

REPORT OF THE HISTORICAL VALUES COMMITTEE

October 25, 1969

Present: Dr. Roy Franklin Nichols, Chairman
Dr. Margaret B. Tinkcom, Historian

The Historical Values Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission has been concerned by the proposal of the Fairmount Park Commission, as announced in the newspapers, to turn over to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission thirty-two historically significant houses in Fairmount Park. The committee is concerned because of the damage a transaction of this kind could cause to the reputation of the city of Philadelphia, damage which will be proportionately greater because of the reputation Philadelphia has achieved for its significant work in the preservation of historic structures in the Society Hill area. It will seem to many persons as though the city has suddenly decided to turn its back on its architectural treasures.

This committee is also concerned because there is no assurance that the State will be able to protect these structures. State funds are limited and anyone who has had occasion to visit any of the historical properties presently administered by the State must be well aware of this fact. To turn these properties over to the State would seem likely to be consigning them to a very uncertain future.

This committee would, therefore, recommend that the Commission consider an alternative proposal to be made to the Fairmount Park Commission and the Department of Public Property. In essence this proposal would be that the historically valuable houses in Fairmount Park be leased to responsible persons who would agree to restore and maintain them. The terms of the lease would be similar to the agreements of sale drawn up between the Redevelopment

Authority and purchasers of historical properties in Society Hill. In all probability the leases would need to be fairly long term ones in view of the expenses the leasees might be expected to undertake. (A ten year lease could be considered.) This committee further suggests that the Historic Houses Committee of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation be asked to serve as an advisory board in this matter reviewing applications for park houses and recommending to the Fairmount Park Commission or to the city's Department of Public Property the persons or person who would make suitable tenants for one or more of these properties.

Should the Fairmount Park Commission not wish to continue to serve as custodian of what is generally regarded as the city's principle architectural heritage, the Historical Commission would suggest that the Department of Public Property consider assuming this responsibility. Neither arrangement would involve the expenditure of additional funds by the city.

It should be noted in conclusion that the Preservation Committee of the American Institute of Architects, Philadelphia Chapter; and the Preservation Coordinator, American Institute of Architects, for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, support this suggestion.