

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION

3 April 1987

David Brownlee, Chairman

The Twenty-seventh meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation began at 1:00 p.m. on Friday 3 April 1987 in the Planning Commission Conference Room, 14th Floor, City Hall Annex.

Present: David Brownlee, Chairman of the Committee on Historic
Designation
David Baldinger, Deputy Director, Philadelphia City Planning
Commission
Caroline Golab
Hyman Myers
Sandra Tatman

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Philadelphia Historical Commission
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Assistant Historic Preservation
Officer, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Philadelphia Historical Commission

Joyce Halley
Lenore Millholen, Center City Residents Association
Ellen Miller
Myrna Field, Society Hill Civic Association

NEW BUSINESS

The Committee reviewed nominations of the following historical and architectural resources.

Old Mill Tenement House
Vernacular

1568-1570 Adams Avenue
c. 1788

The 2 1/2-story stone double house at 1568-1570 Adams Avenue possesses significance as an extremely rare 18th century building left in Frankford, as a fine example of a vernacular Federal Period house and as the last standing component of a grist mill plantation on Frankford Creek, probably the earliest European site in Frankford. Indeed, Frankford owes its early settlement largely to the water power provided by Frankford Creek and the mills that grew up along its banks.

Although not erected until c. 1788, the Adams Avenue tenement houses have a place in the continuing development of a mill complex begun by Swedish Colonists by 1660. With the arrival of William Penn the mill and ground was purchased from the Swedes and passed through a number of hands until approximately 1788 when George Ashbridge erected this tenement to house the workers of his mill. Deeds and tax records documenting "1 stone tenement" provide the basic evidence for construction by the Ashbridges and the construction date of circa 1788. Although the mill itself no longer exists, it stood when the Adams Avenue tenement houses were erected as an addition to the mill complex and remained well into the nineteenth century. Thus these tenement houses yield a direct link in the industrial history of Frankford, extending back to the seventeenth century.

These houses remain as one of the very few 18th century structures in Frankford and amongst these it is a unique example of a double stone tenement house. The Frankford Historic Preservation Committee of Frankford United Neighbors Community Development Corporation has been surveying Frankford for historic sites and has found only four other buildings dating from the 18th century. The houses are a fine vernacular interpretation of the Federal style with their tall gable roof form, symmetrically spaced openings, pedimented dormers, stone quoins, interior panelling and mantels.

The Committee recommended the designation of the houses at 1568-1570 Adams by a vote of 5 - 0.

The Committee resumed its discussion of the proposed historic district for the neighborhood around Rittenhouse Square. The discussion centered on three issues: 1) The name of the proposed district 2) The boundaries and 3) classification of buildings within the district.

The Committee recommended calling the district the "Rittenhouse Fitler Residential District" because the boundaries include neighborhoods presently called Rittenhouse and Fitler Square and because the nomination focuses primarily on buildings that were constructed for residential use.

The Committee, after having visited the district several times agreed upon a final recommendation for boundaries, which can be found on the attached map.

The Committee took up the discussion of classifying buildings in the district inventory and recommended that only three classifications be used: Significant, Contributing and Non-Contributing. Significant refers to those buildings or resources of outstanding architectural and or historical merit that would be worthy of individual listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The term Contributing applies to buildings that add to the historical and architectural fabric of the district. This includes buildings that have been refaced at a later period but still retain the scale of the streetscape, and modern buildings that contribute positively to a streetscape through their scale, materials or detail.

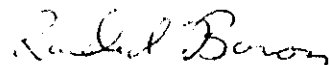
Buildings that are both relatively contemporary and badly out of scale to their streetscape are labeled non-contributing. The Committee asked that a meeting be held to look at pictures of a number of typical and also hard to classify buildings to establish their classifications.

The Committee recommends not placing a date as a cut off between Contributing and Non-contributing buildings, arguing that history is continuous and does not end at a certain date.

The Committee will meet publicly a 3rd time to vote on recommending the Rittenhouse Fitler Residential District for designation on 15 May 1987.

The Committee adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted



Randal Baron
Preservation Planner