

STOP WASTING ABANDONED PROPERTY, INC.



S. W. A. P.

THIRD ANNUAL REPORT 1979

S.W.A.P.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Friends:

Little did we dream two-and-a-half years ago that those endless meetings at City Hall, in church basements, and in our livingrooms would result in an organization with one of the most impressive records in the country for dealing with housing abandonment. With the conviction that no obstacle or bureaucracy can stop a committed, organized community, and with the knowledge that no one will solve our problems except ourselves, we have begun to reclaim our neighborhoods from the absentee landlords who abandoned them.

During the past year we have witnessed growth in our membership, staff, and scope of activities, and have almost doubled the number of homesteaded houses by achieving the average rate of 1½ houses sold per week.

On one level, SWAP deals with the individual houses and homesteaders, and gives homesteaders extensive counseling. This is handled almost exclusively by our extremely competent and dedicated staff.

Organizational concerns, special projects, and general housing issues comprise our other level of activity, and these are the major responsibilities of the Board of Directors and its committees, with the careful guidance of our Executive Director. The Board is an enthusiastic mixture of the private sector, homesteaders, and community leaders. Homesteaders now constitute a majority of the Board, ensuring that the people most affected by SWAP have a policy-making role. The Board has shown itself to be a flexible, innovative, committed, and successful group.

S.W.A.P. saves abandoned houses from demolition by finding homesteaders to restore and occupy them.

PAST PRESIDENTS OF S.W.A.P.

Clockwise from bottom left: Robert Fain, current President; Berta Phillips, first President and S.W.A.P.'s guiding force; and Stan Cameron (with son), second President of S.W.A.P.



Two new committees have developed over the past year. The Model House Committee, chaired by Stan Cameron, has overseen the restoration of our new office at 439-441 Pine Street. The Banking Committee, chaired by Andrew Cagen, our Treasurer, works with banks, which are crucial to homesteading. The Homesteaders Coop, has continued to be a great source of strength and leadership, while dealing with issues of immediate and practical concern.

Our success, coupled with our intensive public relations effort, has significantly altered the public's attitude on abandoned houses. Many people no longer regard them as hazards that should be destroyed, but as irreplaceable assets that must be saved. The hardworking Chief of Building Inspection, Merlin DiConti, reports that demolition by the city has decreased from 371 in 1974 to 140 in 1978.

This year we can anticipate the establishment of a fundraising committee, and the development of closer working relationships with

other neighborhood groups. We should also become more involved with the issues of insurance and arson.

SWAP has matured into a nationally recognized organization. We have responded to the needs of the neighborhoods and increased the size of our operation without losing touch with the community. As we begin our fourth year, we must continue our tradition of bold risk-taking, tempered by the desire to achieve our goals in an efficient and practical manner.

Our 150 homesteading families and their proud homes are eloquent testimony to our success. More than anything, they will serve to remind us and the community-at-large of the continued need for our activities.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Fain
Robert Fain
Chairperson

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE HOMESTEADING of each house is a unique and unequalled project. The telling of the tensions, the joys, and the anecdotes of the saving of each house would fill several volumes. Though the statistics we have compiled and listed below are impressive, they can never convey the human drama: the frustrations, the sweat, and the satisfactions of each homesteading family; the stubborn, selfless efforts of the Board of Directors; and the commitment and sensitivity of the staff. But

those of us who are part of the S.W.A.P. organization, and our friends and supporters in the community ---- the people behind the statistics --- know the massive effort behind these facts and figures.

On behalf of the S.W.A.P. staff, I am pleased to present the Report of the Executive Director.

Getz Obstfeld
Executive Director



S.W.A.P. was formed in August, 1976. Eight houses had been sold before S.W.A.P.'s formation by the ad-hoc group that eventually became S.W.A.P. The statistics below are accurate as of April 15, 1979.

HOUSES SOLD TO DATE

Closings--146
Under sales agreement--12
TOTAL--158

NUMBER OF UNITS

Dwelling units--309
Storefronts--3
Churches--1

HOMEOWNERSHIP

Owner-occupied--141
Absentee-owned--5*
*All but one absentee owner are neighborhood residents.

NEIGHBORHOOD BREAKDOWN

South Providence--55
Elmwood--38
West End--23
East Side--8
Smith Hill--6
Washington Park--4
Olneyville--4
Federal Hill--3
Other--2

RACIAL DISTRIBUTION

White--51
Black--42
Hispanic--46
Mixed families--3
Non-profits--4

TAX APPEALS

Through a yearly tax appeal that S.W.A.P. makes on behalf of all new Homesteaders, tax assessments are lowered to the true value of the property at the time of purchase. Upon application to the Tax Assessor's Office, it becomes frozen at that assessment for a minimum of five years.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u># OF APPLICATIONS</u>	<u>LOWERED ASSESSMENT</u>	<u>TAXES SAVED/YEAR</u>
1977	57	\$184,270	\$10,641.92
1978	37	\$199,200	\$11,505.04
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>\$383,470</u>	<u>\$22,146.96</u>

BANK MORTGAGE INFORMATION

<u>BANK</u>	<u># OF MORTGAGES</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
Citizen's	30	\$231,088
First Bank & Trust	1	6,000
Industrial Nat'l.	4	26,500
Old Colony	1	12,000
Old Stone	10	87,800
People's	8	125,800
RI Hospital Trust	8	55,000
Coop Credit Union	4	19,900
South Prov. C.U.	15	53,850
State Employees C.U.	3	8,000
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>\$630,938</u>

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

77 grants totalling \$351,000

312d 3% HOME IMPROVEMENT LOANS

4 loans totalling \$107,150

INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Over \$16,500/family of four--7
Between \$16,500-\$7,313--103
Under \$7,313/family of four--32
Non-profits--4

FAILURES

So far, there have been no mortgage defaults.
One house burned after closing.
Luckily, only \$500 had been invested.
One house burned accidentally after renovations completed.
This was the only fire insurance claim.

---S.W.A.P. STAFF

From left to right.

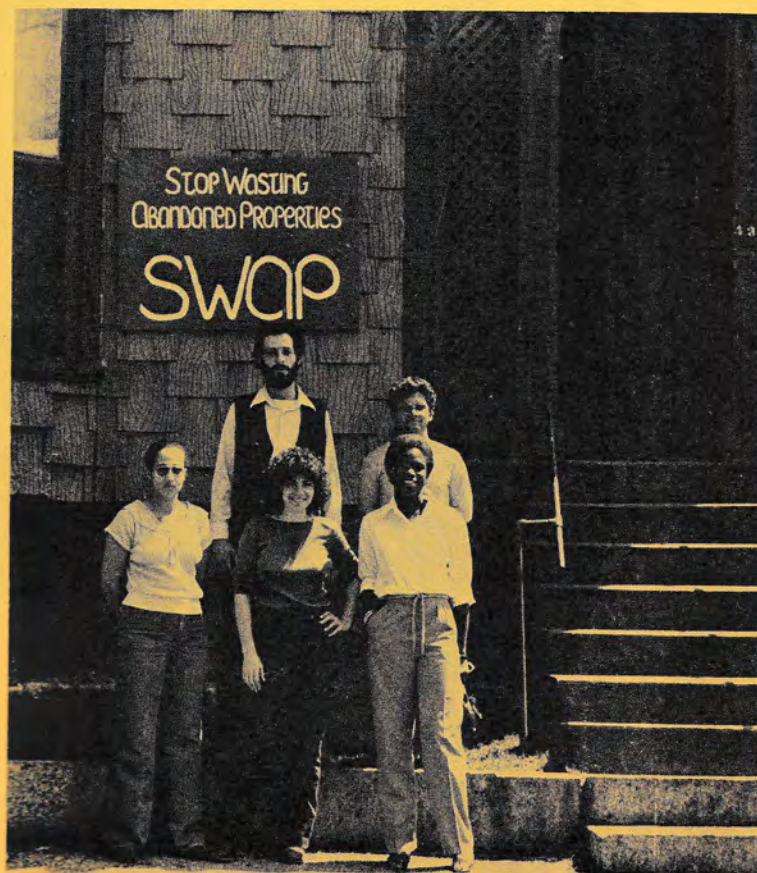
Bottom row:

Debra Hall, Francine Gerace

Lynette Freitas

Top row:

Getz Obstfeld, Juan Francisco



HOMESTEADERS COOP REPORT

This has been an exciting year for the Homesteader's Coop. The number of S.W.A.P. homesteaders has doubled, and more and more people are actively involved with making the Coop a success. This year, the Coop elected three officers: myself as Chairperson, and Juanita Soto and Henry Andre, Vice Chairpersons.

Two major projects which we'd started back in 1977 finally became reality. After 1½ years of work, the Homesteader's Coop finally got legislation passed by the city and state which will remove back taxes unpaid by the previous owner. Time and time again, homesteaders attended public hearings, council meetings, and contacted legislators. On May 5th the governor signed our enabling legislation, and on June 6th 50 homesteaders cheered while the Providence City Council voted to approve our tax abatement ordinance. Already, 40 homesteaders have applied to have back taxes abated, and hopefully this spring we'll see homesteaders begin to receive their final abatements.

The second major project, the Homesteader's Tool Bank, started to operate in July, after months of hard work by the Coop Tool Bank Committee. The Tool Bank is a membership group, with every S.W.A.P. homesteader welcome to join, and is operated on Saturday mornings by the ToolBank Committee. Through the Tool Bank, Homesteaders can borrow expensive equipment that few individuals could afford, but are essential to good renovation work.

Coop meetings, hosted by homesteaders at their homes, include time for coffee, house-talk, and a tour of the host's accomplishments. The meetings are a time for people to share both enthusiasm and problems. The Coop has sponsored workshops on

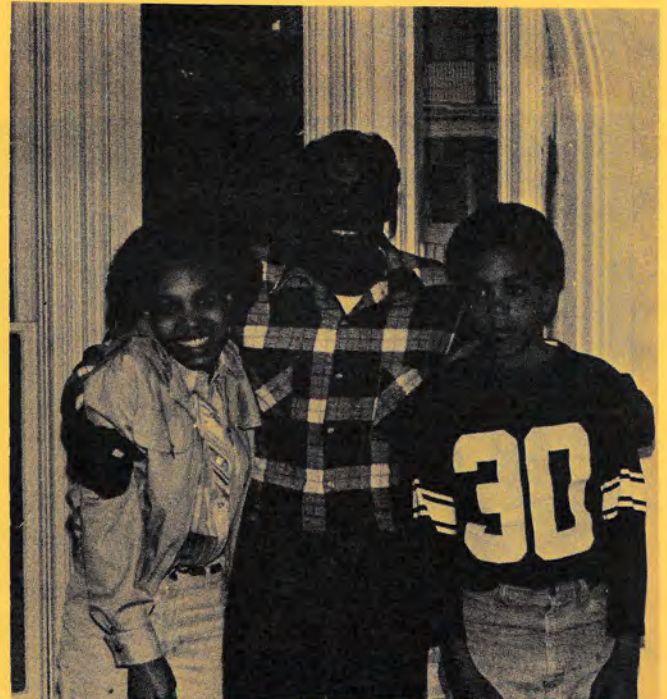
electricity, plumbing, and use of power tools, and has held two pot luck dinners this year, attended by homesteaders and their entire families.

The Homesteader's Coop is simply homesteaders joining together to make repairing a condemned building simpler and easier. The Coop is the place where new homesteaders can benefit from the experience of people already fixing houses, and where everyone can work together to solve common concerns.

Respectfully Submitted,

Donald J. Lopes

Donald J. Lopes



Donald J. Lopes

Juanita Soto (top)
Henry Andre (bottom)

REPORTE DE LA COOPERATIVA DE PIONEROS

Este ha sido un año excitante para los miembros de la Cooperativa de Pioneros de S.W.A.P. El número de cooperadores se ha duplicado y mas gentes estan activamente participando y añadiendose a la Cooperativa. En este año los miembros de la Cooperativa eligieron tres oficiales: el Señor Danny Lopes, Presidente, Henry Andre y una servidora, como Vice-Presidentes.



Dos de los proyectos que habíamos empezado en 1977 finalmente se hicieron realidad. Uno de estos proyectos resulto en la aprobación (de parte de la Ciudad y el Estado) de un proyecto de ley el cual exonerará impuestos debidos en su casa antes de usted haberla comprado. Este proyecto de ley se aprovo el día 5 de Mayo, gracias al esfuerzo unido de los pioneros y aportadores de esta organización.

El segundo proyecto, El Banco de Herramientas de los Pioneros, empezo a operar en Julio, después de haberse estado organizando por espacio de largos meses por el Comité del Banco de Herramientas de la Cooperativa, el cual administra el programa en el presente. El Banco cuenta con un gran número de herramientas costosas y esenciales en la renovación de su casa. Usted se puede hacer miembro pagando una cuota de \$5.00 dolares anuales.

En las reuniones de la Cooperativa, las cuales son patrocinadas por los mismos dueños de casas, se tratan puntos de vital importancia al nuevo y viejo propietario, se sirve cafe y se le enseñalos logros del dueño de la casa en su propiedad. La Cooperativa patrocina clases de plomería, carpentería, electricidad, etc.

La Cooperativa está compuesta por un grupo de propietarios del programa que se han unidos para hacer la renovación de sos casas mas facil y efectiva.

Juanita Soto
Vice Presidente

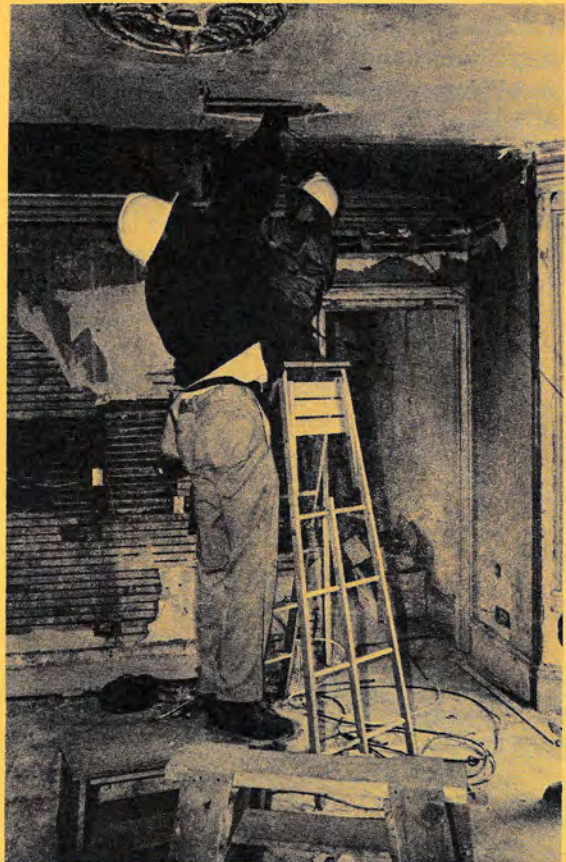
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Juanita Soto".

REPORT OF THE MODEL HOUSE COMMITTEE

All of us knew that something special had to be done to save the Pine Street Area. Pine Street is a major thoroughfare linking downtown to South Providence, Elmwood, and the West End neighborhoods. It was in a very deteriorated condition; 90% absentee-owned, and with a reputation that made selling abandoned houses very difficult. Ironically, this was the street on which our office was located.

In the spring of last year, the S.W.A.P. Board decided to commit itself to the revitalization of the Pine Street Area. The first step in saving the area had already been achieved by its nomination in 1977 as an Historic District by the National Register of Historic Places. We decided that with a commitment of public funds and energies for a symbolic restoration, we could spark the revitalization of the rest of the street by private families and institutions.

A seed money grant from the Mayor's Office of Community Development of \$45,000 turned the idea into a reality. The Model House Committee was set up, including myself as chairperson, Henry Andre John Martin, Berta Phillips, and Joan Rich. Mike Warner was selected as the architect. The committee purchased 439-441 Pine Street--the largest, most dilapidated and visible abandoned building on the street. Volunteer labor and donations of materials were sought from every source conceivable. After a great deal of encouragement, Central Vocational High School chose our building as a site for classroom training in carpentry, electricity and sheet metal. This arrangement has turned out to be highly successful for both S.W.A.P.



and the high school. We have been approved for a matching grant from the R.I. Historic Preservation Commission of \$8600 for the exterior. Citizen's Bank has agreed to provide a mortgage upon completion which will give S.W.A.P. enough funds to restore a second house. Thus, the seed money provided for this initial house will revolve and be used to renovate other abandoned houses in our neighborhoods.

Our first Model House should be ready for occupancy by the first of July. S.W.A.P. will move to office space in the basement of the renovated building. Three two-bedroom apartments, completely renovated, will be available for rental to families from the neighborhood.



The Model House Committee is very proud of what it has helped Pine Street become. In less than a year, the Model House has leveraged \$129,500, and \$36,000 in in-kind services. Over eleven houses in the Pine Street Historic District have been sold by S.W.A.P. to owner-occupants. Pine Street is now a street of young pioneering families, a street with a future. A Pine Street Block Club has been formed, with over 40 resident members. S.W.A.P. began this project

despite an air of skepticism from others, but we are happy to report that even we are overwhelmed at the dramatic progress of Pine Street's revitalization.

Respectfully Submitted,
S. E. Cameron

BANKING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Banking Committee was created last summer by the Board of Directors to review and attempt to improve the working relationship between S.W.A.P. and the banking industry. In several cases, S.W.A.P. found that the initial commitments of some banks, which helped to create the breakthrough "S.W.A.P. Abandoned House Grant Program", were too vague to be of real value.

Over a six-month period, the Banking Committee met with individual institutions and discussed the details that are essential for creating a workable renovation mortgage. The immediate result was an improved relationship with several banks. In addition, the committee's efforts have opened up avenues for previously unmortgageable situations, such as tax-reverted properties, and fire-damaged, uninsurable property.

The Banking Committee's efforts have now turned to R.I.

Housing Mortgage and Finance Corporation (RIHMFC) which provides mortgages for home purchase at a lower interest rate. The committee has organized a coalition of banks and community organizations to strongly encourage the RIHMFC to meet the needs of Rhode Island's older cities. It appears at this time that an addition to the regular mortgage program is being considered. This could provide up to \$500,000 in lower interest (8½-9%) mortgages to homeowners doing extensive renovation work over an 18 month period. The Banking Committee will continue to work with RIHMFC and the banks to create a forum where S.W.A.P.'s needs can be discussed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Andrew M. Cagen
Andrew M. Cagen



Homesteading families use their sweat as equity.



199 Camp Street: BEFORE



199 Camp Street: AFTER



69 Evergreen Street: BEFORE



69 Evergreen Street: AFTER



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