

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Kol Israel Synagogue

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 603 St. John's Place [] not for publication

city or town Brooklyn [] vicinity

state New York code NY county Kings code 047 zip code 11238

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [] statewide locally. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ruth A. Purpoint / DSHPO

10/20/09

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
[] see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
[] see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain) _____

Signature of the Keeper

date of action

Kol Israel Synagogue
Name of Property

Kings County, New York
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	TOTAL

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

No style.

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE
walls STONE
BRICK
roof
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Kol Israel Synagogue

Kings County, New York

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location
- C** a birthplace or grave
- D** a cemetery
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage: Eastern European Jewish

Religion

Period of Significance:

1928-1959

Significant Dates:

1928

Significant Person:

n/a

Cultural Affiliation:

n/a

Architect/Builder:

Goldstone, Tobias

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by historic American Building Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u> <u>1</u>	<u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u> <u>2</u> <u>9</u> <u>5</u> <u>9</u>	3	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>						
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing				
2	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>			4	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>						

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By (See continuation sheet for author)

name/title Contact/editor: Kathy Howe, Historic Preservation Program Analyst
organization NYSOPRHP, Field Services Bureau date October 13, 2009
street & number P.O. Box 189, Peebles Island telephone 518-237-8643, ext. 3266
city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Kol Israel Synagogue attn: Rabbi Ari Kirschenbaum
street & number 603 St. John's Place telephone _____
city or town Brooklyn state NY zip code 11238

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20503

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Kol Israel Synagogue
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DESCRIPTION

7. Description

Introduction

Kol Israel Synagogue, at 603 St. John's Place, is located on the north side of St. John's Place between Franklin and Classon avenues in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights, in New York City. It is surrounded by small, three-story apartment buildings and row houses, on both sides of St. John's Place. The property consists of a single building filling its lot. The boundaries of the property are described as Brooklyn Tax Block 1175, Lot 72.

Kol Israel Synagogue is an early 20th-century vernacular "tenement synagogue" surviving in Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood. Built in 1928 to designs of Brooklyn architect Tobias Goldstone, it features a façade reflecting the international trend of adapting Moorish-style ornament to synagogues. Kol Israel demonstrates that a style developed for substantial European and American synagogues seating thousands of congregants could also succeed in a small-scale vernacular Brooklyn synagogue with a congregation of a few hundred.

The Kol Israel synagogue retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. It has been continuously maintained as a synagogue since its construction in 1928. The main façade is intact, with the exception of the original colored glass, which has been partially replaced with clear glass. The interior is also intact with the exception of the recent addition of modern lighting on the balconies.

Exterior

Kol Israel is a small, rectangular building with its main façade on St. John's Place and a secondary, largely undeveloped side façade facing out over the Franklin Avenue shuttle cut (depressed subway tracks). The synagogue sits behind a small areaway demarcated by a simple wrought-iron fence.

Main façade

The synagogue's main façade is two stories tall. It is faced primarily in randomly laid fieldstone. Its major decorative element is a grand central entrance. Three successively recessed slender colonnettes with capitals support three successively recessed round arches; the form of each column is based on a spiral pattern, but each has a different ornamental treatment.

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The entry is through a simple rectangular opening with plain double doors. At the top of the entrance, beneath the ornamental arches, is set a simple colored glass rose window, with a central *magen david* (Star of David). Below this is the inscription "Congregation Kol Israel" in elongated stylized letters designed to suggest Hebrew calligraphy.

There is a slightly shorter and slightly narrower rectangular entrance to either side of the main entrance. Above each is a narrow square-headed window with simple stone sill and lintel matching the fieldstone of the façade; each of these has a simple eight-light casement.

At the second story, directly above the central entrance, are three simple, narrow square-headed windows, each combining an eight-light casement – similar to those at the first story – above which is a leaded glass pane with a *magen david* inscribed within a circle. Above these windows is a Hebrew inscription קאנג כל ישראל שנת תרפח ("Cong.[Congregation] Kol Israel" and the Hebrew year).

Side facade

The side (western) façade is exposed because it overlooks the depressed subway tracks of the Franklin Avenue shuttle. It is an absolutely plain brick wall, with three stories of windows visible (here, unlike the main façade, the basement level is visible); the upper two stories (corresponding to the sanctuary and its balcony) have round-arched windows, while the lower story (corresponding to the basement) has square-headed windows.

Interior

Vestibule

The synagogue's main entrance leads into a small vestibule. A staircase leads up one flight to the sanctuary, while another staircase leads down to a basement level community room. The simple walls are plastered; the main ornament is the colored-glass rose window of the façade.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is a long, narrow room with an upper balcony along three sides, and a high ceiling above. The sanctuary's architectural detail is simple, and depends on the rhythm of the round-arched windows on either side of the sanctuary, both below and above the balcony; the two round-arched openings on either side of the ark, as well as similar openings directly above them at the balcony level; and wider round arches supported on posts at the balcony level. The floor is wooden; the ceiling both beneath and above the balconies is plastered, while the central ceiling is almost entirely taken up by an ornamental skylight.

Following the traditional Eastern European synagogue layout, there is a simple wooden *bimah* (reader's platform) in the center towards the north, enclosed by a wooden banister railing; and a raised platform at the northern end supporting an elaborate wooden ark, to hold the Torah scrolls, built into the wall. The design of the

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wooden ark is suggestive more of classical forms than of Moorish, with four narrow fluted pilasters dividing it into three paneled bays. At its top, two sculpted lions flank a representation of the two Tablets of the Law, topped by a crown. A curtain adorned with a *magen david* hangs in front of the central section where the scrolls are kept. The sanctuary's wooden benches may be original to the synagogue; each has an ornamental *magen david* inscribed within a circle at either end.

The balconies are simple spaces; they have wooden banister railings similar in design to the railings of the *bimah*, as well as wooden benches similar to those below.

Unusual for such a modest space is its ornamental glass. A rose window above the ark includes a large *magen david* inscribed in circles of leaded glass. Particularly noteworthy is the ceiling: The main section, between the balcony arcades, is organized as one large glass skylight, divided into two rows of ten multi-colored leaded glass squares, each with an identical geometric pattern of a square centered on a circle, attached to the edges with a form resembling a light fabric. One panel has lost its ornamental glass, but most are intact.

The natural light provided by the two levels of large arched windows – each of which is a casement whose middle six-light section opens outward, with a fixed three-light pane below and fixed three-light fanlight above – and the ceiling skylight is amplified by simple ornamental two-pronged wall sconces mounted between the first-story windows, and three ornamental metal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling from the skylight frame. New light fixtures have been added to the balcony ceiling, replacing older fluorescent light fixtures, and a row of individual bulbs has been added to the underside of each balcony.

Basement level

The basement level has a long hallway with a simple tiled floor, and at the north end a community room which is also used for religious services. It is a long simple room, lit by square-headed windows, with benches and tables, and an ark at the far end.

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SIGNIFICANCE

8. Statement of Significance

The Kol Israel Synagogue, at 603 St. John's Place in the Crown Heights neighborhood, is historically significant at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of ethnic history and religion as an early 20th-century synagogue surviving in Brooklyn, Kings County, New York. Built in 1928 for an Orthodox congregation, to designs by Brooklyn architect Tobias Goldstone, it dates from a period when Brooklyn had emerged as one of the world's major Jewish population centers. As much of the surrounding Jewish community at the time was tending to more liberal branches of Judaism, Kol Israel was founded specifically to provide a home for Orthodox practice, then considered on the wane.

The building is architecturally significant at the local level under Criterion C as an example of an intact 1920s "tenement synagogue" in Brooklyn. Its design reflects the international trend to adapt Moorish-style ornament to synagogue design. This style of ornament developed in Europe and America from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries, in the belief that the Moorish represented a more "Eastern," and therefore more culturally appropriate style for Jewish buildings. Its interior is unusual for a ceiling largely comprised of an enormous ornamental leaded-glass skylight. The design of Kol Israel demonstrates that a style developed for substantial European and American synagogues seating thousands of congregants could also succeed in a small-scale vernacular Brooklyn synagogue with a congregation of a few hundred.

Throughout its 81 year history, Kol Israel has served the spiritual needs of the Orthodox Jewish congregation. The continuity of its religious traditions is reflected in its period of significance which spans from its construction in 1928 up to 1959.

The Jewish community of Brooklyn and its synagogues

Since 1898, when the City of Brooklyn became the Borough of Brooklyn within the City of Greater New York, the Jewish population of Brooklyn has formed a major portion of the Jewish population of New York City. Long home to roughly half the city's overall Jewish population, Brooklyn remains to this day one of the chief Jewish communities in the country and in the world.

Unlike Manhattan – whose first Jewish settlement dates to the 17th-century Dutch colony – Brooklyn traces its Jewish population to the middle of the 19th century. Jewish immigrants to Brooklyn during this period – like Jewish immigrants generally – came largely from the German-speaking states of central Europe. Samuel P. Abelow, the author of a 1937 history of Brooklyn Jewry, lists the earliest residents he could ascertain:

When the Jews first settled in Brooklyn is not known definitely. In the Brooklyn directory for 1838-1839, published by A.G. Stevens and Wm. H. Marschalk, appear such names as Benjamin Levy, auctioneer, at 79 Fulton St., Benjamin Levy, variety store, at 137½ Fulton St., and Daniel Levy, cartman,

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175 Pearl St. According to a tradition, the pioneers used to row across the East River to New York to attend services there Friday nights, Saturdays and holidays.¹

The earliest Jewish residents of Brooklyn chronicled by Abelow included Solomon Furst, who emigrated in the 1850s and

...settled on Atlantic Avenue, where he earned his living as a merchant tailor and invested money in real estate in that section. [He] joined Congregation Baith Israel and became its president.

His son, Michael, was

...the first Jewish boy of Brooklyn to attend any college. Although he was the only Jewish boy in Yale, he spoke at the graduation exercises on the topic, "The Modern Jew." He was selected as one of the speakers because of his high scholastic attainments. He graduated in 1876. Then he studied law at the Columbia Law School and, after graduation, opened an office in Brooklyn. He was proud of the fact that he never moved out of Brooklyn and was associated with many of the leading Jewish and civic movements.²

Elias Isaacson

...came from London, England, in 1838, and settled on DeKalb Avenue, near Myrtle Avenue.... Elias Isaacson became one of the "Forty-niners" who rushed to California to dig gold out of the soil but returned to Brooklyn with a bag of misfortunes. Elias' son, Mark N., was a great violinist and occupied a very important part in the history of Brooklyn music. The son of Mark, Charles D., who died in 1936, was also a famous musician.

Levi Blumenau came from Germany in 1845 and settled "in the Court Street section." Bernhard Schellenberg, "born near Frankfort...opened a merchant tailor shop at 119 Myrtle Avenue" in 1857. That same year, James Gru "settled in Brooklyn... [and] established a men's hat business on Atlantic Avenue near the East River...."³

Distinct from the Brooklyn Jewish community was a sister community in Williamsburg, a separate village before uniting with Brooklyn.

The first known settler here was Adolph Baker, who arrived in 1837.⁴

¹ Samuel P. Abelow, *History of Brooklyn Jewry* (Brooklyn: Scheba Publishing Company, 1937), p.5.

² Abelow, 6-7.

³ Abelow, 8-9.

⁴ Abelow, 9.

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The Jewish community grew, but it was some time before it achieved great numbers. In 1870, Henry Stiles' *A History of the City of Brooklyn* listed only four Jewish congregations, and stated only that "there are in Brooklyn nearly one thousand families of the Jewish faith."

Over the next few decades, however, as Brooklyn grew into the country's third largest city, reaching a population of approximately 600,000 by 1880,⁵ its Jewish population grew enormously. The subsequent opening of the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg bridges, and the extension of the IRT subway into Brooklyn, facilitated the continuing growth of both the borough and its Jewish population.

Following a major wave of immigration from Eastern Europe of Jews fleeing poverty, religious discrimination, expulsion and massacres – a wave beginning in the 1880s and reaching its peak in the early decades of the 20th century – New York City, including Brooklyn, became home to an enormous Eastern European Jewish immigrant community. From about 1880 up until World War I, some two million Jews – roughly one third of all the Jews in Europe – arrived in the United States.⁶ The vast majority first settled in New York City, many settling in the crowded tenements of Manhattan's Lower East Side. The Jewish immigrants created an enormous Yiddish-speaking community, in which they were able to find *kosher* (ritually acceptable) food, Yiddish-language newspapers, and mutual aid societies. Major Jewish immigration stopped only with the passage in 1924 of new immigration laws.

Brooklyn shared in this massive growth. From 1905 to 1930, the Jewish population of Brooklyn grew eight-fold, from 100,000 to 800,000. In 1918, New York City's Jewish population was estimated at 1,330,000, most of whom lived in Manhattan (696,000) and Brooklyn (568,000).⁷ Some of Brooklyn's new Jewish arrivals moved there from the more crowded neighborhoods of the Lower East Side, while others settled directly in Brooklyn after arriving in the United States.

By 1927, Jewish residents accounted for roughly a third of Brooklyn's population, and made up almost half the Jewish population of the entire city.⁸ In this pre-Holocaust period, wrote Abelow,

...as the estimated Jewish population of the world is 16,240,000, according to Jacob Lestschinsky, of the Jewish Scientific Institute, Brooklyn has about one-sixteenth of all the Jews. In view of the fact that Brooklyn Jewry began with a handful of settlers about 1837, the growth of the community presents one of the most remarkable social phenomena in history.⁹

Today's Brooklyn Jewish community is made up of many different elements.

⁵ Ilana Abramovitch and Seán Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn* (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life; Brandeis University Press, 2001), "Introduction," p. 5.

⁶ Moses Rischin, *The Promised Land: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (New York, 1970), p.20, cited in Andrew Dolkart, *National Register Nomination: Lower East Side Historic District* (New York: 1999).

⁷ *The Jewish Communal Register of New York City 1917-1918* (New York: Kehillah [Jewish Community], 1918), p.86.

⁸ Abramovitch and Galvin, p. 5.

⁹ Abelow, p.13.

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In 1990, Brooklyn Jews numbered about 420,000 out of New York City's 1.13 million Jewish inhabitants.... Brooklyn's Jewish life is breathtaking in its diversity. Major groupings in the borough include Jews from the former Soviet Union, from Syria, Jews of central and eastern European origin, Israeli Jews, Jews from Arab lands, Iranian Jews. There are large numbers of elderly Jews, yuppie Jews, Holocaust survivors, Orthodox, Ultra-Orthodox.... Within its borders, Brooklyn has contained major centers of Jewish religious, educational, and all varieties of Zionist and anti-Zionist life.¹⁰

Synagogues have always played a major role in the life of New York's Jewish population, and Brooklyn's first synagogues date back to the pre-Civil War era. Brooklyn's synagogues reflect the varied modern history of Judaism – there are synagogues associated with the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements, as well as Modern Orthodoxy and the synagogues of the borough's many Hasidic communities.¹¹

Brooklyn's first Jewish congregation, Beth Elohim, met informally in 1848 in Williamsburg, and officially incorporated in 1851. Its founders were a group of German and Alsatian Jews; perhaps not coincidentally, the year 1848 was the year of the various failed revolts in German-speaking European states. In 1859, the congregation bought a Lutheran church on South First Street and converted it to use as Brooklyn's first synagogue.

Just three years later, in 1862, Brooklyn's second Jewish congregation, Baith Israel, constructed Brooklyn's first purpose-built synagogue at the corner of Boerum Place and State Street.

In the words of Rabbi Israel Goldefarb, the Congregation's first historian, it was "the first altar dedicated to the God of Israel" to be built on all of Long Island, for it was not until 1876 that Williamsburg's Kahal Kodesh built its own synagogue on Keap Street.¹²

Within 40 years, Brooklyn synagogues numbered in the hundreds. New York's 1918 Jewish population was served by 700 synagogues, of which not quite 300 were located in Brooklyn. Brooklyn's synagogue count that year, broken down by district, included (and this listing is indicative of the location of the major Jewish communities within the borough at that time):

Borough Park: 27 permanent, 13 temporary

Brownsville: 48 permanent, 23 temporary

Bushwick: 5 permanent, 6 temporary

¹⁰ Abramovich and Galvin, p.3.

¹¹ Though Judaism is small in numbers of adherents, compared to such religions as Christianity and Islam, it has many different theological manifestations. For a description and history, see Isidore Epstein, *Judaism* (Penguin Books, 1959, reprinted 1973), especially Chapter 21, "Modern Movements in Judaism."

¹² Judith R. Greenwald, "First Synagogues - The first 144 Years of Congregation Baith Israel Anshei Emes (the Kane Street Synagogue)," in Abramovitch and Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn*, p. 33.

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Central Brooklyn: 26 permanent, 26 temporary
East New York: 24 permanent, 29 temporary
Williamsburg: 49 permanent, 20 temporary¹³

After World War II, Brooklyn began losing much of its population and industrial employment. In particular, the population of Jewish neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn shrank due to death and movement away from city neighborhoods. The 1980s and '90s saw a resurgence of Brooklyn's Jewish population. The flight to the suburbs slowed, and many Jews moved to the city in the '80s from the Soviet Union, Israel, Iran and from other Middle Eastern countries. By 1990, there were 420,000 Jews in Brooklyn.¹⁴

Today Brooklyn still has hundreds of active synagogues. In some neighborhoods which formerly had Jewish communities but no longer do, notably Brownsville and East New York, synagogues have been either demolished or converted to churches or other uses. In neighborhoods that have historic or new Jewish communities, however, synagogues continue to thrive. Such is the case in Crown Heights.

Crown Heights and its Jewish community¹⁵

Crown Heights, within the old town of Bedford, falls into the "Central Brooklyn" category of the *Jewish Communal Register* cited above. Bounded by Atlantic Avenue on the north and Empire Boulevard on the South, Flatbush Avenue on the west and Ralph Avenue to the east, Crown Heights went through several stages of development. Following the end of slavery in New York State in 1827, two African-American communities, Weeksville and Carrville, grew up in the eastern part of the area. In 1854, in the area north of Eastern Parkway, where Kol Israel is located, the former Lefferts estate was sold off just as improved transportation – stagecoach and horse-car connections to the Fulton Ferry – made suburban development possible. Early frame villas from this period – few of which survive – were joined in the 1870s by waves of speculative row-house building. The neighborhood's residents at the time were largely Protestants of European descent, who built a variety of Protestant churches. The arrival of the IRT subway line on Eastern Parkway in 1920 brought six-story middle-income apartment buildings to the neighborhood. It was during this period that the name Crown Heights became popular, and also that the neighborhood's ethnic make-up began to change, as former residents left and new immigrant groups took their place, including Caribbean blacks, Germans, Scandinavians, Irish, Italians and Jews.

¹³ *Jewish Communal Register*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Marc D. Angel, Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Jews," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 622.

¹⁵ General information on Crown Heights is based on Ellen Marie Snyder-Grenier, "Crown Heights," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, and New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Crown Heights North Historic District Designation Report* (New York: City of New York, 2007).

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Today, the Jewish community of Crown Heights is generally identified with the Lubavitch Hasidic movement,¹⁶ but in 1928, the Jewish population – comprising roughly 35% of the neighborhood – was more varied.¹⁷ As late as 1950, the 75,000-strong Jewish community of Crown Heights

...supported some thirty-four synagogues, ranging from Reform to Hasidic, and housed in spaces ranging from tiny store-fronts to the immense Brooklyn Jewish Center on Eastern Parkway.¹⁸

The Kol Israel synagogue, located north of Eastern Parkway – away from what became the main concentration of the Lubavitch community – was built for a small congregation that, while Orthodox, was not Hasidic. In 1928, the congregation was surrounded not by other Orthodox congregations, but rather by a growing non-Orthodox population.

Congregation Kol Israel, the “tenement synagogue” type, and Moorish-inspired ornament

As a small, relatively poor congregation, Kol Israel was not in a position to hire a major architect, and turned instead to Brooklyn architect Tobias Goldstone.¹⁹ Little is known about Goldstone’s career. He was active in Manhattan and Brooklyn from the 1920s through the 1950s.²⁰

The Kol Israel synagogue is a relatively modest building because it represented a small Orthodox community within what was then a larger, more-liberal post-World War I Jewish population. In the immediate neighborhood, a large Reform congregation had built Union Temple, considered the largest such building in Brooklyn. This was a descendant of Brooklyn’s first, originally Orthodox congregation, Beth Elohim. There was also a large Conservative synagogue not far away.

Orthodoxy was considered on the wane in the 1920s, but Kol Israel was determined to find a space for Orthodox practice in the community.

¹⁶ As described in “Lubavitchers,” by Lisa Gitelman, in the *Encyclopedia of New York City*: “...the largest Hasidic sect in the world, founded in eastern Europe in the nineteenth century by Shneur Zalman.... After the Holocaust many of the surviving members emigrated from eastern Europe and settled in Brooklyn and especially in Crown Heights, where the movement maintains its world headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway. The leader of the sect for many years was Menachem Schneerson. Most members speak Yiddish and are strongly oriented toward their community. They emphasize reason and study as a path toward union with the divinity....”

¹⁷ According to Henry Goldschmidt, *Peoples Apart: Race, Religion and Other Jewish Differences in Crown Heights* (Ph.D. Dissertation in Anthropology, University of California at Santa Cruz, December 2000), p. 108: “There were a handful of Lubavitchers in Crown Heights as early as 1925, but the community only took root when the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, arrived in the United States in March of 1940 as a refugee from the Nazi Holocaust.”

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Brooklyn Buildings Department, New Building application 3360 of 1928; Certificate of Occupancy, September 1928.

²⁰ Various listings in accounts of new permits issued by the Buildings Department, as reported in the *New York Times*. According to listings in New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designation reports, “All that is known of Tobias Goldstone is that he was a Brooklyn architect and member of the AIA.” New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report* (New York: City of New York, 1981), “Architects Appendix,” p. 1246.

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According to its articles of incorporation, in 1924:

...the principal objects for which the corporation is formed are:

1. To establish a place of worship in accordance with strict Orthodox Jewish rites for the members of this synagogue.
2. To foster and further the Orthodox Hebrew faith, morals and teachings among the young men and women of the Hebrew faith.
3. To do any and all acts as are usual with and a part of the worship of an Orthodox Hebrew synagogue and center.
4. To perpetuate the Orthodox Jewish Rites and customs.... as are now falling into disuse.

Like the synagogues of the enormous Jewish community of Manhattan's Lower East Side, some of those in Brooklyn were "stieblach," or store-front congregations, and others were large, high-style buildings (sometimes called "cathedral synagogues") like Union Temple. Kol Israel, however, was a so-called "tenement synagogue," a vernacular building like the NR-listed Stanton Street Synagogue (Bnai Joseph Anshe Brzezan) on the Lower East Side, or Anshe Corona (Congregation Independent Chevra Tiferet Israel Anshei Corona - also NR listed) in Queens.

The architects of such synagogues, which had to be shoehorned onto narrow tenement lots, developed what has been characterized as a unique vernacular type. On their exteriors, these buildings are similar in size, materials and proportions to neighboring tenements or small commercial buildings, while their interiors are long, narrow sanctuaries reflecting New York's traditional 20- or 25-foot by 100-foot lot.

The facades of "tenement synagogues" are often an adaptation of forms popular for larger synagogues. While the Stanton Street Synagogue - built in 1913 - used a modest neo-classical vocabulary for its facade, and Anshe Corona - built 1911 - used a simple clapboard design, Kol Israel's facade reflects the 1920s popularity of Moorish-style ornament of a type that developed in Europe and America from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries - in the apparent belief that the Moorish represented a more "Eastern," and therefore more culturally appropriate style for Jewish buildings.

As one historian explains, in discussing the introduction of Moorish ornament into 19th-century European synagogues:

When churches began to forsake classical architecture for the Gothic styles of the Middle Ages, synagogues (with few exceptions) did not follow suit, partly because Gothic was thought to be identified too closely with Christianity. Perhaps the revival of interest in the Jews of medieval Spain was responsible for a return to the architectural style of their synagogues. In a spirit of romantic escapism,

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the [synagogues] of the industrial age evoked the splendor of the palaces and gardens of the Alhambra. Reports of the synagogues of Toledo, now used as churches, began to percolate. Perhaps there was also the thought that the Jews derived from the Middle East, and in Islamic countries, had enjoyed a greater continuity of residence and respect than in the west; their architectural association with Saracenic detail would therefore have been of longer duration than other styles.²¹

A modest use of the style by Gottfried Semper in 1838-40 for interior detail at a synagogue in Dresden may be the earliest example. It was followed by grander examples:

At mid-century, the interior of the Cologne Synagogue, designed by E.F. Zwirner of Berlin... shows how much more elaborate the Moorish decoration had become since Semper's comparatively restrained interior at Dresden. The synagogue in the Tempelgasse in Vienna (1853-58)... was carried out in full-blooded Arabic detail by the well-known Viennese architect and city planner Ludwig von Förster, in conjunction with Theophil von Hansen. Förster was also responsible for the synagogues in Vienna (Leopoldstadt), at Miskolez, Hungary and at Pesht (1860) – the latter banded externally with colored bricks, its façade interspersed with stone and terracotta, decorated with angle towers and cupolas.²²

Architect Leopold Eidlitz brought the style to New York in 1868, in his design for the former Temple Emanu-El (demolished). Frank Furness (unlike Eidlitz, not himself Jewish) used the style at the Rodef Shalom synagogue in Philadelphia (1869/70).

By 1866, elaborate angle towers which characterized this design, were an accepted feature of the Moorish style; they were adopted in many countries, crowned with balloon-like cupolas or onion-shaped and bulbous domes. They flank synagogues of varying sizes a Liverpool, London and New York (Lexington Avenue) [Central Synagogue].²³

A more recent review of the subject points out that the use of Moorish elements remained strictly ornamental:

No architect ever aimed to recreate on Western soil an actual Oriental palace or mosque (let alone one of the famous "Oriental" synagogues such as those of medieval Spain). The ground plan, structural engineering, and important stylistic elements always reflected contemporary Western tastes and practices. What was Islamic was mainly decorative. The only structural element adapted from the "Orient" were perhaps the slender pillars with floral and vegetal capitals. And these, too, were often made of iron, using the latest Western methods of construction.²⁴

²¹ Edward Jamilly, "The Architecture of the Contemporary Synagogue," in Cecil Roth, ed., *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 766.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 767.

²⁴ Ivan Davidson Kalmar, "Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Spring/Summer 2001 (New Series), p. 72.

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Kol Israel sat just a few hundred congregants, not thousands like the major synagogues of Europe or Manhattan.²⁵ But Tobias Goldstone's design for the façade of Kol Israel clearly reflects the influence of the "Moorish" style on a small-scale vernacular Brooklyn tenement synagogue. The main element of its otherwise plain facade of randomly laid fieldstone is a grand entrance with successive layers of spiral colonnettes of varying design supporting a series of round arches. The outermost colonnettes are decorated with an ornate diaper pattern often seen in Moorish design. The stone façade with its narrow slit-like windows is reminiscent of an ancient fortress. Within the arches, above the entrance is a rose window of colored glass adorned with a *magen david* (Star of David) set above the inscription "Congregation Kol Israel" in English letters designed to suggest Hebrew calligraphy.

Goldstone had to adapt the long, narrow proportions of a typical tenement lot to the ritual requirements of the congregation: an ark at the far end to hold the Torah scrolls, a *bimah*, facing the ark, from which services were led and the Torah scrolls read, and a gallery for women worshippers (who sat separately from men, in accordance with Orthodox Jewish practice). Traditionally, synagogues faced east so that congregations could pray in the direction of Jerusalem. Many small synagogues, however, with limited budgets, had to make do with narrow lots facing north or south, and so were unable to have sanctuaries facing east. Kol Israel, which faces north, follows this pattern exactly.

The architectural detail of the interior is simple, and depends on the rhythm of the round-arched windows on either side of the sanctuary both below and above the balcony, two round-arched openings on either side of the ark, and wider round arches supported on posts at the balcony level. The design of the wooden ark is suggestive more of classical forms than of Moorish, with four narrow fluted pilasters dividing it into three paneled bays. At its top, two sculpted lions flank a representation of the two Tablets of the Law, topped by a crown.

Particularly noteworthy for such a modest space is the ornamental glass. A rose window at either end includes a large *magen david* inscribed in circles of leaded glass. Particularly unusual is the ceiling – the main section, between the balcony arcades, is organized as one large glass skylight, divided into two rows of ten multi-colored leaded glass squares, each with an identical geometric pattern of a square within which is a circular form attached to the edges with a form resembling a light fabric.

Later history

As members of a small, modest congregation, Kol Israel's congregants did not leave much in the way of public records. A few simple notices in the newspaper suggest a quiet congregation of families living their lives, celebrating their *simchas* (joyful occasions) and mourning their losses. In a 1934 notice in the *New York Times*, Mr. and Mrs. Harry P. Frank, of 225 Eastern Parkway

²⁵ According to its Certificate of Occupancy, issued September 19th, 1928, the building could accommodate "150 males" in its main sanctuary and "100 females" in the second-story balcony.

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...announce bar mitzvah of their son, Laurence, at Congregation Kol Israel, 603 St. John's Place, Brooklyn, Saturday, Oct. 13. Reception at home, Sunday, Oct. 14 after 7 P.M.²⁶

In a similar notice in 1946, Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell Laufer

...are happy to announce the Bar Mitzvah of their son, Donald Lee...²⁷

Other notices announced the passing of members:

MARTZ, Tillie, mother of Morris, Benjamin, Blanche Bunin, Esther Goldman, Minna Rascoff, the late Samuel Martz, the late Dr. Harry Martz and the late Anna Spitz. Funeral services at Congregation Kol Israel, 603 St. John's Place, Brooklyn. 10 A.M., today.²⁸

And:

LEVY -- Abraham. Congregation Kol Israel of 603 St. Johns Place, Brooklyn, extends sincerest sympathy to our dear member, Mr. Harold Levy, on the passing of his father. May God comfort you and your entire family. JOSEPH GOLDFARB, president.²⁹

According to his own obituary notices in 1961, Joseph Goldfarb, former president of the congregation, was deeply involved in Orthodox Jewish organizations. He served as Financial Secretary, Trustee and Founder of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue in Manhattan, and as a director of the Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and Mesivta. His wife, Jeannette Goldfarb, was a Board member of the First Hebrew Day Nursery of Brooklyn. His brother, Albert Goldfarb, was an administrative Board member of the Jewish Center on Manhattan's Upper West Side.³⁰

Kol Israel's neighborhood has undergone many demographic changes. Though Crown Heights south of Eastern Parkway has a predominantly Lubavitch Hasidic Jewish population, the population of the area immediately surrounding the synagogue, north of Eastern Parkway, is largely West Indian in origin. Kol Israel continues, however, to serve a small but determined Orthodox Jewish congregation, including a number of Lubavitch students.

Despite its modest appearance, Kol Israel appears in *Synagogues of New York City: History of A Jewish Community* by Oscar Israelowitz. According to that book, the PBS television network featured the synagogue in its documentary *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews* narrated by prominent Israeli public figure Abba Eban (formerly Israel's ambassador to the United Nations), and also appeared in another movie, *A Stranger Among Us*.

²⁶ "Confirmations," *New York Times*, October 7, 1934, p.34.

²⁷ "Confirmations," *New York Times*, May 25, 1946, p.31.

²⁸ "Deaths," *New York Times*, December 28, 1959, p.23.

²⁹ "Deaths," *New York Times*, January 3, 1954, p.89.

³⁰ "Deaths," *New York Times*, November 30, 1961, p.37.

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The congregation of Kol Israel is determined to raise the necessary funds to restore the building. As an intact vernacular synagogue reflecting the international phenomenon of Moorish-influenced synagogue design, it stands today as a visible reminder of the early 20th-century Jewish history of Brooklyn – one of the largest and most significant Jewish communities in the world – and particularly of the modest synagogues which, despite their small size, have served Brooklyn's millions of Jews for a century and a half. Kol Israel is now also part of the history of Jewish Brooklyn at the beginning of the 21st century. It remains a vital part of the living history of its neighborhood, of its borough, and of its city.

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- "Confirmations," October 7, 1934, p.34.
 - "Confirmations," May 25, 1946, p.31.
 - "Deaths," December 28, 1959, p.23.
 - "Deaths," January 3, 1954, p.89.
 - "Deaths," November 30, 1961, p.37.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

Kol Israel Synagogue occupies Brooklyn Tax Block 1175, Lot 72, Kings County, New York. The lot is 25' wide x 131' deep. The boundary is delineated on the accompanying map.

Boundary Justification

The nomination boundary includes the entire lot upon which the historic synagogue building is located.

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Section 11 Page 1

Kol Israel Synagogue

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

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Form prepared by:

Tony Robins

Thompson & Columbus, Inc.

50 West 67th Street, Suite 1-F

New York, NY 10023

212-877-7637

Prepared on behalf of:

The New York Landmarks Conservancy

One Whitehall Street

New York, NY 10004

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Section 11 Page 2

Kol Israel Synagogue

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

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Photographs

Kol Israel Synagogue
603 St. John's Place
Brooklyn, Kings County, NY

Photographer: Tony Robins

Date taken: March 1, 2006 (Note: The current appearance of the synagogue is the same as shown in these photographs from 2006. No major changes have occurred.)

CD-R with .TIF images on file at: NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Waterford, NY

1. Kol Israel Synagogue, 603 St. John Place, west and south elevation, looking northeast
2. South façade, looking north
3. South façade, entrance, looking north
4. South façade, upper portion, looking north
5. Sanctuary, view from gallery looking north towards ark
6. Sanctuary, ark
7. Sanctuary, ark detail
8. Sanctuary, wall above ark with window, looking north
9. Sanctuary, window above ark, looking north
10. Sanctuary, gallery, looking southwest
11. Basement, meeting/prayer hall space



404

Kol Israel
Synagogue
603 St John's Place
Brooklyn, Kings Co,
NY.

403

Zone 18

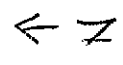
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Northing 4502959

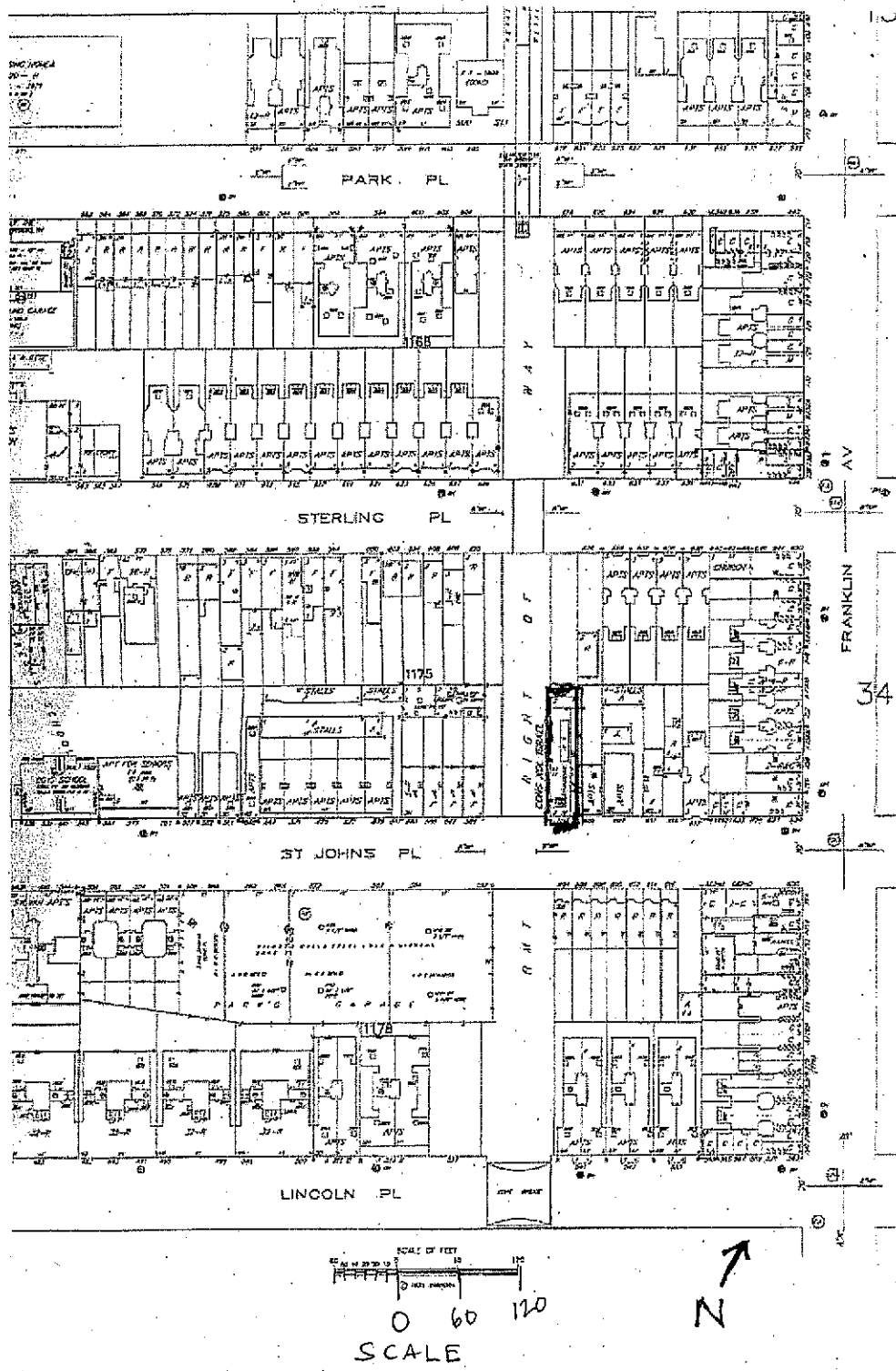
40

Brooklyn Quad
USGS Topo
1:24000

401



400



Kol Israel Synagogue
603 St. John's Place
Brooklyn, Kings County, NY

Brooklyn Tax Block 1175, Lot 72
 (Lot is 25' wide x 131' deep)

Source: *The Sanborn Building & Property Atlas of Brooklyn, New York.*
 Volume 7, Plate 33. First American Real Estate Solutions, 2006.



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North, New York NY 10007 TEL: 212-669-7926 FAX: 212-669-7797
<http://nyc.gov/landmarks/>



KATE DALY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
kdaly@pc.nyc.gov

July 29, 2009

Ms. Ruth Pierpont, Director
New York State Office of Parks Recreation
and Historic Preservation
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Peebles Island
P.O. Box 189
Waterford, New York 12188-0189

Re: Kol Israel Synagogue, 603 St. John's Place, Brooklyn

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of the Kol Israel Synagogue, located at 603 St. John's Place in Brooklyn, for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Mary Beth Betts, the Commission's Director of Research, has reviewed the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau and recommends that this building appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Sincerely,

Kate Daly

cc: Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Mary Beth Betts

STATEMENT OF OWNER SUPPORT

Before an individual nomination proposal will be reviewed or nominated, the owner(s) of record must sign and date the following statement:

I, Rebbi Ari Kirschenbaum, am the owner of the property at
(print or type owner name)

603 St John's Pl Brooklyn, NY 11238
(street number and name, city, village or town, state of nominated property)

and I support its consideration and inclusion in the State and National Registers of
Historic Places.

AK 10/29/8
(signature and date)

Rebbi Ari Kirschenbaum
765 St John's Pl. #2A
Brooklyn, NY. 11216
(mailing address)



Col Israel
 Synagogue
 203 St. John's Place
 Brooklyn, Kings Co,
 NY.

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Brooklyn Quad
 1:25,000 Topo
 1:24,000





