



The  
South End  
Historical Society

SUMMER 1993

# THE SEHS NEWSLETTER

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402

Vol. 22, No. 3

## The SEHS House Tour of Victorian & Contemporary Interiors



The 25th South End House Tour, sponsored by The SEHS, will be held Saturday, October 23 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It will feature homes in the South End, with interiors from Victorian to contemporary as well as several public spaces.

The Tour is an important ongoing tradition through which the public can see the continuing interior renovation of these houses and the preservation of exterior architecture in the South End. Funds raised from this event help underwrite the cost of producing the Tour and benefit The Historical Society's programs.

Information regarding the reservation or purchase of tickets may be obtained by calling The SEHS office at (617) 536-4445.

Tickets are \$15 in advance or \$18 the day of the tour. Sponsor tickets are \$30.

1993 List of Massachusetts' Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties Issued

## Allen House Makes Top Ten

by Alan G. Schwartz

**H**ISTORIC MASSACHUSETTS, INC., (HMI) ANNOUNCES that the Allen House in Boston's South End has been placed on Massachusetts' Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties List. The list includes both nationally significant and locally treasured landmarks threatened by neglect, deterioration, insufficient funds, vandalism, lack of maintenance, inappropriate development, or insensitive public policy.

"This list is a call for action," says Alan G. Schwartz, executive director of HMI and chairman of the Boston and South Landmark Commissions. "These ten properties are representative of the problems faced by hundreds of historic properties across the commonwealth." In discussing the diversity of the 1993 list, Schwartz says "at stake are not only sites that are tourist attractions but those that contribute to the fabric of community life."



Part of entrance to the Allen House, 1882 Washington Street. Reuse could restore the house as a local landmark.

The Allen House, one of the oldest (1859) and grandest houses in the South End, is listed in a National Register District and Local Landmark District and has been under the ownership of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) for several decades. Prolonged vacancy has left this high style mansion in extremely poor

condition, with gaping holes in the roof allowing water to pour into the

*Continued on Page 3*

Twenty-Fifth South End House Tour, October 23, 1993



**"Dear SEHS"***This Month's Letter*

June 16, 1993

Dear South End Historical Society Newsletter:

We would like to continue the dialogue you began in your Winter 1993 issue by publishing two letters about streetlighting from John Neale and Ann Hershfang. On some points, there seems to be agreement: that a light fixture should shine on the sidewalk, that orange is an ugly lighting color, that rectilinear light poles are magnets for disfiguring posters and graffiti, and that existing technologies are making streetlights more energy efficient.

The main concern about acorn lights is that (like the unfortunate lollipop lights chosen by aesthetically inclined South Enders of the late 1960s) they shine up at the sky and into bedrooms and not down on the sidewalk. Your picture on page 2 of the newsletter illustrates the problem well: the "recently installed...acorn lamp" is shining on the housefront while the sidewalk is dark. It is precisely for downward illumination that rectilinears are preferable. The yellowish sodium vapor lighting was chosen by the city for economy: it uses less electricity for the same degree of brightness and thus saves energy and pollution. Other bulbs could be and are used, either with rectilinears or acorns.

The heart of the matter, especially for the elderly, is glare. The acorn fixtures (current ones are much brighter than the 1930's prototype) shine directly in one's eyes making it difficult to see anything near the fixture. Lights with reflectors that shine down have much less glare and thus provide better security. Maybe we need a new light, more aesthetic but practical, with a round or even fluted pole. But the fixture should shine down, not up.

Historically speaking, those who lived in the South End 25 years ago will remember how the night sky disappeared when the lollipop lights were introduced. Because we are now choosing for safety reasons to install

more lights, it is even more important that they shine down. Otherwise, as a recent *New York Times* editorial opposing the big-billboard-in-the-sky headlined, "Goodnight moon, goodnight stars."

On another subject, in Mr. Neale's article on the streets of the South End, he states that the Columbus Avenue and Tremont Street sidewalks were installed with concrete walking surfaces and brick edge strips "to save money." This is incorrect. Concrete was chosen because in scores of neighborhood meetings to review the South End Traffic and Transit Plan, the elderly made clear that brick sidewalks were uneven to walk on and caused falls and serious injuries, including broken hips. It was decided that since the fundamental function of sidewalks is to be walked on, they should be flat and safe. Aesthetic and real estate enhancement purposes were acknowledged by the brick tree strip.

It is still true in the South End, and in Boston, that there are no publicly maintained brick sidewalks in place for more than a few years without missing bricks, or heaving, uneven surfaces. In winter, bricks are last to lose their ice and, with their edges, difficult to shovel; they thus require heavier applications of salt, which cannot be healthy for our beloved street trees. Bricks are doubtless dangerous for the disabled as well as the elderly, and it is probably just a question of time before they are found to violate the Americans With Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADA-AG). Concrete of good color and texture is as attractive as it is walkable. If smoother roads are better for cars than the "historic" cobblestones, aren't walkers entitled to smoother sidewalks? Some technological advances make sense.

We suggest people go for a nightly stroll and compare street for street the quality of the lighting and safety provided as well as the aesthetics for our neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Ann Hershfang  
Ken Kruchemeyer



**TO SUBMIT LETTERS:** Address your comments to "Dear SEHS," *The South End Historical Society*, 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118. We reserve the right to edit readers' letters for length.

This newsletter is published by The South End Historical Society, 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA, 02118; office telephone (617) 536-4445. The opinions expressed by the contributors are not necessarily those of The Historical Society. Every effort will be made to return unsolicited manuscripts submitted for possible publication if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Those interested in printing articles must obtain written permission from the editor. Copyright, The South End Historical Society, Inc.

Receipt of *The SEHS Newsletter* is a privilege of membership in The Historical Society, an association of people interested in the recognition and preservation of historic resources in, and recording the history of, the South End of Boston. Individual membership is \$15 per year; family and dual memberships are \$25.

**Officers:** Arthur F. Howe, President **Editor:** Elizabeth Sippel  
Susan Park, Treasurer **Design:** Step Up  
Barbara Anderson, Secretary

## Allen House Is Endangered

*(Continued from Page 1)*

building, outbreaks of fire, and disintegrating stonework. The building sits on an extremely prominent site in this neighborhood, and reuse could restore the mansion to its status as a local landmark.

*"We must now act to protect these and other endangered properties before it is too late."*

*Alan G. Schwartz, HMI*

The original owner of the Allen House was Aaron Allen, a Boston furniture dealer who decided to build an elegant house in the South End after he predicted it would become a fashionable neighborhood. Allen moved to the Back Bay in 1871, when he realized that the South End was becoming a neighborhood of apartments for the working class.

Allen leased the building to the Central Club, a social organization for men, that later followed Allen to the Back Bay. In the early 1890s the Catholic Union bought the house for \$37,500 and occupied it for 47 years. At that time the South End had a large Catholic population. The building was also used by Boston College High School during the 1930s and the Lebanese-American Club until 1953.

The Allen House has been taken over twice by the city since the late 1950s for delinquent taxes. Since the late 1970s the building has been owned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). Over the past ten years, several attempts have been made to develop the building. According to Schwartz, "the Landmarks Commission has been working with the BRA to seek funds to stabilize the property for

future development."

Included in addition to the ten most endangered properties is a list of those properties which have been demolished in the last year and are now categorized as "lost and gone forever."

"We must act now to protect these and other endangered properties before it is too late," says Schwartz.

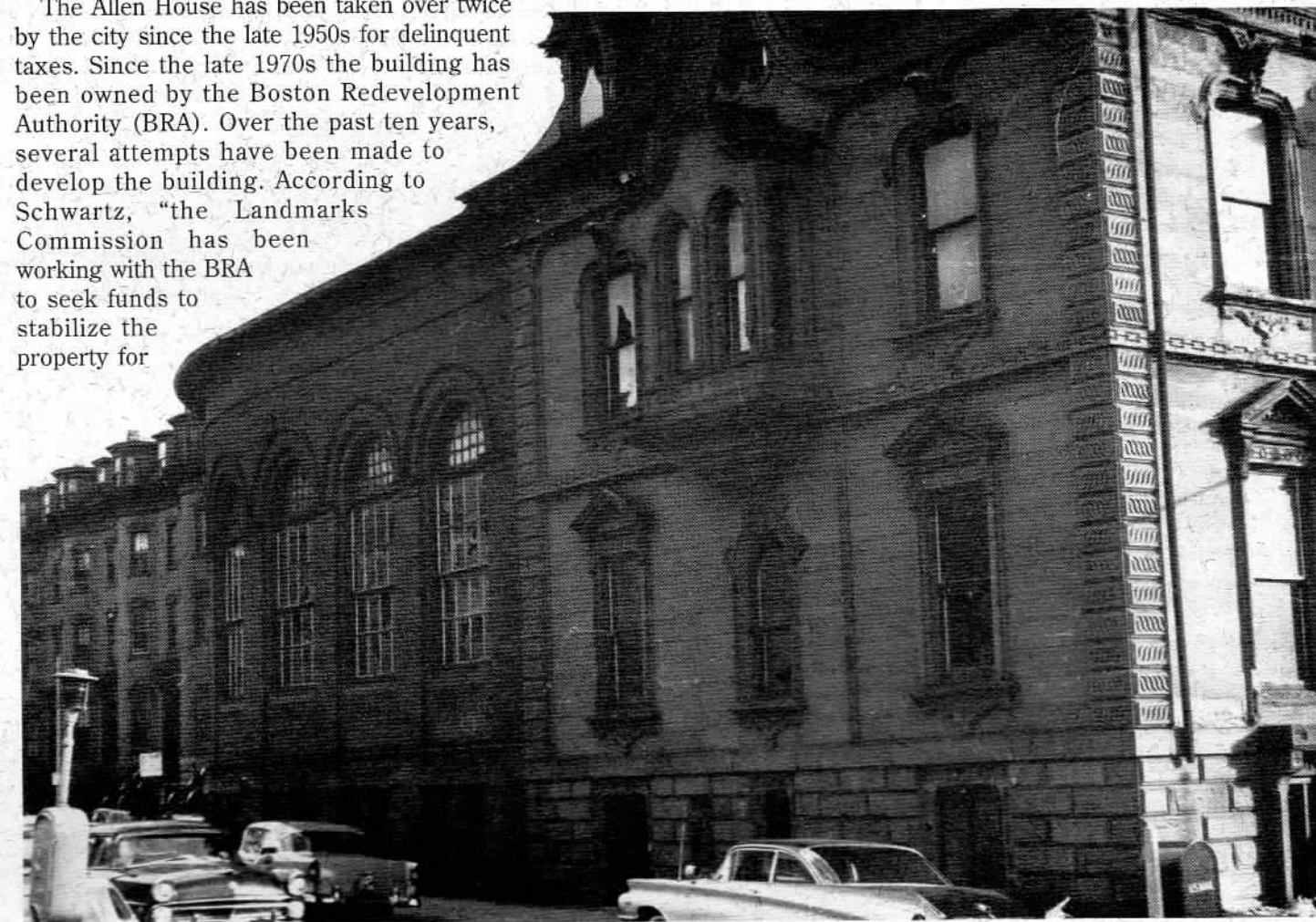
HMI is the non-profit, statewide, preservation organization dedicated to preserving the commonwealth's historic and cultural heritage for future generations.

In addition to the Allen House, other properties on the 1993 list of Massachusetts' ten most endangered historic properties (listed alphabetically) are the: Rea-Putnam-Fowler House, Danvers; Central Congregational Church, Fall River; Lower Main Street National Register District, Lee; Ventfort Hall, Lenox; St. Peter's Church and Rectory, Lowell; Sankaty Light, Nantucket; Pelham Town Hall Complex, Pelham; Souther Tide Mill, Quincy; and Union Station, Worcester.

Those that are lost and gone forever include: South Congregational Church, Brockton; Corliss Memorial Building (YMCA), Newburyport; "Dr. Seuss House," Springfield; and Williamstown Opera House, Williamstown.❖

*A corner of the Allen House at Worcester Square and Washington Street.*

Photos for this article are courtesy of The South End Historical Society.





# Noticing Everything Has its Ups and Downs A Talk with Susan Park

by Elizabeth Sippel and Emily Domurad

Susan Park, treasurer of  
The South End Historical Society, president of  
the Boston Preservation Alliance and president of  
Boston Harborfest, talked at her home recently about Boston,  
the South End, urban renewal, and historic preservation:

Susan Park still has the Staffordshire giraffe she won as a prize for fundraising when she was ten. Seeing one at a flea market, she was thrilled to discover its value has greatly appreciated over the years. Just as the early trophy gained in value, it heralded a career in preservation that has enriched Park's love of people and history. We spent an

evening this summer at her home talking about some of her favorite subjects.

"Probably how I got into historic preservation was by being either blessed or cursed by noticing everything. There are some people who can walk through life absolutely oblivious to their surroundings and others who make



Susan Park and friends at The South End Historical Society's Annual Ball.

extensive observations. I'm one of the people who notices everything. That has its pluses and its minuses because I notice when things are out of order.

"I have always enjoyed people, special events, and current events. I was born in Boston and grew up in New York City. I am an urban person and have always lived along the northeast corridor between New York and Boston, which is a wonderful place to grow up. My parents eventually moved to Connecticut, but I prefer to live in the city and explore different things. I think I like the larger world, which is why I like the city, because it has bigger horizons.

"[After studying American history and political science at New York University] I lived in Back Bay and loved the historic character of the neighborhood. In the late fifties I moved to Beacon Hill for three years and loved living in an old house, walking old streets—streets with a history, a feeling, a character. Then Joe [husband Joseph Park is president of the Ellis Neighborhood Association] and I went to New York and lived in a high-rise for three years and couldn't wait to get back to Boston. A friend who had lived above us on Beacon Hill had bought a house in the South End and said come look in the South End. We rented a whole house on Gray Street with an option to buy, and after eight months we had done a lot of work on the house, loved it, and decided that we weren't going to let anybody else reap the fruits of our labor! We spent ten years there. The South End Historical Society was founded in 1966; we joined in the fall of 1967, and Joe eventually became treasurer.

## THE GINKGOS ON GRAY STREET

"When it came time to plant trees on Gray Street, we asked



Home of Susan and Joseph Park at 166 West Canton Street, frequently one of the stops on The South End Historical Society House Tour.

the Parks Department what would be appropriate on a narrow street, and they suggested a columnar ginkgo. They said it had an unusual leaf and turned a pretty yellow in the fall. House by house we raised the money. We planted the odd side of the street first, and a couple of years later we went through the whole process again and planted the other side. I am pleased to say that when you walk in front of 23 Gray Street today, that tree is the biggest and most beautiful because it got all sorts of love, attention, and conversation. The week we moved they put in the brick sidewalks after we had waited ten years. When we moved to West Canton Street, we waited another ten years for brick sidewalks. Eventually, as part of the fabric of city planning, brick-paved sidewalks did occur. The South End was not paying a lot of money in taxes in those days, and city government was not very responsive to the community. That was before we had district representation of city councillors, so we were everybody's and nobody's baby. We lacked political clout.

### LANDMARKING WAS ANOTHER MILESTONE

"The landmarking of the South End was as significant a milestone for the area as building it. By the early '80s

development in Boston was very hot in a real estate sense. There was tremendous activity in terms of purchasing property and turning it from owner occupants into condominiums. Often absentee developers, living anywhere from Boston to California, had eyes only for the bottom line of their balance sheet. We needed a mechanism to preserve the integrity of the area, and the landmarking of the area was the strongest tool available.

"People fail to grasp that the South End is almost a square mile, in excess of 500 acres. Beacon Hill, when it was just the south side of the slope, was only 19 acres. If you double that at 38 acres and measure that against the South End, you begin to see how large the South End is. When the South End was built there were 4000 buildings here, and 25% of the housing stock was lost under urban renewal. Behind Columbus Avenue, from the railroad tracks to Harrison Avenue or Albany Street, 1000 buildings were torn down in the '60s and '70s. It's staggering."❖

*In our next issue we will continue our interview with Susan Park. She will talk more about the South End, the devastation of the West End, the buildings of Boston, and the history of preservation here and elsewhere.*

## South End's Hayes Park Honored by Boston Preservation Alliance

photo: courtesy of Ann Gilardi Johnson, architect

**A**T THE ANNUAL BOSTON PRESERVATION Alliance's awards ceremony the recently renovated Hayes Park received an award for "The Creation of a New Landscape Design Complementary to the Historic Built Environment." The award, voted on by the Board of Directors of the Alliance, was presented to the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the Division of Capital Planning, the Parks & Recreation Department, and the Friends of Hayes Park. The ceremony was held on May 17 at the Boston Antiques Center.

The park is at the corner of Warren Avenue and West Canton Street. It was originally designed in 1969 but by the mid-1980s was badly in need of restoration. In 1987 a group of neighbors began meeting with the city to discuss improving the park, and last summer the newly completed park was rededicated at a ceremony on June 6, 1992. (Please see "Newly Renovated Hayes Park is Unveiled" in the Summer, 1992 issue of The SEHS Newsletter, Vol. 21, No. 2.)

The Friends of Hayes Park are Park Partners with the Boston Parks Department that permits the community to perform most of the routine care. Fifteen hundred daffodils, three thousand blue scillas, and one thousand tulips bloomed with the pear trees in the spring, followed by forty Betty Prior rose bushes, eighty-five daylilies, and four hundred summer annuals. The extensive plantings are meticulously tended by both



Seating areas in the park are paved with granite edgestone, which is laid flat. Center gathering space and paths are paved using stone dust.

adults and children from the neighborhood. Six day-care centers use the park, sharing the space with neighbors who visit the park to enjoy what has become a gathering place. The Friends of Hayes Park conducts seasonal free events and celebrations in the park for the enjoyment of all. In addition, fund-raising events are held outside of the park to enable the Friends to employ a landscape contractor and arborist once a year for professional maintenance.❖



# Officers And Directors 1993-1994

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81 Montgomery Street, 02116

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183 West Brookline Street, 02118

## Curator

Kimberly Shilland  
4 Lawrence Street, 02116

## Fundraising Committee Chairman

Nancy Parker Wilson  
7 Union Park, 02118

# C a l e n d a r

## First Tuesday of every month:

South End Landmarks Commission  
Room 801, Boston City Hall  
4 p.m.  
For more information, call (617) 635-3850

## Second Thursday of every month:

The South End Historical Society  
Board Meeting  
Francis Dane House  
532 Massachusetts Avenue  
7:45 p.m.

## COMING EVENTS:

### SEPTEMBER

Saturday, September 18  
8:45 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
A DAY LONG TOUR OF TWO SPECIAL PROPERTIES IN PORTSMOUTH, RHODE ISLAND: GREEN ANIMALS TOPIARY GARDENS AND GREENVALE. A Victorian Gothic summer residence planned as a gentleman's farm. There is a charge to participants for this outing. This will cover entry fees, transportation, and a gourmet box lunch. MORE INFORMATION WILL BE

MAILED TO MEMBERS, or call the office at (617) 536-4445.

Thursday, September 30  
MEMBERS' PROGRAM  
HISTORY OF FUNERAL CUSTOMS—FROM VICTORIAN TO PRESENT  
Home of Mr. Arthur Hasiotis and Dr. Karen Pappas  
1654 Washington Street  
7:45 p.m.  
Reception to follow.

### OCTOBER

Saturday, October 23  
10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
TWENTY-FIFTH SOUTH END HOUSE TOUR  
Sponsored by The South End Historical Society  
Help us celebrate a quarter century of tours of historic South End, the nations' largest collection of Victorian row houses.  
Tickets: Tour and Sponsors' Party, \$30 person  
Tour only, \$15 in advance; \$18 day of tour.  
Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with ticket request.

For information, call (617) 536-4445.

## NEWS • AND • EVENTS

**Officers and Directors, 1993-1994***(Continued from Page 6)*

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Meetings & Functions Committee Chairman  
 Janet Bryan  
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Membership Committee Chairman  
 Robert Tanzie  
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Fundraising Director-at-large  
 Liane Crawford  
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Director-at-large  
 M. Rita Gallo  
 72 Montgomery Street, 02116

**New Members**

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 Jill Axelrod  
 M.J. Berries/Maggie Ballard  
 A.R. Benton  
 Eric Dray  
 Phebe Goodman, Friends of Copley Square  
 Patrick Guthrie  
 Lynn Hartness, Old South Realty  
 Natasha and Peter Lofgren  
 Barbara and Joseph Magill  
 Richard J. Minard  
 David Panella  
 James H. Piatt  
 Edward Sokol and William Wakefield  
 Lorne Steedly  
 Daniel Sugarman  
 Steven Waddell  
 Kevin J. Walsh, M.D.



# Welcome

## Greet A New Neighbor

with a

# Membership

# To The SEHS

**B**ECOME A PART of the effort to preserve the South End, one of Boston's most unique and important neighborhoods, by joining The South End Historical Society. Your dollars and membership will help us achieve our objective of preserving the physical fabric and interpreting the history of the South End for present and future generations.

Newsletters, publications, programs, tours, and numerous other activities are all part of The South End Historical Society. We hope you will support our neighborhood by joining our society and becoming part of these activities.

name or  
names \_\_\_\_\_

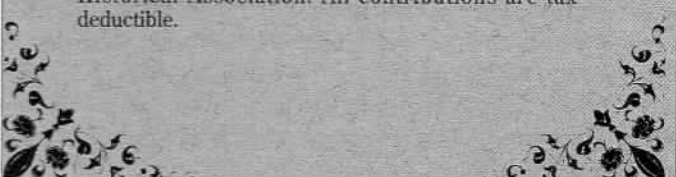
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zip \_\_\_\_\_

telephone \_\_\_\_\_

full-time student...	\$10.00	_____
individual.....	\$15.00	_____
family/dual.....	\$25.00	_____
patron.....	\$75.00	_____
life (indiv.).....	\$300.00	_____
additional		
contribution.....	\$25.00	_____
.....	\$50.00	_____
.....	\$100.00	_____
total.....	\$	_____

Please make checks payable to The South End Historical Association. All contributions are tax deductible.





# Annual Spring Ball: A Swinging Success!

THE ANNUAL SPRING BALL OF THE SOUTH END Historical Society was held in the elegant Curtis Ballroom located in the Boston Center for



*Frances Duffly and Rita Galló at The South End Historical Society's Ball.*

Adult Education at 5 Commonwealth Avenue on the evening of Saturday, April 24.

As always the Ball proved to be a spectacular evening. The diverse crowd represented all ages. Music was by L n R



*Bill Ralph and Nola Herrigan attending the Ball.*

Productions with piano interludes by Daniel Klau, a South End resident. The appetizers, supper, and dessert catered by the well-known South End caterer East Meets West were set against the fabulous backdrop of the Louis XV ballroom built in 1915 by the Bailie family.

Many thanks to the 1993 Ball Committee—Selena Gallo, Pamela Howland, Jennifer Feldman Klau, Susan Park and Nancy Parker Wilson—for all their time and hard work. We hope to see you at next year's Ball!

**Members: a reminder—don't forget to send in your membership renewal.**



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