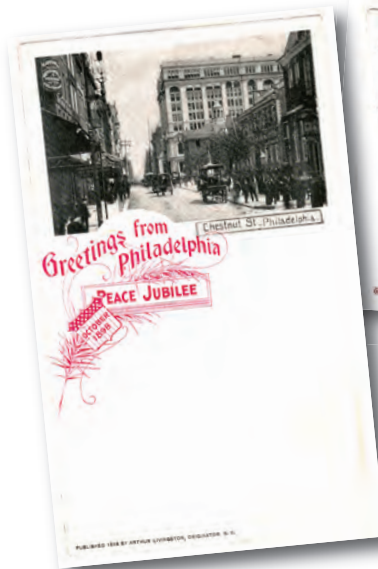
PMCs had just been authorized by Congress on May 19, 1898. This card was published soon after to commemorate the 1898 Peace Jubilee celebrating the end of the Spanish-American War. Until this point, only the U.S. government was allowed to publish "postal cards." Those are the same cards with the postage printed on them that you can buy from any post office today. Private publishers had been allowed to print postcards, but they could not use the words "postal cards," and their cards cost twice as much to mail as those published by the government: two cents instead of one cent.

The new PMCs represented an early step in the development of the postcard and are somewhat scarce. The new PMC cost the same one cent to mail as the government postals. They had to be marked with the phrase "Private Mailing Card, Authorized by Act of Congress of May 19, 1898," and they had to be slightly smaller than the government postal cards. Messages were not allowed on the address side. The image on this card is kept small so that the sender has some space to write a message.

Peace Jubilee

Philadelphia's Peace Jubilee, one of many across the nation, ran from October 25 to 27, 1898. For the celebration, Philadelphia was decorated in patriotic colors. A naval parade of warships took place on the Delaware River. A giant victory arch was built across Broad Street, which was lined with 13 ornately carved columns. The arch and columns were brightly illuminated at night.

Three different parades were held, including a military parade of 25,000 troops. The Rough Riders marched, as did the 9th Ohio Volunteers, a black regiment. President William McKinley attended. It does not seem to have been pleasant duty for the troops — who spent time in the rain getting here, were ill-quartered in old factory buildings, were poorly fed and had to march a seven-mile parade route. Some anti-war groups protested the event.



This Private Mailing Card published in 1898 shows Chestnut Street in front of Independence Hall, before the buildings across the street were torn down in order to create the park we have today.

Splendid Little War

Called a "splendid little war" by Secretary of State John Hay, the Spanish-American War lasted about 100 days. American battle deaths were low, at 385 mortalities. Eleven days after it began, an American squadron under the command of Commodore George Dewey destroyed the Spanish fleet at the Battle of Manila Bay in a matter of hours. Dewey commanded the action from his flagship USS Olympia, which may be visited at our Independence Seaport Museum on Columbus Boulevard.

Some writers say it was an unnecessary and ill-conceived war, brought on by yellow journalism produced in the circulation competition between Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*. The sinking of the Battleship Maine and the loss of over half its crew in Havana was a catalyst in creating the conflict because it was blamed on Spanish sabotage. There was, however, a conflicting opinion at the time that held the sinking was caused by a spontaneous fire in the ship's own coal supply. A naval investigation in 1974 supported that theory.

The war ended the Spanish Empire, which had lasted 400 years. The U.S. gained the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico. The event helped reunite the country after the division caused by the Civil War, as former Confederate and Union troops — as well as black troops — served on the same side. It transformed American foreign policy to a new level of global influence.

It also resulted in this wonderful historical artifact that I am able share with you.

Al Cavalari is a certified member of the Association of Philadelphia Tour Guides. For a day job, he operates the Flag Guys®, a flag business in upstate New York. Send comments to Al at flagguys@aol.com.



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STEPPING BACK IN TIME

BY SANDRA ROTHMAN

Immigrants Banked On It

Several years ago, I wrote a series of articles about my son's ancestors, whose arrival here coincided with the birth and growth of Philadelphia's Jewish Quarter. Sharp-eyed history sleuths can still find remnants of this period scattered throughout our neighborhood.

I was particularly intrigued with the paper trail left behind by Alexander's great-great grandfather Abram Trachtenberg, who in 1882 escaped Russia's pogroms to arrive alone in America with two dollars in his pocket. How, I wondered, did an illiterate 16-year-old-boy navigate a new land without money, family friends, or fluency in English?

An important clue surfaced when I discovered, on Ancestry.com, four transactions Abram had made with an immigrant bank in our community over a fifteen-year period. As I dug deeper, I learned how important this banking system was for the newcomer to America. Not only did it provide Abram with the initial capital to start his own buttonhole manufacturing company, but it aided him in eventually reconnecting with some of his family. We had at least two immigrant banks in and near Society Hill.

Serving Their Countrymen

Unlike traditional institutions, immigrant banks were usually individual proprietorships that were not incorporated or well capitalized. Their primary business revolved around where they were housed — economic entities such as groceries, saloons, bakeries or even peddlers' carts.

These casual banks were essential for first-generation immigrants. Not only did bankers speak their language and understand their culture, the convenient evening and weekend hours gave laborers some welcome flexibility. Banks kept deposits; facilitated money transfers abroad; wrote letters and received mail; and provided lending and notary services. Bankers often helped the uneducated or semi-literate navigate the world of officialdom, offering legal advice and related aid. Most notably, the majority of community banks acted as agents for steamship lines, simplifying the sale of tickets and arranging transport from Europe.

Because they were not subject to government oversight or regulation, owners were able to set lending terms, engage in speculative investments and offer non-interest-bearing accounts to customers. The lack of checks

and balances often resulted in catastrophic losses for the depositors in the event a bank failed. Indeed, the banking panic of the 1930s led to the demise of most of these institutions.

An exception was the Rosenbluth Bank, which managed to survive by focusing on the sale of steamship tickets for immigrants. Since the era of the Depression, it has devoted itself entirely to the travel business. Today Rosenbluth is one of the world's leading travel agencies.



Blitzstein Bank

Walk to 4th and Lombard Streets, where Old Pine Community Center stands. Here, in 1919, Anna Blitzstein expanded the private bank she and her late husband, Marcus, founded several years after emigrating from Russia in 1888.

The original enterprise was run from their rowhouse at 431 S. 4th Street, on the corner where St. Peter's School playground now sits. The Blitzsteins initially ran a successful tobacco shop from the three-story brick home they shared with their six children. Friends who respected their business acumen asked Marcus and Anna to manage money for them, and soon the couple began to offer services more widely to their compatriots. They also started to finance the sale of steamship tickets as passage agents, primarily for the American Hamburg Line. The business prospered, and M. L. Blitzstein & Co. was formally established in 1891.

Philadelphia's First Woman Banker

Anna Galanter Blitzstein is widely regarded as Philadelphia's first female banker. She was a strong-minded and resourceful woman, respected for her wisdom, business judgment and charitable initiatives. This is all the more amazing since Anna picked up the totality of

A walking tour through local history

M.L. Blitzstein & Co., 4th and Lombard Streets, circa 1959, courtesy of Urban Archives, Temple University



Anna Blitzstein (1854 to 1929), courtesy of Laura Goldsmith

continued on page 13



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STEPPING BACK IN TIME

continued from page 11

her education sitting in the back of her younger brother’s classroom in a little *shtetl* on the outskirts of Odessa.

The first decade of her marriage was difficult. The young couple constantly moved from town to town and country to country. Sadly, during this time they buried five of their 11 children, and a sixth one died in Philadelphia. Adversity, however, did not break her.

A 43-year-old widow in 1897, Anna took control of the business and expanded it into a full-fledged immigrant bank that also dealt in matters of foreign exchange. It’s notable that, unlike most of these institutions, Blitzstein’s offered customers two percent interest on checking accounts and four percent on savings. The bank assumed a central role in the area’s commercial life and had more than 6,000 depositors when it suddenly closed its doors on December 23, 1930. To their credit, the Blitzstein family, who were hit hard financially by the collapse, managed to pay off 52 percent of their depositors’ claims by 1937.

Anna died a few months before the bank failed. She was given a public funeral at nearby Congregation Keshet Israel, a rare honor for a woman during those years. Notable Blitzsteins were Anna’s daughter Rose, Philadelphia’s first female obstetrician-gynecologist, and her grandson, renowned composer Marc Blitzstein.

Reuniting Family and Friends

Of the numerous steamship agents and immigrant banks in Philadelphia, only three kept thorough records that have survived and are now housed

in the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center at Temple University. Unlike passenger lists, which document an immigrant’s entry into port, these ledgers record details such as the name of the purchaser, the individual(s) for whom tickets were purchased, the name of the steamship line, and fees and travel itinerary. These agents were the Blitzstein Steamship Company, the Rosenbaum Steamship Company and the Lipshutz/Peoples Bank.

As luck would have it, Abram Trachtenberg bought four tickets from the Rosenbaum Steamship Company whose building still stands at 605 S. 3rd Street but is now a cigar store.

At the time of the first transaction in 1896, Abram was married and the 30-year-old father of five children. By the time he purchased his last two tickets in 1911, his circumstances had changed dramatically. Not only had his first wife died; he was remarried with a combined total of 15 children to support. It couldn’t have been easy to squirrel away the nickels and dimes needed to bring his four sisters here from Odessa.

I’ve come to realize that this was the initial bargain made by many foreign households. Family chipped in to send the first member abroad with the understanding that they would eventually return the favor. The immigrant banking system helped many like Abram find the means to both build a life and reconnect with loved ones.



Advertisement for the Rosenbaum Steamship Company, courtesy of Temple University Special Collections

For More Information

Google *Mark the Music: The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein* by Eric A. Gordon and *An Immigrant Bank in Philadelphia Serving Russian Jews: The Blitzstein Bank (1891–1930)* by William Moskoff and Carol Gayle. Access steamship records at <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/custom/steamshipagents>.

Visit the *Reporter’s* archives at www.societyhillcivic.org/about/publications/newsletter-archive/ to access a four-part series on Philadelphia’s Jewish Quarter: May/June; July/August; September/October 2013 and January/February 2014.

ACME MARKET IMPROVEMENTS



This group is reviewing architectural drawings for improvements to our 5th Street ACME market, which will include a wine and beer section plus seating. The team is hopeful that remodeling will begin within the next 12 to 18 months.

Left to Right: Danielle Cremer, Construction and Design for Albertsons Companies; Jim Perkins, ACME President and Executive Vice President of Operations for Albertsons Companies; Joe Hultz, District Manager; and Bill Crosby, Vice President of Operations, ACME.



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The 2019 Powel House Annual Holiday Party



Katie Alles, Carla Grasser, Kayla Anthony
(Executive Director of PhilaLandmarks)



Guests sing carols in the front hallway...



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The 2019 Hill-Physick House Annual Wine & Beer Fundraiser



David Wolfsohn, Linda Skale, Barbara Oldenhoff
and **Ted Robb**



James Dunn, Hannah Kim, Marc Kittner and
Ashley Hulsey



Claudia Carabelli and
April Thomas-Jones

GET INVOLVED

Help Support Starr Garden Renovation

Our councilman Mark Squilla (shown here) supports Starr Garden, Philadelphia's first playground located at 6th and Lombard Streets. In fact, he funded a design process for a new park layout that was completed by a talented team in collaboration with Starr Garden Neighbors & Friends and other members of the community.

A complete park renovation is an achievable goal if there's community support. Let's come together to make historic Starr Garden as beautiful as our Society Hill neighborhood and have fun in the process! Join us for a strategy meeting on January 13. Contact Carolyn Stanish, Starr Garden Neighbors & Friends, cs@carolynstanish.com, 609-685-4355 for details.



Councilman Mark Squilla is flanked by neighbors at Starr Garden.

WELCOME BASKETS

BY MARTHA LEVINE

A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words...

Pictured here are some of the new, first-time Society Hill home and condo owners who received a Welcome Basket in 2019. We are seeing many new arrivals from the Philadelphia suburbs, especially empty-nesters who move here to be close

to great restaurants, theaters, museums and other attractions. Other newcomers have relocated for their jobs from other states. We welcome them all to our neighborhood. If you are a new owner, and would like a basket presented to you,

by appointment, please let us know by contacting Martha Levine at marthalev6@gmail.com. To see a list of contributors to the Welcome Baskets, please go to www.societyhillcivic.org and click on Welcome Baskets.



Alexa & Terry Ragsdale and family



Laura & Grant Rawdin and family



Jim Dolan



Lexi & Aaron Peskin



Paul & Annamarie Jaskot



Robyn Kobil



Sabrina Leaman



Stephen & Christine Johnson and family

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BY MARTHA LEVINE

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Amy Agger



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OUR CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

BY SANDRA ROTHMAN

Birds of a Feather

Recently, while driving back from Vermont, I cranked up the sound of Van Morrison belting out the lyrics, “the bird that’s on the wing, and he’s flying free... he can hear the sound of home endlessly” to the delight of my companions. There was much rhythmic head bobbing and occasional harmonizing, as we flew down the turnpike headed towards their beloved Venetian blinds in Society Hill.

The Backstory

When our 17-year-old Bichon died, I was immediately struck by the silence that hung heavy in the air. It was something I couldn’t get used to, but I felt conflicted about getting a new dog. The carpets had been replaced; days were magically freed when they didn’t revolve around Coco’s needs; and facing the elements became a choice, rather than a necessity.

I found my thoughts returning to my childhood pet — a cheerful, portable parakeet who filled the house with chatter. And so, eventually...

The Girls Arrived

Robyryda and Chichi came together from the pet shop, each with a distinct personality. The first is lovely, elegant and reserved, while the other is sly and crafty. Two years later, I added a third to the little flock. Sunny lived up to her name — a sweet, lively creature.

I’m more interested in raising actual birds than tamed pets, so I let them fly free. They depart the cage together at dawn and dusk, much as they would in nature, take a few loops around the room and return. Their territory is small and fixed, and they rarely wander off course. If this happens, the girls employ a kind of sonar technique with their cage mates to find their way back to the Venetian blinds, a favorite retreat. Perhaps you’ve passed our home on South 2nd Street and heard animated chirping coming from the window.

Their bird nature constantly intrigues me. I noticed that they have excellent eyesight and an uncanny ability to read



Robyryda, Sunny and Chichi enjoy a beautiful Vermont day.



Chichi’s egg in contrast to Ukrainian pysanky.

human body language. When needs demand, I have to use all my stealth skills to close the top of the cage.

I’ve also observed that parakeets, which are prey animals, greet every new food, toy or person with suspicion. Indeed, poor little Sunny was initially subjected to days of shunning. The other two literally turned their backs on her until she was deemed safe.

A Sad Departure

This summer I saw another side of bird behavior. Sunny fell ill. A skilled avian vet tried his best and although the bird rallied, she wasn’t able to completely recover. Over the course of a few weeks as she faded away, Robyryda preened and occasionally fed Sunny beak to beak, as would a mother to her young.

The surviving two were subdued after Sunny’s death, yet I had been privy to

witness a determined push for life over the past several years.

Chichi’s Project

I deliberately chose to have same-gender birds since I did not want to fill the house with babies. Females can lay eggs without a male, but it’s not advised since they can become egg-bound. Because sunlight triggers ovulation, I was diligent about shutting blinds early on spring and summer evenings, however, I failed to relay this information to Chichi.

Parakeets need cavities to mate and nest in — something that simulates the tree holes they favor in the wild. I discovered that there’s a small gap between the interior and exterior walls of my home. Somehow Chichi intuited a vulnerable point of entry and, with great determination, set about accessing the space.

We continuously played the excavation/repair game, but this past spring Chichi finally won. One morning I was startled to see her small head pop out of a hole in the wall. I quickly blocked access, but a potential nesting site must have sparked hormonal activity because days later a tiny infertile egg lay abandoned on the cage floor. Since a parakeet can produce between four to eight eggs in a clutch, it remains a mystery if any are still hidden.

Down the Line

It’s decidedly quieter without Sunny, as she was the singer in the family. So, I’m giving serious thought to adding a rosy Bourke parakeet to the mix. These fluffy pink birds are gentle and good-natured, and they coo on the wing. One would add a soothing, melodic tinkling to the soundtrack. Stay tuned!

Park, America!

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ON THE GO

BY KELSEY WHITE

A Weekend in Beantown

Despite being home to our rivals, the Patriots, Boston is a really great city with lots of character and wonderful people. It's quite similar to all of the best parts of Philadelphia, with some individualities that give it a very special identity.

This destination is easy and fairly economical to reach by plane; it's rarely more than a forty-five-minute flight. The layout of the city is user friendly and accessible — the public transit (T) is reliable and clean. Also, Boston has a vibrant restaurant scene with a range of interesting new concepts, like Japanese-Peruvian fusion. Excellent traditional cuisines like steakhouses and classic Italian are well represented. The city is scattered with intimate concert venues, theaters, markets and historical sites that are well worth seeing.

Boston is the ideal location for a long weekend getaway, at any time of year. Here's the scoop.

What to Do

If you've been to Boston before, chances are high that you've frequented The Freedom Trail. If not, it's certainly worth stopping at Boston Common and the State House. The park and Public Gardens are well kept and right in the middle of downtown, making for a lovely place to walk around, people-watch and absorb the essence of the city.

Another popular site is the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, similar in concept to the Barnes Museum, and home to a lovely indoor garden. Be sure to listen to the podcast *Last Seen* — about the 1990 Gardner Museum Heist — before you visit! The Boston Museum of Fine Arts is conveniently located near the Gardner Museum, so if you have a taste for art, check it out. The Boston Public Library is also a centrally located stop that has beautiful architecture and is near great stores and restaurants. It turns over exhibits often and always has an interesting collection.

If you're seeking something a bit more interactive than museums, Beacon Hill is an area very similar to Society Hill. You can wander around these smaller, historical streets and find interesting boutiques, restaurants and beautiful real estate. There's plenty of outside space in Boston, so carve out some time to meander on the path along the Charles River, where you can often observe iconic crews training. Along the Cambridge side of the Charles, there are tons of local restaurants and shops to check out. This contrasts with downtown proper, which features more commercial and higher-end shopping.

Depending on what time of year you're venturing to Boston, Fenway Park hosts some excellent events. The intimate ballpark setting makes for really special concert experiences, and there are lots of fun bars and restaurants in the surrounding blocks.

One of the best ways to spend a Sunday is by wandering around the South End open-air market. In the summer and spring SoWa (South of Washington) boasts a farmers' market with local vendors, bakers and breweries. During the holiday season, the market is moved indoors and is the ideal place for shopping with lots of local boutiques and artisanal cuisines. It is a cheerful atmosphere at any time of year.

What to Eat

Being a coastal city, seafood in Boston is a must-try. My favorite spot is Island Creek Oyster Bar (ICOB) — situated in an excellent location to walk around beforehand or afterwards. The chowder, scallops and lobster roll at ICOB are all fantastic. Boston is best known for the North End, which features hundreds of classic Italian restaurants. It's difficult to go wrong here, but some of my favorites are Strega and Mama Maria's. Typically, tourists opt to head to Mike's Pastry after a big meal, but I'd encourage you to head to Modern Pastry — its arguably more delicious and always has a shorter line. Other restaurant favorites include Ruka, Toscana and Abe & Louie's Steakhouse.

There's a new foodie haven located in the Fenway area called Time Out Market. Time Out started in Portugal, and it's a concept similar to our Reading Terminal Market. You can find 15 vendors of the top chefs and bartenders in Boston. Its accessible by public transit and offers a great atmosphere for a group.

Though Boston is just a quick jaunt up north, it offers a lot more than one may think. The food scene is diverse. There are plenty of sites to see, and lots of beautiful outdoor space. I implore you to look past your hatred of Boston sports teams and see it for more than just a Tom Brady Fan Cult — it truly offers all the necessities for a great vacation.

Kelsey White grew up in Society Hill and is a rising junior at Boston College, studying Communication and International Relations.



The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is similar in concept to the Barnes Museum.



The Time Out Market connects top chefs and bartenders with foodies.

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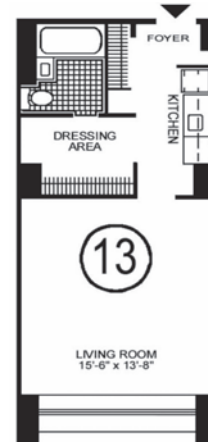
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ON OUR SHELF

BY VIKTORIA LANGE

Orbiting Relationships, Celestial Rhythms

The synopsis described on the inside cover of Jokha Alharthi's novel, *Celestial Bodies*, is fairly straightforward. According to the short blurb, readers are about to zoom into the lives of three sisters from a small village in Oman, an Arabic country in Western Asia, viewing life-cycle events through their eyes. It's notable that this is the 2019 International Booker Prize winner, as well as the very first novel by a female Omani author to be translated into English.

The reality of *Celestial Bodies* is that it unveils the perspectives of the aforementioned sisters, as well as three generations from the village of al-Awafi. In the opening pages we find a sprawling family tree that lists the cast of the book's characters, some who we will hear from directly in the ensuing pages and some who will be referred to in passing. Alharthi makes clear from the start to anyone unfamiliar with Omani custom that relationships are everything.

Indeed, it is in the exploring of these orbiting relationships that the novel gains an elliptical, yes, celestial, rhythm. Rather than a single plot, it is split into a series of short vignettes. The title of each section is the character from whose perspective the vignette is told. We experience the heartbreak, abandonment, marriages, births and deaths that perpetuate life in al-Awafi.

The plot is entirely character-driven, with the feeling of reading a book of related short stories rather than a forward-progressing narrative. This may be difficult for some; I struggled to gain footing in the very new-to-me setting and frequently flipped back to refer to the family tree. Yet, nearing the novel's conclusion, it becomes clearer that this is Alharthi's intention. These artfully constructed vignettes seem to accelerate

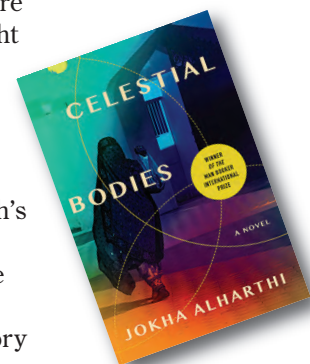
as readers advance, becoming shorter and more urgent, like the passing of space detritus caught in a planet's gravitational pull.

Curiously, the only character we hear from in the first person is Abdullah ibn Sulayman, who marries the oldest sister Mayya. The son of a wealthy, slave-holding merchant, Abdullah's introverted nature and poetic thought process magnify the generational changes in family life taking place in his village. A scene in which Abdullah recalls a harrowing childhood memory contrasts with a touching scene in which he blames himself for the abuse endured by his daughter at the hands of her fiancé.

The women of the book come across more opaquely. There are more of them, making their vignettes harder to track, plus their narratives are written in the third person. While we are able to track the sequence of Abdullah's life events through his own thoughts, we view the women of al-Awafi from a removed perspective. Perhaps this is a facet of the novel's translation into English, or perhaps it is Alharthi's original intention. I found myself yearning for more details of their lives, propelling me through the book to become more actively engaged in the village's gossip.

Therein lies both the novel's flaws and successes. Readers must doggedly comb their way through what at times can be dense information without a plot, yet the reward is also there: to arrive in a new culture and get swept away by its gravitational pull.

Richard De Wyngaert is the proprietor of Society Hill's only local, independently owned bookstore, Head House Books, located at 619 S. 2nd Street. Events Coordinator **Viktorija Lange** wrote this article.



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SOUTH STREET HEADHOUSE DISTRICT

BY KERI WHITE

Never Boring, Always Board

South Street Headhouse District (SSHD) has the perfect antidote to cabin fever this winter! Two new businesses have landed in the district, and both are centered around the latest trend in entertainment: board games. Both **Queen and Rook Café** and **The Philly Game Shop** are built on this “new-old” craze.

Board Game Cafe

Queen and Rook Café, located at 607 S. 2nd Street between South and Bainbridge, bills itself as a board game café. But it is a lot more, with a full bar featuring craft cocktails, wine, and beer on tap, canned or bottled; and a global, vegetarian, small-plates menu that serves up game-friendly bar snacks like nachos, mozzarella sticks, tempura, tacos and veggie sliders.

Local owners Edward Garcia and Jeannie Wong amassed over 1,200 games for the venture. The collection spans the classic to the contemporary, and games are curated by on-staff “gamekeepers” who function like sommeliers. They welcome guests; ask about their game experience and preferences; curate a selection for the table; and demonstrate and provide instruction as needed. Guests are also free to browse the collection and select their own games.

Garcia comments, “We’ve had such an incredibly warm welcome from the community that we’re just thrilled to be here. We are family friendly all day and adult friendly after about 8:30 p.m. That happened very organically, and it works really well for our guests.” The café has hosted birthday parties; knitting and book clubs; fundraisers for local schools and charities; “meet-ups” for various professional and social organizations — and they are seeing frequent repeat visitors.

Games are free to use Monday through Wednesday, but there is a \$7 fee Thursday through Sunday for hours of board games. There is no food or beverage minimum. The owners are extremely community oriented, with a commitment to source from local, women-owned and minority-owned businesses whenever possible. For more information, visit www.queenandrookcafe.com/.

Like Home, Only Better

Philly Game Shop, located at 519 S. 5th Street, is the brainchild of Taylor Jenkins. A former professor of political science, he left academia “because I needed more joy in my life. Board games seemed like a way to find that.” Jenkins,

in describing the shop, says “We are a game shop, but we are also an inclusive community space where people can gather to explore games, try them out, or book our private room for a game event. We welcome BYO food and beverage. We are also looking into potential partnerships with schools and other groups in the future. Our goal is to provide a cozy atmosphere — it’s like home, only better!”

Philly Game Shop recently hosted a beginners’ Dungeons & Dragons workshop. They intend to continue providing opportunities for instruction and connection over games. Jenkins continues, “I see playing a board game as the midpoint between reading a novel and online gaming. It’s more interactive than reading, and you have to be really present to play a board game. We see this trend emerging because, frankly, millennials are lonely! They sit home on their phones and lack human interaction. To play a board game, you have to put down your screen and connect with people. And we are here to make that happen.” Visit www.phillygameshop.com/ to learn more.

Mike Harris, SSHD Executive Director, is enthusiastic about both of the venues. He says, “These new businesses offer something different for the community — a fun, high-quality amenity that attracts a multi-generational clientele. They offer a fun alternative for family night out, date nights, large group gatherings, a place to go on a rainy or snowy afternoon, as well as great gift shopping. Both Queen and Rook Café and The Philly Game Shop are enlivening the area in a positive way. The owners are very committed to the neighborhood and are doing an excellent job reaching out to the community. By creating these types of destinations, we hope to continue improving the area and attracting more investment and engagement.”



THE PHILLY GAME SHOP

IN 2020

An update on Heirloom Market: Giant Foods opened its third of four new Philadelphia-area Heirloom Markets on November 15 in Northern Liberties. Next in line is the location at 201 South Street. The Giant Heirloom organization has received the final permits and hopes to open the flagship South Street store in May 2020.

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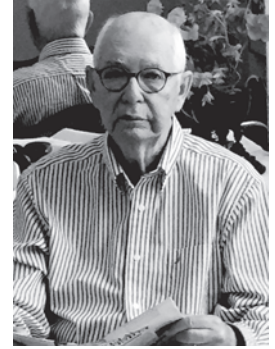
We offer our condolences to the family of **Donald Bean**, who died on November 9 of pneumonia at his home. He was 103 years old.

Donald graduated Lafayette College in 1937 and Harvard Law School in 1940. He had been a lawyer in Philadelphia for 64 years, then took continuing legal education courses into his 90s.

During World War II, Donald served as an ensign in the Navy and performed throughout the remainder of the war as an officer in charge of Navy gun crews on two U.S. merchant ships.

Donald was an early convert to the fitness culture. In 1957, when his wife gave birth to their third son, he took up jogging to increase his chances of seeing the boy reach adulthood. He continued jogging into his 70s, when he switched to walking, and he continued to walk daily until shortly before he died. At his death, his youngest son was 62.

His wife Fahnya died in 2013. He is survived by sons Henry, George and Donald Jr.; seven grandchildren; a great-granddaughter; and a sister.



Donald Bean, 1916-2019

We are sad to inform neighbors of the death of **Shirley Curtiss**, who passed away on October 26 after a long battle with Parkinson's Disease. She was almost 86 years old.

Shirley was originally from Harrisburg, Illinois. She completed her MBA at the University of Miami and then came to Philadelphia to study bassoon with Sol Schoenbach, principal bassoonist with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Shirley was the Principal Bassoon for the Pennsylvania Ballet for over 40 years.

She was, for many years, the driving force of the woodwind chamber music program at the

Settlement Music School. It marked Shirley's service as the founder and lead faculty member of their woodwind ensemble program by naming it after her. Throughout her life, she was a personal inspiration for generations of young musicians.

In 1962, Shirley married Sidney Curtiss, a viola player with the Philadelphia Orchestra. They both wanted to live in Philadelphia and were among the first pioneers to settle in Society Hill.

A memorial for Shirley will be held in the spring. Please share condolences at www.gangemifuneralhome.net.



Shirley Curtiss, 1933-2019

Harry Schwartz, 85, of Society Hill, a lawyer who served as a housing official and policy aide in the Carter administration and who later wrote groundbreaking tax law enabling historic preservation, died December 1, of congestive heart failure at home.

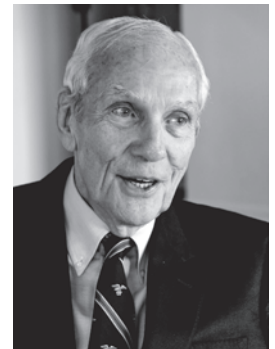
Harry was a nationally known expert on state tax incentives for the rehabilitation of historic buildings. He participated in the drafting of the Pennsylvania Historic Tax Credit Law and provided advice to other states on tax credits for historic preservation.

A Philadelphia native, Harry graduated from

Central High School in 1951, Harvard University in 1955 and the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1959. He began his career in 1960 as a clerk at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

A longtime resident of Society Hill, Harry was active in community affairs. From 1969 through 1976, he served as a member of the board of the Society Hill Civic Association. Later, he served on its committee for historic preservation.

He is survived by his wife, Marinda Kelley Schwartz; children Tony and Amanda; and two grandchildren.



Harry Schwartz, 1933-2019





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MEMBERSHIP REPORT

BY MATT DEJULIO

2020 Membership Drive Tops 600

By early December, over 620 Society Hill residents had already renewed their SHCA membership — slightly lower than the same time last year, which saw a total of 1,183. Winners of the restaurant certificates for those who renewed by December 31 will be announced in the March/April 2020 issue of the *Reporter*.

If you have delayed in sending in your renewal, or wish to join, please do so today. We welcome each of the over 3,600 households in our neighborhood to join SHCA. Your civic association helps protect your real estate investment by funding many of our improvement projects, as well as providing subsidies to neighbors who plant trees and fix their sidewalks. We help enhance your quality of life when we advocate on your behalf regarding zoning changes, real estate taxes, crime problems and traffic issues. All of this is accomplished through the hard work of our dedicated board of directors, committee members, block coordinators, and most importantly, your membership dues.

Without member dues, SHCA would cease to function. Protect your neighborhood and your real estate investment. Sign up today!

Email Mattdejulio@aol.com with questions or comments, which will be shared with our board members representing every quadrant in our unique, historic neighborhood.

Matt DeJulio is a retired publishing executive. He has served SHCA as its administrator since 2001.

EXERCISE & SOCIALIZE

The **Walkie/Talkies** meet at Three Bears Park, Delancey Street between 3rd and 4th Streets, on Tuesday morning at 8:15 a.m. for a one-hour stroll through our historic community. Anyone is welcome to participate in this non-stressful, one-hour exercise and socialize program.

“Philly Is Walking In The Park!” meets at the fountain in the center of Washington Square, 6th and Locust Streets, at 8 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for a half-hour, self-paced walk through our historic, beautiful park led by neighbor Dr. Lisa Unger. All are invited to join us.



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- Clean-Up Day
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- Social Events
- Property Taxes
- Fundraising
- Zoning & Historic Preservation
- 5th Street Development
- Local Crime Incidents and Alerts

Please return completed application to:

Society Hill Civic Association, P.O. Box 63503, Philadelphia, PA 19147

NIFTY NEIGHBORS IN MY OWN BACKYARD

BY JANE BIBERMAN

The Edelsteins: Staunch Society Hillers

Ever since they married in 1968, Fred and Karen Edelstein have lived in Society Hill. “We bought our first house in Society Hill in the spring of ’68,” says Karen. “Then we lived at 641 Addison for 15 years, 103 Pine for eight years, Independence Place for a year, and for the past 35 years, we’ve lived in Lawrence Court.”

“We’ve been to many places around the world, but clearly, we adore Society Hill,” says Fred. “Despite trying, we’ve only been able to move within six blocks. Life here is a delight.”

The couple has three children, all of whom attended St. Peter’s School and various private middle and high schools. Two live locally, and one has a family, including a 6-year-old son, in Florence, Italy.

Karen and Fred believe that over the past 50 years, Society Hill has both stayed the same and gotten better over time. “A typical day is like the other day,” points out Karen. “We chatted with a neighbor and caught up with other neighborhood friends.”

“Some good friends have moved away,” adds Fred, “but many others remain. We have a core group of neighbors, whom we feel are irreplaceable. Of course there is much socializing with friends from all over, but most of these relationships had their beginnings right here in Society Hill.”

The couple has great respect for SHCA and the enormous amount of work it has done on residents’ behalf. “Fred and I both served on the SHCA Board in the early days,” adds Karen.

Karen is a lifelong Philadelphian. “I was born in Camden in 1944. Camden was then a lovely small city, later to be torn apart by highways. I moved to Overbrook Park and, at nine, to Havertown. We were part of an upwardly mobile wave of Jewish families, who (almost) made it to the Main Line. Fred’s family made it from Wynnefield to Wynnewood,



Karen and Fred Edelstein

which was more expensive and mildly posh. Those were the times!”

Karen was the first in her family to attend college. “I have a long-standing empathy for first-timers, who have to figure it all out. It’s hard. I attended the University of Wisconsin for my freshman year, because a friend was going. By January I had decided to transfer to the East Coast. I was accepted at Penn and Barnard and chose Barnard, a lifelong good decision. Looking back now, I see for the first time that I was looking for adventure.”

After college, she moved back home — “Not unusual at that time and now quite common again.” She was fluent in Spanish, thanks to a major in Latin American areas, and taught ESL in Philadelphia public and parochial schools.

The couple has five grandchildren so far and, luckily, a baby girl in the Fairmount section of Philadelphia. Their other grandchild lives in Italy. “Our suburban grandchildren attend Lower Merion Schools and are all French-speaking,” says Karen. “They work at the Union League on weekends and in summer. We are members there.” The couple is waiting for their 12-year-old granddaughter to apply for a slot. Their oldest grandson is now a college student at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.”

Karen went to graduate school in psychology at the age of 40. “I loved

being home with my children, but was ready to move on. I was licensed at age 50 and worked for 25 years as a clinical psychologist, doing psycho-educational testing and individual and family therapy. My mentors throughout my career have been Dr. Doug Wilkerson, a Society Hill resident, and Adrienne Goe, Ph.D, a former Society Hill resident.” Karen was the counselor at St. Peter’s for five years. Fred has served on its Board. They both

continue to be involved with the school.

Both Karen and Fred take issue with the column by *Inquirer* critic Inga Saffron who disparaged our neighborhood.

“I think we should invite her for dinner,” says Karen. “I am so disheartened by her words and can’t begin to understand how she can so disrespect our area. She may not remember our battle with Section 8 Housing and the cold, rainy night when many, including an elderly Richardson Dilworth, waited in line to vote. The measure passed overwhelmingly, and we are all fine with our Section 8 neighbors.”

The couple also joined with other Society Hill residents to fight a major restaurant, which wanted to build in the old Mariner’s Church directly behind their Pine Street House. “We lost,” admits Fred, “but miraculously, the Church fell down and the restaurant was no longer interested.”

“There have been so many other struggles, most recently the Acme site imbroglio,” adds Karen. “We’ve succeeded in keeping our neighborhood faithful to historical residential standards.” They believe that Society Hill remains beautiful. “If anything, it can serve as a model and mentor to other neighborhoods in their bureaucratic and quality-of-life struggles.”

Jane Biberman, former editor of *Inside Magazine*, is a freelance writer who has contributed to a variety of publications.



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