



# *The Historical Society of Frankford*

1507 Orthodox Street  
Frankford, Philadelphia, PA 19124  
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215-743-6030

*Preserving and presenting the history of Frankford and vicinity*

April 29, 2025

Zachary Frankel  
Chair, Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Mr. Frankel and members of the Philadelphia Historical Commission:

The Historical Society of Frankford has gone on record opposing the current nomination of 1507 Orthodox Street because of its errors of both omission and commission. Those errors could have been avoided had the process been conducted collaboratively, considering the needs of both the owner and the nominator. That is an important lesson that as a historical organization we would like to use to help make the process more transparent and collaborative for others in our neighborhood. The Historical Society of Frankford can serve as a resource for both historic building owners and potential nominators to help facilitate partnerships and avoid inaccuracies and misunderstandings that naturally arise when there is no communication between the two. Exploring our resources for the study of historic buildings in the Frankford neighborhood as an interactive collaboration between owners and nominators would help build trust in a process that often devolves into an “us vs. them” scenario. The current process may add buildings to the register, but it is not necessarily the best public policy for building community spirit.

Despite our significant issues with the text of this nomination, meeting with the staff at the Philadelphia Historical Commission did help assuage our other concerns about what designation would mean. We think other owners who might consider historic register nomination would benefit from such information. The Historical Society of Frankford is willing to host a meeting or meetings at which preservationists and preservation agencies, such as the Philadelphia Historical Commission and Preservation Alliance, could help demystify the process of historic nomination. We believe these sessions and collaborative meetings with owners of properties that are priorities for historic designation could promote a stronger representation of Frankford on the Philadelphia Historic Register. As we noted in our original letter to the Committee on Historic Designation, no Frank R. Watson buildings in Frankford, including two historic churches, are currently on the register. We encourage Mr. Joseph Menkevich, nominator for 1507 Orthodox, to use his extensive research on Frank Watson to support the nomination of these buildings. The Historical Society of Frankford could help celebrate these nominations with an exhibit on Frank R. Watson’s life and architectural work in the neighborhood. We also encourage Mr. Menkevich and staff at the Historical Commission and Preservation Alliance to work with our resources to promote the nomination of other historic buildings in Frankford.

In our letter to the Committee on Historic Designation, the Historical Society of Frankford requested that this nomination be rejected based on the errors and misinterpretations we documented, particularly regarding Criterion J: “Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.” Because of the errors in the current nomination, we argue that this nomination does not accurately address that criterion. As we noted in our letter to the committee, we have been compiling information to prepare our own historic register nomination for our 1930 building. Our archives are rich with material to create an accurate description of our organization’s significance to the community of Frankford. Rejecting this nomination would allow the Historical Society of Frankford to address both criteria accurately, correcting the documented errors in the current nomination. That pause would also allow us to promote the neighborhood historic preservation initiatives that we have described above. We believe that Frank R. Watson’s significant church architecture in Frankford should be recognized on the historic register prior to the 1930 Georgian-style fireproof building that he created to further the society’s mission to collect and preserve Frankford history.

Over the past few years, the society has made strides in that mission. We are building a digital—eventually online—catalog; actively promoting our monthly lectures on topics of relevance to the history of the neighborhood; developing programs for local school children; encouraging library researchers and museum visitors; and building a dependable volunteer “staff.” These projects cannot be completed overnight. Celebrating success on these fronts in an accurate historic nomination that uses our unique resources would be a much better addition to the Philadelphia Historic Register.

We are also concerned that should the Historical Commission accept the current nomination, it will become a public record despite having documented errors and misinterpretations. We respectfully suggest that knowingly accepting an inaccurate document as the basis for approving a legal action, in this case inclusion on the Register of Historic Places with its attendant obligations, is not good public policy. Even disregarding any legal implications, a nomination’s inclusion on the historic register conveys the Commission’s acceptance of its accuracy. Future researchers will use the document in good faith, but perpetuate uncorrected errors. This is why having the input of owners in the nomination process is so important.

For these reasons, and those expressed in our letter to the Committee on Historic Designation, dated April 1, 2025, we respectfully request that the current nomination of 1507 Orthodox Street be rejected. The Historical Society of Frankford will then be able to focus on its core mission initiatives. The society board will be happy to work with Mr. Menkevich to produce an accurate nomination for the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. We will also continue to compile historic information on our building to facilitate its admission to the Pennsylvania Register of Historic Places, as the state arm of the National Register.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jerry Kolankiewicz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "J" and "K".

Jerry Kolankiewicz  
President, Board of Directors  
Historical Society of Frankford

*Preserving and Presenting the History of Frankford and Vicinity Since 1905*  
**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF FRANKFORD**

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**To: Dr Jonathan E Farnham, Executive Director, Historical Commission**

***Sir, in response to your letter dated 17 January 2025, please be advised that the Historical Society of Frankford (HSF), the owner and occupant of the building under consideration, at 1505-07 Orthodox St, does NOT endorse or support the nomination, which has been submitted without our knowledge, and more to the point, without our express consent. We therefore recommend that the nomination be withdrawn if not rejected outright.***

***While we acknowledge Mr. Menkevich's painstaking efforts in the matter of the historic designation nomination for the building in question, had the HSF Board of Directors known about this at the outset we would have raised our concerns and discouraged Mr. Menkevich from taking any further action at this time.***

***At present the HSF Board is generally of the opinion that the nomination is both premature and flawed. In particular, we believe that one of the criteria selected, 7(e), is dubious because regardless of who the architect was, at the end of the day, the fact still remains, our building was intentionally designed to imitate an earlier style of construction, a replica rather than an actual historical structure, and not a contemporary reflection of a style in vogue at the time of its construction.***

***For the record, Mr. Menkevich is not currently a dues-paying member of HSF, nor has he been for at least the last decade. This situation inevitably begs the question of why an outsider would have so strong an interest in proceeding without our knowledge or consent? The Commission needs to be aware of the potential for abuse inherent in its policy of allowing nominations without the approval of the building's owners. To be sure, our building is not in danger of falling down or being demolished.***

***In light of the above, HSF claims the right to nominate our building at such time as we deem appropriate, and on our own terms. Thank you for your assistance with this matter.***

***Sincerely,***



**Jerry Kolankiewicz  
President HSF**