

# SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

Vol. 1, No. 1 • Issued November 5, 1991

[This publication succeeds the Society Hill News, which published three issues.]

## NOTES from the President

(At the October General Membership Meeting of the Society Hill Civic Association, Dick Ostrander was elected as our new president. Dick and his wife Liz are well-known residents in the area, having both been active in many phases of community life. We congratulate Dick on his election and look forward to working with him in furthering the aspirations of the association.)

### NOTES

- Good news for the SHCA section of the Sun: the team that put together The Resident Newsletter has agreed to do the same on a trial basis for this paper. Ruth Dugan, Nancy Frenze, Bernice Hamel and Carolyn Mooney should be thanked.
- Now that the season has clearly changed, we should also be saying thanks to the many neighbors who

kept the flowers growing and the sidewalks clean during the summer. Let's hope they are joined by many more to keep our neighborhood bright and cheerful with seasonal and holiday adornments. Every bright spot that brings a smile will help make the short days seem warmer and brighter during the winter months ahead.

- You'll see this issue of the Sun on or about election day '91. Keep an eye out for redistricting proposals that will have major impact on the next city and state elections. We will be affected and your voice can impact the changes.

- The recycling effort at Starr Garden playground (6th and Lombard Streets), which has been very successful due to the efforts of Don McNeil, now needs HELP. Don can no longer devote as much time to the project. We need a team to give 10-20 minutes daily to checking the site and covering pickup time on Saturday mornings. Call Don at 574-9284, me at 922-6179 or your quadrant rep.

- Just a reminder that ALL SHCA memberships expire December 31, 1991. Watch your mail within the next month or so for a notice that 1992 dues are due...or something like that.

- Be sure to check the SHCA calendar in every issue of this paper because we won't be sending out flyers for each meeting now that we have this method of keeping you informed.

• The next SHCA Board meeting is November 20 at 7:30 PM at Old Pine Community Center... AND REMEMBER... ALL Board meetings are OPEN to every Society Hill resident.

Let's GROW!!  
—Regards,  
Dick Ostrander

## SOCIETY HILL REPORTER

Society Hill Civic Association  
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Articles Welcome. Mail to SHCA at above address. Deadline last week of each month.

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## PENN MUTUAL DEMOLITION PLAN

# Historic District Takes Another Blow

(Continued from front page of The Sun)  
entire parcel makes the most economic sense."

Why does this sound like the young man who killed his parents and then pleaded for the court's mercy because he was an orphan?

The scaffolding is already up. Penn Mutual is moving quickly. According to Ms. Young, demolition is scheduled to begin after Thanksgiving. The only immediate plans for the vacant site include "appropriate landscaping and fencing," but most likely the entire land parcel will remain undeveloped for some time.

### Preservation Suffers Major Setback

As you know, Philadelphia, with its huge stock of historic buildings, has long been a leader in preservation efforts, but it is this very fact that paradoxically has created some of the problems the city now faces. (You've seen one, you've seen them all philosophy!) Ironically, Philadelphia's law was the nation's first citywide preservation ordinance and is still considered to be one of the best. But now preservation is in crisis throughout the state due to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's ruling of July 1991 in which it states that Philadelphia's historic preservation ordinance violates the state constitution!

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court is the only state high court to reach a contrary conclusion to the United States Constitution regarding preservation laws. It could result in the dismantling of all local historic registers. In Society Hill's case, the

pending nomination has been postponed indefinitely as a result of the court's decision.

The Penn Mutual buildings are included in the Society Hill Historic District's comprehensive inventory of structures—the boundaries of which are Front to 8th Street and Walnut to Lombard Streets. The fact that the District's preservation laws are in abeyance makes all of Society Hill extremely vulnerable to opportunistic business decisions. If the official voice of Independence National Historic Park is not respected by Penn Mutual, what chance do private individuals have in stemming the development tide?

### The Park's Request

Friday's meeting at Park Headquarters was called by the park's new Superintendent, Martha B. Aikens. It was attended by

Penn Mutual representatives and consultants; Park Architects Penny Batcheler and Bill Brookover; Chairman of the Friends of Independence National Historical Park, Carter Fergusson; Society Hill Civic Association Vice-President Stephen Skale; as well as several SHCA members and neighborhood residents and activists.

The Park Service's official request to Penn Mutual is that it preserve the two smaller Walnut Street buildings (504 and 506) in order to maintain the present scale with the next building—an Egyptian Revival facade building

Continued next page



PHOTO BY BERNIE CLEFF

## Preservation Ruling Gets A Hearing

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court met in an extraordinary session on October 23rd to rehear portions of their July 10th decision striking down Philadelphia's Preservation Ordinance, and putting in jeopardy dozens of historic buildings throughout the Commonwealth. Those who crowded into the hearing in Room 456 at City Hall came away with the sinking feeling that

the decision would stand. We should know soon enough.

In anticipation of bad news to come, the Society Hill Civic Association, following the lead of our neighbor, the Wash West Association, passed a motion at the General Membership Meeting on October 16th, requesting action to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution, the basis of the

Supreme Court's opinion.

Constitutional amendments are notoriously slow in being enacted, so we can expect to see a rush of activity by developers eager to bulldoze while the time is ripe. The face of Philadelphia (and other Pennsylvania communities) is bound to change unless public opinion against the destruction of our past is heard loud and clear.

## THEN AND NOW Fish and Other Oddities

When Charlie Peterson shared recollections of his 40 years in Society Hill at the October 16th Civic Association General Membership meeting, he brought back a flood of memories about the way things used to be in Society Hill. Dick and I are "new people" of only 20 years standing, but we remember places and people who now seem a part of a very distant time and neighborhood. So look back and remember with me for a brief moment.

Do you remember the fish store in the 500 block of Lombard Street? It was right next to the old long-idle glass factory, and just a block away from the baths that seemed so exotic and mysterious to the new arrivals from Ohio. The fish store always had a great array of fish swimming about in huge tanks, but the store really came into its own before the Jewish holidays. Then the tanks were filled with the best carp I ever saw. Housewives would come in, two by two,

to pick out their fish, and such a ceremony they made of choosing just the right one!

The storekeeper stood by—more or less patiently—while the ladies discussed the pros and cons of each fish in great detail, and weighed the advantages and deficiencies of each with minute precision. Finally the choice was made, and once the shopkeeper was satisfied there would be no mind-changing, he drew his billy club and gave the hapless fish a mighty "thwack." The ladies stood smiling and going over their shopping lists, while the victim was drawn and quartered in preparation for the feast ahead.

And then there was the horseradish man on the corner of 5th and South. Today, that corner boasts the heavenly scents of Jim's Steaks. But then it was the pungency of the horseradish that told you exactly where you were.

How many of you know that the Old Pine Community Center has

stood at 4th and Lombard only since 1977? Before that it was a vacant lot that Joan Putney and some others turned into a community garden. Old and young from all over the neighborhood had their plots where they grew veggies and flowers and visited with one another. Matter of fact, we had several vacant lots where we could let our dogs run while we stood around and gabbed.

The corners of 6th and Pine, 6th and Lombard and 6th and Panama were all vacant until about 12 years ago, as was the old Mariners Church lot at the east end of Society Hill. All were the sites of discussions and sometimes arguments of world import.

When buildings went up, and when the old A&P closed for several years, Society Hillers lost their public forums. Thanks to Super-Fresh and Three Bears Park, we still have places where we can settle the pressing issues of the day.

These are just a few of the memories that rushed back as I heard Charlie Peterson speak. For us, they will always be a precious part of the history and the people that make Society Hill so special.

—Liz Ostrander

## SHCA DIRECTORY 1991-1992

Richard Ostrander, President	922-6179	
Steven Skale, Vice President	627-4910 (H)	790-0404 (W)
Sidney Hack, Treasurer	925-3438	
Joan Johnson, Recording Secty	922-0702 (H)	751-8396 (W)

### QUADRANT DIRECTORS

**NORTHEAST**  
Lorna Katz Lawson 922-0155 (H) 351-0560 (W)  
George Scarpulla 925-3003  
Jane Brown 829-1497

**NORTHWEST**  
Joel Chernock 625-9852  
Mary Sturdivant 928-1203  
Lyn Wiksten 923-5474

**SOUTHWEST**  
Liz Ostrander 922-6179 (H) 875-3400 (W)  
Sally Smith 925-5464 (H) 922-5180 (W)  
Sam Leer 925-4072 (H) 625-0100 (W)

**SOUTHEAST**  
Kitty Wallin 574-9848 (H) 609-582-7000  
Duane Perry 925-6672 (H) 592-8808 (W)  
Ross Engelman 238-9809 (H) 241-7624 (W)

### HIGHRISE REPRESENTATIVES

Hopkinson House  
Bari Shar 629-1018 (H) 546-0550 (W)  
Jonathan Segal 629-1886 (H) 483-0124 (W)  
Independence Place  
Helen Comstock 925-6882  
Society Hill Towers  
Dr. Maggie Schultz 627-8262 (H) 894-1485 (W)  
Christopher Anderson 440-7135 (H) 787-2600 (W)

### COMMITTEES 1991-1992

Legislative  
Eric Schurmer 592-4066 (H) 923-4206 (W)  
Liquor Control Board  
Duane Perry 925-6672 (H) 592-8808 (W)  
Membership  
Carolyn Mooney 627-6119 (H)  
Neighborhood Maintenance  
Harris Nudley 925-4282 (H)  
Parks and Playgrounds  
Ann Spector 928-1928 (H) 546-5928 (W)  
Project Planning  
Becky Stoloff 627-4910 (H)  
Recycling  
Bob Zilin 574-0578 (H) 627-1001 (W)  
Town Watch  
Mel Buckman 925-2167 (H) 341-1000 (W)  
TV & Movie Production Liaison  
Joy Lindy 926-4042 (H)  
Zoning  
Lorna Katz Lawson 922-0155 (H) 351-0560 (W)

**Penn Mutual** (From previous page) (508-510), a modern office building that is in the center of the block. The total effect desired by the Park would be to keep intact as much as possible the Walnut Street appearance as we know it.

### Community Response

About three weeks prior to the November 1 meeting at Park Headquarters, a small meeting was convened by Penn Mutual for their "backyard" neighbors who live on St. James Court. At that time, the planned demolition of these buildings was reported by Penn Mutual as a *fait accompli*. Because most other Society Hill residents were uninformed, and because the Civic Association's new president, Richard Ostrander, had not yet been elected, there was not enough time for SHCA to consider the plan. It, therefore, appeared to St. James residents that Penn Mutual had a free hand to do whatever it wished.

Last week a flyer alerted many Society Hill residents to Penn Mutual's plans, and as people have become aware of it, a groundswell of community opposition has been expressed. Roger Pritchard, an Old City preservation activist, has reminded neighbors that a Philadelphia zoning provision requires approval by the city's Planning Commission for any facade changes along Walnut Street in the periphery of Independence Park.

Some neighbors expressed hope that this little-known provision could be used as leverage in stalling the demolition. In the meantime, however, a community petition is currently being distributed, which differs from the Park's position opposing demolition in that it requests that *all* the buildings be saved. In spirit, however, this neighborhood petition is consistent with the Park's position.

At the meeting on Friday, November 1st, Penn Mutual's architect, George Lovera, reported that he has begun a feasibility study to determine how best to develop the parcel of land. Park administrators and neighbors together requested that Penn Mutual delay demolition until the feasibility study is done, expected within a two-month period. Penn Mutual's representatives said they would consider this request and will report back to Superintendent Aikens on their decision.

By respecting the spirit of our historic district and the boundaries of Independence Square, Penn Mutual has the opportunity to please a larger constituency while still making good business sense. These are not mutually exclusive. Demolition would be a failure of the stewardship incumbent on them as property owners in America's most historic square mile.

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# Obituary

## JOHN A. GRISWOLD

Society Hill lost one of its most prominent citizens in August when John "Gus" Griswold died in his home after a long illness. Gus was best known by the outside world as curator of birds at the Philadel-

phia Zoo who had solved the problem of keeping captive flamingos in the pink. In the neighborhood he is remembered as the 1964-65 president of SHARA (Society Hill Area Residents Association), the forerunner of SHCA. During his term the local issue was design of our street lamps. He fought against the city's plan to install mercury vapor lights and saw his choice—the Franklin lamps—installed throughout the area.

In the late 1950's Gus and his wife, Lee, began an undertaking that would preoccupy them to this day: the restoration of the house on Spruce Street where Joseph Hopkinson wrote the words to "Hail Columbia" in 1798. However engrossed he was in solving some construction detail, Gus could be distracted, if only by answering a call for help from a desperate resident unable to deal with a bird that had entered through a chimney.

We extend our profound sympathy to Lee. We, too, will miss Gus.

## SHCA CALENDAR (clip & save)

### 1991-92 BOARD & GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

November 20, 7:30 PM

December 11, 7:30 PM

January 22  
Board Meeting 6:30 PM  
Refreshments 7:30 PM

General Membership 8:00 PM meeting will be held at Pennsylvania Hospital's Preston Hall, Preston Building, 8th and Spruce Streets. Under discussion will be a proposal to redistrict Center City Philadelphia, putting Society Hill, Washington Square West, Rittenhouse and Fidler Squares, University City and Mantua into one voting district. We urge you to participate in this important

decision. Please note the change in date from earlier schedules.

February 19, 7:30 PM

March 18  
Board Meeting 6:30 PM  
Refreshments 7:30 PM  
General Membership 8:00 PM

April 15, 7:30 PM

May 20  
Board Meeting 6:30 PM  
Refreshments 7:30 PM  
General Membership 8:00 PM  
Election of Officers

(All meetings, unless otherwise noted, will be held at the Old Pine Community Center, 4th & Lombard, and are open to any resident.)

## ZONING COMMITTEE REPORT

### 404 South Front Street

Variance permitting construction of a solarium covering open space to prevent basement flooding. Use variance allowing occupation by a legal office employing twenty persons. Property is zoned as a two-family dwelling, but has not been occupied for several years. NOT OPPOSED.

### 235-239 South 6th Street

Use variance to permit occupancy of former medical office on ground floor of Independence Place Tower One by a branch of Sun Capsule, a tanning salon. NOT OPPOSED.

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## PROTECTION FOR WASHINGTON SQUARE'S BORDERS

An ordinance placing Washington Square's periphery under the jurisdiction of the Art Commission has passed City Council and is awaiting the signature of Mayor Wilson Goode.

Ordinance #1492 was introduced by Councilman-at-Large, David Cohen, at the behest of many neighbors in the vicinity of the historic square. It corrects an oversight in an earlier ordinance by extending the same protection enjoyed by Rittenhouse Square, Independence Square, Benjamin Franklin Parkway and other places of importance in Philadelphia. It provides for supervision of "areas abutting Parkways, Historical

Shrines and Civic Projects to create and maintain aesthetic enhancement, economic vitality, and historic values."

The Zoning Committee of the Society Hill Civic Association held a meeting on October 9th to decide whether or not it would support this ordinance. Although there was little or no opposition to support for the measure, the Committee's final decision was deferred until the opinion of the Washington Square Association could be taken into consideration. The Washington Square group will hold its next meeting on November 13th, by which time it is hoped the ordinance will be signed into law.



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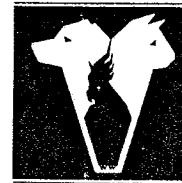
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