NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

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 Young Israel of Flatbush

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 1012 Avenue I [ ] not for publication

city or town Brooklyn [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county Kings code 047 zip code 11230

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] 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 [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ruth A Pierpont DSHPO 12/16/09

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

Young Israel of Flatbush
Name of Property

Kings County, New York
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

[X] private
[ ] public-local
[ ] public-State
[ ] public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

[X] 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

n/a

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)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Other: Moorish Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation

walls Brick. Ceramic Tile.
Stucco

roof Synthetics

other

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

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

Young Israel of Flatbush is located at 1012 Avenue I at the corner of Coney Island Avenue, in the Flatbush/Midwood neighborhood of the borough of Brooklyn in New York City. The synagogue was built in 1925-29 to designs by architect Louis Allen Abramson. The boundaries of the property are described as Brooklyn Tax Block 6523, Lot 6.

The synagogue's immediate neighbors, on both Avenue I and Coney Island Avenue, are school buildings belonging to the Yeshiva of Flatbush, a separate institution. Coney Island Avenue is largely commercial in nature, and across the street from Young Israel are a series of modest 20th century commercial buildings. Avenue I is a residential block, and across the street from the synagogue are several large single-family houses.

Exterior (north elevation)

Young Israel of Flatbush reads as a three-story building. It is designed in a Moorish-inspired style, and features such typically Moorish details as horseshoe arches, slender minarets, and polychromatic tiles. It is faced in polychromatic patterned brick – purple red and brown – laid in irregular geometrical patterns, with stucco and tile trim.

Avenue I facade

The Avenue I façade, which includes the synagogue's main entrance, focuses on three enormous pointed horseshoe arches – at the third story – with stained glass windows. One large single window at either side, flanking a much larger central arch incorporating four such windows, three of them tall, narrow and round-arched, and one a circular rose-window. The arches are defined by a combination of patterned brickwork and tiles. The window openings are set within ornamental polychromatic tiles. The rest of the area within each arch is faced in stucco. Beneath these three areas, at the second story, are a set of blind horseshoe arches of polychromatic patterned brick, inlaid with polychromatic stone, two below either of the single window arches, and five below the larger central arch.

These upper stories of the façade are framed by a band of tile and patterned brick set in geometric patterns. The first story, set off from the rest by a projecting band course of tile and brick corbelling, is plain, with three sets of three square-headed windows, one set beneath each of the three arched areas; the window grilles are adorned with a *magen david* ("shield of David" or "star of David").

This main area is flanked at either end by a tower. The east tower, at the corner of Coney Island Avenue, rises to a narrow octagonal minaret. Its first floor has a square-headed window behind a metal window grille – similar to the others at that level. The second story has an triangular-arched window opening with an

ornamental patterned brick surround, and patterned-brick ornament above it; above that is a pointed horseshoe-arched window opening, then a plain area, topped by the octagonal minaret. The sides of the minaret are alternately wide and narrow, with panels of patterned brick ornament at the base of each side. The minaret projects outward at the top via brick corbelling.

The wider tower at the west end, which does not rise to a minaret, includes an entrance set within a horseshoe arch supported on slender octagonal stone columns with ornamental capitals: The arch itself is faced in ornamental tile framed by patterned brick, and the arch within is faced in stucco. That tile is inscribed with the English words "YOUNG ISRAEL OF FLATBUSH." To either side of the arch is an ornamental metal light fixture. Horizontal and vertical bands of tile adorn the area of wall to either side of the entrance. The various tiles are set in abstract and floral patterns, but also with six-sided forms suggesting a *magen david.* Directly above the arch is another band of tile and patterned brick, including a frieze with a Hebrew inscription set between two *magen david* forms: בנעריינו ובזקניינו נלך ("B'neureinu v'vzekeineinu neileikh" – "With our young and our old we shall go" – words spoken by Moses to Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus (chapter 10, verse 9). Above the entrance level are a pair of narrow round-arched windows, and above that a pair of square-headed windows topped by a set of three blind, horse-shoe arches of polychromatic patterned brick, inlaid with polychromatic stone, similar to those elsewhere on the façade. The top of the tower has angled corners.

Coney Island facade

The Coney Island Avenue façade is narrower than that on Avenue I, but continues the Moorish design, with one large central pointed horseshoe arch with a stained-glass rose window in the upper portion, and three blind horseshoe arches with inlaid polychromatic stone ornament directly below it. Below those arches are four square-headed windows. The basement level continues square-headed windows with ornamental iron grilles similar to those on the Avenue I façade. There is an entrance to a small chapel.

The central area is flanked by a tower and minaret on either side – the minarets of differing shapes creating an asymmetric design. The tower on the north side, at the corner of Avenue I, is the same tower forming the eastern end of the Avenue I façade. The tower on the south side matches it except at the top, where instead of a tall minaret it has a short onion-style dome.

South facade

The south façade is very plain, faced in brick, with a set of four projecting brick piers dividing it into three bays; the pattern of stained-glass windows – without the ornamental patterned brickwork or tile – matches the pattern on the north façade.

East facade

The east façade is completely hidden by the adjoining building on Avenue I.

Interior

Entrance vestibule

The main entrance on Avenue I leads into a small entrance vestibule at the first floor. To the left of the entrance is a staircase leading to the upper stories. Straight ahead from the entrance is a hallway that leads to the synagogue office, and to a staircase on the left leading downstairs. Hallway, vestibule and staircase have modest plaster ornament.

Second story

The staircase immediately to the left of the entrance leads up to the second floor, where there is a large public space; modest surviving ornament includes pairs of plain piers supporting a plain plaster frieze. Doors from this space lead to classrooms.

Third story: entrance vestibule for the main sanctuary

The staircase from the second story leads to a narrow entrance vestibule with plain plaster walls and a shallow barrel-vaulted ceiling. There are various memorial plaques on the walls. Two sets of double doors lead into the main sanctuary.

Third story: main sanctuary

The main sanctuary is a large, two-story tall, rectangular room with a rear balcony. Ceiling arches link to large wall arches dividing each of the side walls into three arched areas. The sanctuary continues the building's Moorish design, notably in the polychromatic tiling that frames sections of the walls and surrounds each window opening. Throughout the sanctuary, typically Moorish ornament intermingles with such Judaic symbols as a *magen david.* The sanctuary's major features include large leaded-glass windows on either side; plaster walls; a plaster ceiling, and a front area set within and recessed behind a tall round-arched opening in which an elaborate ark is set against a marble backdrop, painted wall, and rose window.

The large wall arches bring the design of the Avenue I façade into the sanctuary, but replace the pointed horseshoe arches of the façade with round arches. The arches meet half-way down the wall, where they spring from projecting ornamental blocks supported on volutes. Ceiling and wall arches are both adorned with arabesque designs.

The windows are polychromatic stained glass, for the most part adorned with geometric patterns, but also including symbols inscribed with the names of the Twelve Tribes (e.g., Asher, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Joseph, Issachar). The central window has a rose window at the top inscribed with a large *magen david.* The window surrounds are made of polychromatic tiles in geometric patterns

The major feature of the sanctuary's ceiling is its series of arches adorned with arabesque designs, and the various metal chandeliers hanging from it.

At the front of the sanctuary, plain wall surfaces at either side – each with a doorway – flank a central large round arch; the upper half of the walls to either side is adorned with an ornamental patterned wall covering. Recessed behind the large round arch is an apse with the ark – the receptacle for the Torah scrolls. This area is approached from the sanctuary by a flight of steps. In the center of this recessed area, at the rear, a tall marble wall (which includes some faux marble finishes) rises three quarters of the way up to the ceiling. This marble wall is divided into three arched areas: a shorter, slightly narrower arch at either side, and a taller wider arch in the center. The side arches are supported on single engaged columns, and each has an elaborate metal light fixture just below the arch; the central arch is supported by pairs of octagonal columns on impost blocks. Within the central arch is a square-headed marble opening with ornamental curtains, behind which the Torah scrolls are kept. Atop this marble opening, a sculpted representation of the two Tablets of the Law (inscribed with the Hebrew words signifying the Ten Commandments) sit between two carved ornamental forms. Inscribed on the arch itself is a Hebrew phrase meaning "May Your eyes be open to the supplication of Your nation Israel, Listening to them in all that they call out to You." In front of the Ark there is a reader's table and a number of ceremonial chairs. Above the ark is a painting of clouds in a blue sky, in the center of which is a large leaded-glass rose window with an inscribed *magen david* within which is a *menorah* inscribed in a circle.

Seating in the sanctuary is provided by wooden pews. There is a large wooden *bimah*, or readers area, located in the center aisle and facing the front area of the synagogue; it has four tall metal light fixtures at its corners.

At the rear of the sanctuary, a curving cantilevered balcony projects from the rear wall into the area of the third, rear, wall arch. The balcony rail is adorned with square panels with abstract geometric patterns. Below the balcony, at the rear wall, there are two entrances from the vestibule. Downlights have been punched into the ceiling that forms the underside of the balcony. Various memorial plaques are affixed to the walls. Seating in the balcony is provided by long wooden bench-like pews.

Basement gymnasium

A staircase from the first floor entrance vestibule leads down to the basement gymnasium, today used also as an auditorium. It has a typical wooden gymnasium floor, and no architectural ornament.

Chapel

A staircase from the gymnasium leads upstairs half a flight to a long, narrow chapel which faces onto Coney Island Avenue (from which there is also an entrance to the chapel). The chapel walls have been covered with wood paneling, and there is a suspended acoustical-tile ceiling. The main architectural detail is the set of five leaded-glass windows looking out on Coney Island Avenue. These are square-headed windows, but the polychromatic leaded glass is designed to suggest arched windows. Each window has a roundel in the upper portion illustrating a Jewish ritual object – e.g., a *Kiddush* cup (for making the traditional blessing over wine for

Sabbath and holidays) and *challah* (braided loaf of bread) in one, a *shofar* (ram's horn for the High Holy Days) in another.

In general, Young Israel of Flatbush 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 1925-29. Alterations primarily affect minor spaces such as offices and classrooms. The main façades and the main sanctuary all survive largely intact.

Young Israel of Flatbush
Name of Property

Kings County, New York
County and State

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.)

[X] **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.

[X] **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.)

[X] **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:

1925-1959

Significant Dates:

1929

Significant Person:

n/a

Cultural Affiliation:

n/a

Architect/Builder:

Abramson, Louis Allen

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: _____

8. Statement of Significance

Summary

The Young Israel of Flatbush synagogue 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. Built in the Midwood neighborhood in 1925-29, for an Orthodox congregation, to designs by architect Louis Allen Abramson, 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, Young Israel of Flatbush – part of the new Young Israel movement – was founded specifically to provide a home for Orthodox practice, then considered on the wane. More than just a synagogue, Young Israel of Flatbush from the beginning included school facilities, a gymnasium, and social and meeting rooms. The synagogue's incorporation of such uses from its inception link it to the "Jewish Center" movement that reached its apogee in the decade in which the building was created.

Young Israel of Flatbush is architecturally significant at the local level under Criterion C as an example of an intact 1920s Moorish Revival synagogue in Brooklyn, with a high-style design by architect Louis Allen Abramson, considered one of the chief architects of the Jewish Center movement. 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.

The period of significance runs from 1925, the date of construction of the synagogue, to 1959, thereby including the post-World War II growth of the congregation as an important center of Orthodox Jewish life in the community. Young Israel of Flatbush survives as a distinctive architectural, cultural and religious landmark of the Jewish community of Brooklyn and New York City.

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, 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]

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[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.

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]

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[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.

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

> 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

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[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 Syngogues - The first 144 Years of Congregation Baith Israel Anshei Emes (the Kane Street Synagogue)," in Abramovitch and Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn*, p. 33.

Bushwick: 5 permanent, 6 temporary
Central Brooklyn: 26 permanent, 26 temporary
East New York: 24 permanent, 29 temporary
Williamsburg: 49 permanent, 20 temporary[13]

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 the greater Flatbush area, including Midwood.

Flatbush and Midwood

Young Israel of Flatbush is located at the intersection of Avenue I and Coney Island Avenue, one of the major thoroughfares in Brooklyn generally and Flatbush in particular. It is near the northwest corner of the boundaries generally ascribed to Midwood, a smaller neighborhood within the greater Flatbush area.

Midwood today is considered to be bounded by Avenue H, Flatbush Avenue, Kings Highway and Coney Island Avenue.[15] Its original Dutch name, "Midwout," meant "middle woods," and apparently derived from its location between the towns of Flatbush and Gravesend.

Aside from several early mansions, Midwood saw little development until the 1920s, when the urban transformation of Brooklyn, coming from the northern part of the borough, finally reached the area.

From its beginning as an urban neighborhood, Midwood had a large Jewish population, as did the larger Flatbush district. The wider area has been called

> ...the largest Jewish population area in Brooklyn.... Of the 101,100 Jewish individuals in the area, over half – 54% - self identify as Orthodox.[16]

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[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] The following account of Midwood is based on "Midwood," by Elizabeth Reich Rawson, in the *Encyclopedia of New York City*, *ibid.*, p. 761.

Consequently, the neighborhood is

> ...home to dozens of Orthodox Synagogues. The older synagogues (dating from the early part of the twentieth century) are generally large congregational structures located on busy intersections or on large thoroughfares.[17]

Young Israel of Flatbush is among the oldest and most prominent of these congregations.

Young Israel of Flatbush

Young Israel of Flatbush was organized in December of 1921 in a converted former church building on Coney Island Avenue, on the site of today's synagogue; the new congregation was initially called Ahavat Achim Achai Joseph Synagogue. The first full Sabbath service was held in its basement in March 1922. As recalled by the congregation's first president, Ben Levine:

> We set about cleaning up the debris and the old church paraphernalia which were in the basement long before the synagogue took over the church property. Max Weissman, Jack Weissman, Nat Weissman and I donned overalls and cleaned up, painted and whitewashed the basement. Even the ladies, Berdie Levine and Hattie Frankel...donned aprons and cleaned the floors and windows of the potential Young Israel of Flatbush.[18]

The congregation then acquired the site, on February 20, 1923, and construction began on a new building.[19]

Young Israel of Flatbush was founded to provide a home for Orthodox Jewish observance – considered to be on the wane in the 1920s. As reported in the *Brooklyn Eagle* in February of 1923:

> Young Israel of Flatbush Plan $100,000 Campaign
>
> A campaign for a $100,000 community building to house the religious, educational and recreational activities of the entire community will be launched within a week by Young Israel of Flatbush. A plot of ground upon which this building is to be erected has been purchased. According to Marcus Rottenberg, chairman of the building committee, many Jews in Flatbush have expressed a desire for a Jewish congregation, where religious services would be conducted in accordance with the orthodox ritual, where a Talmud Torah would attract young people to attend classes. He said that at present there is no

[16] Nehemia Stern, *'Post Orthodoxy': An Anthropological Analysis of the Theological and Socio-Cultural Boundaries of Contemporary Orthodox Judaism* (submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology in the Graduate School of Binghamton University, State University of New York, 2008), p. 30.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[18] Quotation provided by Young Israel of Flatbush.
[19] *Ibid.*

> Talmud Torah operating along modern lines, and there is no place in the community where Jews may congregate socially. The synagogue on Coney Island ave., he claimed, is not large enough.[20]

The new building's basement floor was ready for High Holy Day services in September of 1923, but lack of funds forced postponement of construction. In February of 1925, the project began to move forward again, and the *New York Times* reported:

> Young Israel of Flatbush to have $125,000 House.
>
> Plans are being prepared by Louis Allen Abramson, architect, for a community building, to be erected by the Young Israel of Flatbush on its plot at the southwest corner of Avenue I and Coney Island Avenue, Flatbush, Brooklyn. The building is to be the most complete of its kind, containing gymnasium, shower and locker rooms, social and meeting rooms, classrooms and synagogue. The building is to be three stories in height and is estimated to cost $125,000.[21]

The project was described in August of that year in the *Brooklyn Eagle* as an extension:

> Young Israel of Flatbush is to build an extension to its 3-story concrete synagogue and the cost, including interior work and plumbing, is $130,000; the location is at the southwest corner of Coney Island ave and Avenue I.[22]

Construction went slowly, and the building was not completed until 1929.[23] The dedication took place in late February of that year. An article in the *Eagle*, describing the dedication ceremonies, reported on

> ...the opening of the dedication exercises of the Young Israel of Flatbush, Coney Island ave. and Avenue I..... The plan to construct a branch of the fast-growing Young Israel, which has been established nationally, in Flatbush was started in 1924 by a committee headed by Nathan H. Brant. The purpose of the organization is to promote traditional Judaism among the younger generation, create a bond of unity among all divisions of the Jewish faith and to provide proper facilities for teaching Jewish history and literature.... Each night during the week programs of entertainment, dinners, concerts and social events will be held as part of the dedication. Jacob Kestenbaum, president, received the key to the new edifice from Mr. Brant. Nat A. Weissman was chairman. The other speakers were Acting Corporation Counsel Arthur J.W. Hilly and Assemblyman Murray Hearn, who was active in developing the branch. Rabbis from various congregations in Flatbush attended.[24]

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[20] "Young Israel of Flatbush Plan $100,000 Campaign," *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 23, 1923, p.9.
[21] "Plan Community Project," *New York Times*, February 21, 1925 p.22.
[22] "$130,000 Synagogue Extension," *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 23, 1925, p.6.
[23] The work was filed as an alteration application rather than as a new building. Certificate of Occupancy 54590 of 1929, issued to L.A. Abramson, cites Alteration permit 14371 of 1925.
[24] *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 25, 1929, p. 10.

From the beginning, the new structure was meant to fulfill a number of community needs – not just a synagogue, but also a *Talmud Torah* (Jewish religious school), and facilities to meet the various needs of Jewish communal life. The *New York Times*'s account that the building was intended to be "the most complete of its kind, containing gymnasium, shower and locker rooms, social and meeting rooms, classrooms and synagogue" places Young Israel of Flatbush squarely in the phenomenon of the new American institution of the Jewish Center.

New York synagogues, "Jewish Center" phenomenon, and the Young Israel movement

The history of New York synagogues extends back to the construction in 1729 of the original "Shearith Israel" or Mill Street synagogue (demolished). In the intervening three centuries, synagogue architecture has gone through many iterations. Surviving New York synagogues include a number of distinct types, ranging from "stieblach," or store-front synagogues; to vernacular "tenement synagogues" – long narrow structures suited to the 100x20 foot lots typical of the Lower East Side (e.g. the NR-listed Stanton Street Shul); to grand, high-style "cathedral" synagogues (e.g. the NR-listed Central Synagogue). The 20th century saw the development of a new, particularly American synagogue type – the Jewish Center – which served not only as a place of worship, but as a center of community life; besides a sanctuary, it included classrooms, social halls and, in the largest buildings, even gymnasiums and swimming pools.

The development of the Jewish Center has been carefully chronicled by historian David Kaufman.[25] Kaufman traces the origin of the phenomenon to several sources, including the millennia-old tradition of the synagogue as a place of worship, study and assembly; the 19th century Protestant development of the "institutional church"; the social requirements of newly-developed communities of middle-class, assimilated, first- and second-generation Jewish families; and the specific example of the West Side Jewish Center built in 1917 on Manhattan's West 86th Street by influential rabbi Mordecai Kaplan.

Though Kaplan has often been cited as the originator of the Jewish Center, Kaufman argues that many of the necessary conditions were already in place, and that "Kaplan was simply the right man at the right time, giving audible voice to less immediately observable – but far more pervasive – historical processes."[26] Nevertheless, Kaplan's Jewish Center exemplifies the type as it developed in the years following World War I, and was without question an influential model for similar Jewish Centers constructed around the city in the following decades. As described by Kaufman:

> The new institution would be neither a synagogue, nor a Jewish school, nor a social club like the YMHA, but rather, a combination of all three. The idea was one of unification and simplification, meant to harmonize dissonant elements in the cacophonic milieu of the contemporary Jewish community; as formulated by Kaplan it became the germination of the synagogue-center movement.[27]

[25] David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Brandeis University Press, 1999).
[26] Kaufman, p.7.
[27] Kaufman, pp. 232-233.

Kaplan, writing in 1918, described his conception of the Jewish Center:

> We state frankly that we are establishing the Jewish Center for the purpose of deriving from it for ourselves pleasures of a social, intellectual, and spiritual character.... The Jewish Center will be dominated by a purpose of far-reaching significance, if we, who are about to establish it, will do so with the deliberate and conscious aim of conducting it as an experiment to help us solve the problem of Jewish life and religion.[28]

Kaplan saw the Jewish Center as meeting four different levels of need:

> The elements which are indispensable to health in human life are four in number: atmosphere, light, food and exercise. Provide Jewish life with these constituents, and you will solve the problem of Judaism.[29]

Kaufman translates these four levels:

> ..."atmosphere," or a Jewish environment; "light," interpreted as "entertainment and joy-giving recreations"; the "food" of Jewish knowledge; and "exercise," understood as the opportunity for practical action. In other words, the Kaplanian synagogue-center is intended to provide a spatial context for Jewishness, a recreational center, an institute for Jewish education (for all ages), and a headquarters for social and political activism. ... Created as a congregational entity and intended to revolve around a synagogal hub, the West Side Jewish Center was a synagogue-center and, as such, became the prototype for a new movement in American Jewish life.[30]

The building erected in 1917 on West 86th Street was unlike any prior synagogue. As described in 1917, the 11-story building was planned to include:

> ...a spacious lobby and auditorium on the first floor with coat rooms and lavatories on the second floor. The synagogue extends through the third and fourth floors with the exception of the front of the building, where the fourth floor space is to be used as a library, room for trustees, and gallery. The additional stories that will be erected at some future time will contain the following: Fifth and sixth floors, gymnasium and exercise rooms; seventh and eighth floors, natatorium and baths, including steam and hot rooms, showers, &c. and sleeping rooms; ninth floor, class and club rooms for junior; tenth floor, club rooms and banquet hall, with necessary kitchen and pantries.[31]

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[28] Kaufman, p. 238.
[29] Kaufman, 239.
[30] Kaufman explains that Kaplan's type of "Jewish Center" must be considered separately from a contemporaneous "secular" institution *also* known as a "Jewish Center," p. 240.
[31] "Jewish Social Centre," *New York Times*, March 10, 1918, p. RE12.

Kaplan's West Side Jewish Center was followed by a number of major such complexes in Brooklyn, built in the 1920s and 1930s, including first and most famously the Brooklyn Jewish Center; major examples of the type continued being built in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Young Israel movement developed independently from the synagogue center, but historian Kaufman considers it to be a parallel movement.

According to historian Regina Stein,[32] the Young Israel movement

> ...began in 1912 by sponsoring Friday night forums in English on contemporary Jewish issues of interest to young people.... Its appeal was ... "to all Jewish young men and women."[33] By 1915 Young Israel had established a model synagogue.... The organization's goals were:
>
> "To arouse and intensify the Jewish consciousness of our young men and women whose Judaism is dormant;
> To awaken Jewish young men and women to their duties and responsibilities as Jews;
> To create a feeling of sympathy for the Jewish religion, Jewish life in the past and in the present, and Jewish ideals;
> To strengthen the bonds of unity among all the divisions of the Jewish people"[34]

According to historian Abelow:

> By 1918, the movement spread to Brooklyn. Some of the original members who had moved into Williamsburg organized a Young Israel society there which, in time, grew into a membership of about five hundred. The movement spread to other parts of the borough so that, to-day [1937], almost every section of Brooklyn has its Young Israel society. Some of these societies have their own buildings. The Brooklyn, the Flatbush, the Williamsburg, and the Eastern Parkway societies have very expensive buildings....[35]

Abelow considered Young Israel to be an extremely important movement for the future of American Judaism:

> For the future of Judaism in this country, the Young Israel movement is indispensable. It is developing leaders in the fundamentals of Judaism. It is training young men to lead the services and to read the

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[32] Regina Stein, *The Boundaries of Gender: The Role of Gender Issues in Forming American Jewish Denominational Identity, 1913-1963*, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D. in Jewish History, Graduate School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1998.

[33] Stein is quoting from the *American Hebrew*, January 10, 1913, p.303. Stein notes that there is as yet no no published history of the Young Israel movement.

[34] Stein is quoting from the constitution of Young Israel, adopted in 1912 or 1913, cited in Hyman Goldstein, "History of Young Israel Movement," *Jewish Forum* 9 (December 1926), p.52.

[35] Abelow, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

> portions of the Torah on Saturdays. It is stressing the importance of religious practices among the youth of America.[36]

Kaufman notes that there were in fact originally two movements called "Young Israel," which eventually merged...

> ...after several years of parallel existence. The first was a Jewish revival movement, inspired by the nationalist rabbis Judah Magnes and Israel Friedlaender, and attempting to win disaffected young Jews back to Judaism. It provided social and educational activities similar in nature to those of the Jewish center movement. The second YI was primarily a synagogue movement, founded by local youngsters dissatisfied with the *landsmanshaft* Judaism of their fathers. It established a model synagogue intended to modernize and Americanize the old-fashioned *shul* with an attractive, decorous, and English-speaking context for Orthodox services. The two groups united in 1918, synthesizing their social and religious emphases, and thus turning YI into a true synagogue-center movement.[37]

With its combination of synagogue, meeting rooms, and athletic facilities, Young Israel of Flatbush certainly fit the description of the synagogue center. It is not surprising that the congregation turned to the architect of a number of the best known Jewish Center buildings, including Kaplan's: Louis Allen Abramson.

Louis Allen Abramson [38]

Louis Allen Abramson (1887-1985) had a long architectural career stretching from the turn of the 20th century through the late 1960s. Abramson began as an office boy, and then draftsman, in the office of John Duncan, where he helped design several neo-French Classic townhouses in midtown Manhattan. Leaving Duncan's office, he traveled to the west coast, working in and around Seattle for several years. Returning to New York, he established an independent architectural practice.

Abramson was known for the design of hospitals, nursing homes and restaurants. His restaurants – including Horn & Hardart Automats on West 33rd and West 181st streets, six Longchamps restaurants in Manhattan, restaurants for the Brass Rail including the outlets for the 1939 World's Fair, and Ben Marden's Riviera night club/restaurant perched on the Palisades – were elegant Art Deco and Art Moderne creations designed in the 1930s and '40s.

A great deal of Abramson's work was done for Jewish communal enterprises, including hospitals, senior centers, youth centers, and synagogues. His work prior to the 1930s tended to the neo-Classical or neo-Renaissance. Abramson greatly admired McKim, Mead & White's work, to which Duncan introduced him. Abramson had great

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[36] Abelow, *op. cit.*, p.69.
[37] Kaufman, p. 201. For a more complete history of the founding of Young Israel, see Kaufman pp. 201-205.
[38] Information about Abramson is based in part on a personal interview conducted by the author of this nomination in the late 1970s, as well as other sources cited below individually.

> ...admiration of what they had done. And that never left me, never. Each time I'd go by the University Club on Fifth Avenue, I'd stand and figuratively bow, I did love that building. When they started to destroy the Penn Station I used to go over there and cry. To me it was perfection, perfection.... Penn Station was... I don't know how I can really say it. I felt meek in the presence of that building... I recall once, and I don't know if you will recall it, as you walk in from the Seventh Avenue side, where the bronze letters, tablets, on either side... the spacing of the letters themselves impressed me. It was done as a master would do it.[39]

Abramson's first independent work was the Young Women's Hebrew Association (YWHA) on Central Park North, just west of Fifth Avenue, built 1912-14. Before becoming its architect, Abramson functioned as its "campaign manager," organizing what became a huge fundraising operation supported by much of the organized Jewish community. According to the *New York Times*, Abramson was "one of the most active workers in the cause."[40] Some of the most famous names in New York finance and business contributed funds – including financiers Jacob H. Schiff[41] and Felix Warburg, and theatrical impresario Abraham Erlanger (of the Klaw & Erlanger organization), as well as members of the Guggenheim and Loeb families, and lawyer Louis Marshall, a major Jewish communal figure.[42] Prominent rabbis spoke on behalf of the project, including Dr. Stephen S. Wise of the Free Synagogue, Dr. Judah Magnes,[43] and Rabbi David De Sola Poole of Shearith Israel,[44] as well as Dr. Joseph Silverman, rabbi of Temple Emanu-El. The progress of the fundraising campaign was chronicled in a dozen articles in the *Times*.

On completion of the building's construction, the YWHA contained

> ...dormitories, clubrooms, classrooms, where cooking, stenography, dressmaking, and hat trimming will be taught; a reading room and library, gymnasium and swimming pool, social parlors for the girl residents, and a synagogue on the ground floor.[45]

In short, Abramson's first major building included all the functions of a typical Jewish Center. Years later, in reminiscing about the building, Abramson described its design: "The auditorium was Stanford White's Italian. That was the influence."[46]

Abramson went on to design many Jewish communal institutions. In 1915, he designed the neo-Renaissance Home of the Daughters of Jacob, a senior center in the Bronx, as well as buildings for Beth Israel hospital,

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[39] Interview by the author of this nomination; reprinted in "New York from Classic to Moderne: Local Architects Remember," a chapter in *Everyday Masterpieces* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), pp 211 ff.
[40] "Debutantes to Help Raise $200,000 Fund," *New York Times*, April 5, 1912, p.7.
[41] "Y.W.H.A. Fund Half Won," *New York Times*, April 27, 1912, p.14.
[42] "Dedicate $350,000 Home of Y.W.H.A.," *New York Times*, November 23, 1914, p.11.
[43] "New Start for Y.W.H.A.," *New York Times*, April 24, 1912, p.24.
[44] "Debutantes to Help raise $200,000 Fund," *New York Times*, April 5, 1912, p.7.
[45] "Dedicate $350,000 Home of Y.W.H.A.," *New York Times*, November 23, 1914, p.11.
[46] Abramson interview by the author, *op. cit.*

United Israel Zion Hospital in Brooklyn, a Jewish Maternity Hospital on East Broadway, and the Long Island Jewish Hospital. His work extended to public hospitals as well, notably the Bronx Hospital (1919) near Crotona Park.

In 1917, Abramson won the commission for Mordecai Kaplan's West Side Jewish Center. Kaplan had been aware of Abramson's work at the YWHA, a similar building type.[47] Thus began Abramson's career as what Kaufman, the chronicler of the Jewish Center movement, calls "a leading architect of the synagogue-center building boom."[48]

Kaplan's commission was followed by the Brooklyn Jewish Center of 1919, a direct offshoot of Kaplan's West Side center, and one called "the most well-known prototype of the synagogue center."[49] According to contemporary press accounts – most likely based on material supplied by the architect – the "façade of this structure has been designed in a severe early Italian Renaissance style."[50] Abramson also designed the Flatbush Jewish Center (1921), and may also have designed the East Midwood Jewish Center.[51]

In 1925, when Young Israel of Flatbush was being planned as a Jewish Center, Abramson was the logical choice to be its architect.

The design of Young Israel of Flatbush

Unlike Abramson's first three Jewish Center commissions (the YWHA, Kaplan's Jewish Center, and the Brooklyn Jewish Center) – neo-Renaissance in inspiration with the addition of Jewish symbols – Young Israel of Flatbush's design 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 belief that the Moorish represented a more "Eastern," and therefore more culturally appropriate style for Jewish buildings.

There may also be a precedent for the basic form of the synagogue, with its prominent corner towers topped by bulbous domes, in the church architecture of southern Bavaria such as that seen in the famous Marienkirche in Munich completed in the early 16th century. But, the overall decorative patterning and elements used at Young Israel are clearly Moorish inspired.

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[47] *Shul with a Pool*, p. 80. "In his journal entry for August 1914, Mordecai Kaplan lauded two female acquaintances 'for their painstaking efforts in helping to erect such a useful and wonderful edifice.'"
[48] *Shul with a Pool*, p.80.
[49] *Shul with a Pool*, p. 249.
[50] "Jewish Social Centre," *New York Times*, March 10, 1918, p. RE12.
[51] Listed in the National Register. The NR nomination cites the Flatbush Jewish Center as Abramson's design, and makes the attribution of the East Midwood Center based on Abramson's experience with Jewish Centers in general and the Center's similarity to the Brooklyn Jewish Center. The nomination notes: "The one piece of written evidence regarding Louis Allen Abramson's role in East Midwood is a statement in the *Twentieth Anniversary of the Jewish Communal Center of Flatbush, 1916-1936 Souvenir Journal* that Abramson drew the plans for East Midwood."

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, 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.[52]

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.[53]

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].[54]

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

[52] Edward Jamilly, "The Architecture of the Contemporary Synagogue," in Cecil Roth, ed., *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 766.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*, 767.

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.[55]

Abramson's Moorish-inspired design includes such typically Moorish features as horseshoe arches, slender minarets, and polychromatic tiles. The Avenue I façade, which includes the synagogue's main entrance, is faced in polychromatic patterned brick – purple red and brown – laid in irregular geometrical patterns, and focuses on three enormous pointed horseshoe arches with stained glass windows: one arch, with a large single window, at either side, flanking a much larger central arch incorporating four such windows, three of them tall, narrow and round-arched, and one a round rose-window. The arches are defined by a combination of patterned brickwork and tiles. Beneath these three areas are a set of blind, round-arched horse-shoe arches inlaid with polychromatic stone. This main area is flanked at either end by a tower. The north tower rises to a narrow octagonal minaret. The wider tower at the south end, which does not rise to a minaret, includes an entrance set in yet another horseshoe arch supported on slender octagonal stone columns with ornamental capitals. The entrance area is adorned with tiles set in abstract and floral patterns, but also with six-sided forms suggesting a *magen david* ("shield of David" also known as a "star of david").

The Coney Island Avenue façade is narrower than that on Avenue I, but continues the design, with one large pointed horseshoe arch with a stained-glass rose window in the upper portion, and horseshoe arches with inlaid polychromatic stone ornament below, the whole flanked by a minaret on either side – the minarets of differing shapes creating an asymmetric design.

Inside, the main sanctuary is a large, open space with a rear balcony and multiple ceiling arches. The sanctuary continues the Moorish design, notably in the polychromatic tiling that frames sections of the walls and surrounds each window opening. The windows are polychromatic stained glass, for the most part adorned with geometric patterns, but also including symbols inscribed with the names of the Twelve Tribes (e.g., Asher, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Joseph, Issachar). The central window has a rose window at the top inscribed with a large *magen david.* At the front, the ark is more of a classically-inspired design, with twin columns supporting an arch; above the ark itself is a representation of the two Tablets of the Law.

The congregation and its later history

Many of the original members and founders of Young Israel of Flatbush were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who had become well-established in their new country. Jacob Kestenbaum, the congregation's first president, immigrated as a young man, and established the United States branch of his family's fur import business. According to his obituary in the *Jewish Week,* he was

[55] 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.

> ... a partner in the international fur importing firm Kestenbaum Brothers before his retirement in 1956..... [The company] had branches in London, Paris and Leipzig prior to World War II. The firm was founded by Jacob's father. Elias Kestenbaum, patriarch of the Kestenbaum family. Jacob Kestenbaum was born in 1893 in Tarnov, then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He migrated to the U.S. in 1914 and established the New York branch of KB.

Besides being a founder of Young Israel of Flatbush, Kestenbaum was also a founder of the United Jewish Appeal, and an

> ...avid supporter of the American yeshiva movement from its earliest days.... Kestenbaum, along with his late brothers, the late Stephen Klein of Barton's Candy Corp, and Congressman Herbert Tenzer, former UJA chairman, was a key figure in the Vaad Hazaalah...which worked to extricate European Jews from the jaws of death during the Holocaust. The Vaad Hazaalah held a number of meetings with the then Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles and negotiated several successful rescue operations.[56]

Another Eastern-European-born leader in the congregation was Louis Richman, a produce merchant. His obituary in the *New York Times* described Richman as the

> ...president of Richman - Justman - Frankenthal, Inc., 199 Duane Street, produce growers, shippers and distributors, and a leader in Jewish charitable affairs.... Born in Warsaw, Poland, Mr. Richman had long been active in the produce field. His firm owns fruit and vegetable producing properties in Arizona and California. He was a former president of the Warschauer Haym Salomon Home for the Aged, 43 St. Marks Place, Brooklyn, and was its honorary president and chairman of its building committee. ...He had been active in the United Jewish Appeal and the Federation...and had helped to manage the affairs of the Talmud Torah of Flatbush, Young Israel of Flatbush and the Jewish Community Center of Brooklyn....[57]

Simon F. Gross, another president of the congregation, was a real-estate lawyer.[58] Another president, Lionel Golub, born in London, was also a lawyer, and served as an assistant New York State Attorney General.

> Mr. Golub, who had served as an assistant attorney general of New York State in 1945, specialized in trust and estate law. He was a former chairman of the law committee of the Brooklyn Liberal party and of the legislative committee of the Liberal party. Born in London March 14, 1900, the son of Rabbi and Rose Golubowski, Mr. Golub came to the United States in 190. [sic] He attended Clark University and received a law degree in 1922 and a master's degree in 1923 from New York University. A former general counsel for the Assembly of Orthodox Rabbis of America and Canada and the Mizrachi Women's Organization of America, Mr. Golub also had been president of Young Israel of Flatbush, the

[56] "Jacob Kestenbaum is dead at 86 after protracted illness," *Jewish Week*, February 10, 1980, p.18.
[57] "Louis Richman, 73, Produce Merchant," *New York Times*, November 23, 1950, p.35.
[58] *New York Times*, January 2, 1964, p.27.

> Mizrachi Organization of Flatbush and the Prospect Park Jewish Center. He had been a delegate to the Brooklyn Jewish Community Council.[59]

The first rabbi at Young Israel of Flatbush was European-born and-trained Abraham Feuer:

> Until failing health forced his retirement, he had been for ten years rabbi of the Young Israel Congregation in Flatbush.... A native of Poland, Rabbi Feuer was educated in Hungary, and was made a rabbi at 17. He taught languages and wrote for newspapers in Europe before coming in 1910 to Canada, where he organized a Jewish farm colony.[60]

Rabbi Feuer's successor was Rabbi Solomon Sharfman, who served as rabbi of the congregation from 1938 through 1984. American born (in Newark, N.J.), Rabbi Sharfman graduated from City College and Brooklyn Law School, and was ordained at Yeshiva Chofets Chaim-the Rabbinical Seminary of America. His obituary in *The Jewish Week* described him as:

> ...a pivotal figure in the development of Flatbush as a leading Jewish community [and] a major rabbinic influence far beyond his pulpit, serving as president of the RCA [Rabbinical Council of America], the Synagogue Council of America and the Vaad HaRabanim Rabbinical Council of Flatbush.... Rabbi Kenneth Auman, the RCA's current president, as well as Rabbi Sharfman's successor at the Young Israel of Flatbush, said "Rabbi Sharfman's uniqueness lay in his ability to be at once a global leader, fully involved with world Jewry and its problems, and yet at the same time devoting himself tirelessly to the needs of his congregation and congregants. He was beloved for the care and concern he lavished on all. He was dignified without being pompous, and humble despite being a decisive and strong leader."[61]

According to another obituary, Rabbi Sharfman "helped make southern Brooklyn in New York City an international center of Orthodox Jewish life."[62] As for his congregants:

> Moshe I. Sorscher, president of Young Israel, summed up the feeling of the congregation, saying: "To be the rabbi of a large, multifaceted congregation for 45 years is a monumental achievement, but to retain the love, admiration and respect of colleagues and congregants alike for such a long time is indeed a rarity. He has uplifted us, raised our sights and been a friend to three generations of Young Israelites. Our rabbi and rebbetzin are responsible for what we are today."[63]

Young Israel of Flatbush has always housed a school as well as a synagogue, including, in its early years, the Yeshiva of Flatbush. The Yeshiva long ago moved into its own buildings, however, and though it is a neighbor, it is a completely separate institution from the synagogue.

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[59] "Lionel Golub, 70, lawyer, is dead - Assistant Attorney General of New York State in '45," *New York Times*, March 8, 1971, p.36.
[60] *New York Times*, March 12, 1936, p.21.
[61] *The New York Jewish Week*, Dec 10, 2004, p. 52.
[62] *Pittsburgh Post – Gazette*, January 17, 2005, p. A.11.
[63] *The New York Jewish Week*, June 22, 1984, p. 9.

The neighborhood continues to have a large Jewish population, and the synagogue continues to thrive – as a synagogue, school, and general community center. As such, Young Israel of Flatbush reflects the history of Brooklyn Jews in the 20th century – including the history of the Jewish Center and Young Israel movements – and now also the history of Brooklyn Jews at the beginning of the 21st century. Its handsome neo-Moorish design by Louis Allen Abramson makes it an important architectural and artistic resource. Young Israel of Flatbush remains a vital part of the living history of its neighborhood, and of its city.

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"Plan Community Project." February 21, 1925 p.22.
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Young Israel of Flatbush
Name of Property

Kings County, New York
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	587454	4497857
2	18		
3	18		
4	18		

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 December 9, 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 Young Israel of Flatbush Attn: Stephan Lieberman, Board Member

street & number 1012 Avenue I telephone 718-252-6032

city or town Brooklyn state NY zip code 11230

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

Young Israel of Flatbush occupies Brooklyn Tax Block 6523, Lot 6, Kings County, New York. The lot is 60' wide by 100' 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.

Form prepared by:
Tony Robins
Thompson & Columbus, Inc.
50 West 67th Street, Suite 10F
New York, NY 10023
212-877-7637

Prepared on behalf of:
The New York Landmarks Conservancy
One Whitehall Street
New York, NY 10004

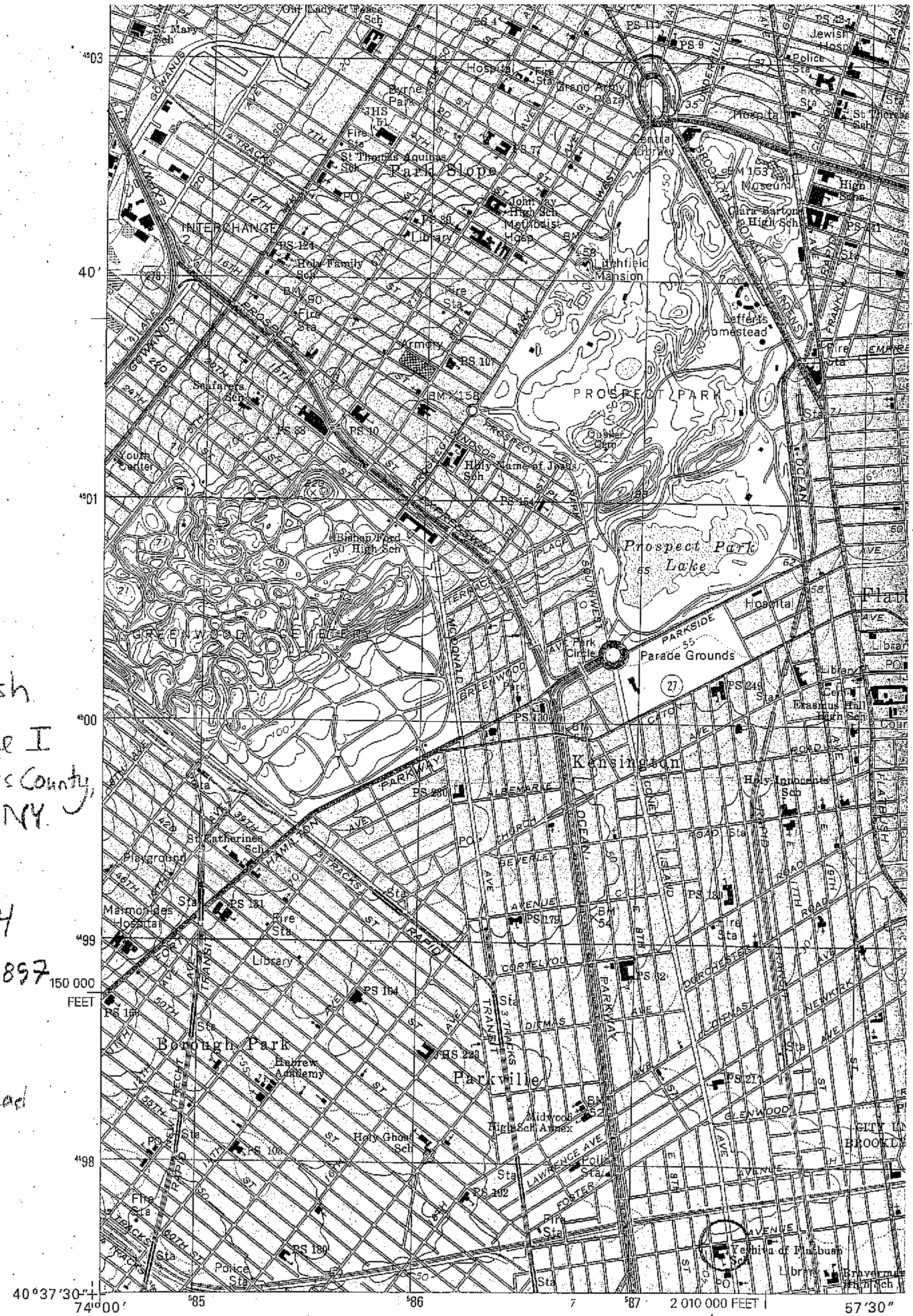
Photographs
Young Israel of Flatbush
1012 Avenue I (corner of Coney Island Avenue)
Brooklyn, Kings County, NY
Photographer: Tony Robins
Date taken: January 2009
CD-R with .TIF images on file at: NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Waterford, NY

1. Young Israel of Flatbush, Avenue I façade (north), looking south
2. Coney Island Avenue façade (east), looking west, looking south
3. Avenue I façade, detail of ornamental brick and tile, looking south
4. Avenue I façade, detail of window ornament, looking south
5. Vestibule to main sanctuary, third floor, looking south
6. Main sanctuary, third floor, looking east towards front
7. Main sanctuary, looking west towards rear
8. Main sanctuary, ark at east wall, looking east
9. Main sanctuary, *bima*, looking southeast
10. Main sanctuary, detail of stained glass window depicting a donkey and inscribed with the name, in Hebrew, of "Issachar," one of the 12 tribes of Israel
11. Main sanctuary, ceramic tile detail at window
12. Small chapel, east wall
13. Basement, gymnasium

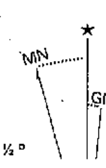
Young Israel
of Flatbush
1012 Avenue I
Brooklyn, Kings County,
NY

Zone 18
Easting: 587454
Northing: 4497857

USGS
Brooklyn Quad
1:24000



Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Topography compiled 1966. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1977 and other sources. Photoinspected using imagery dated 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1967. Boundaries, other than corporate, revised 1999
Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS charts 275 (1964), 542 (1967), and 745 (1966). This information



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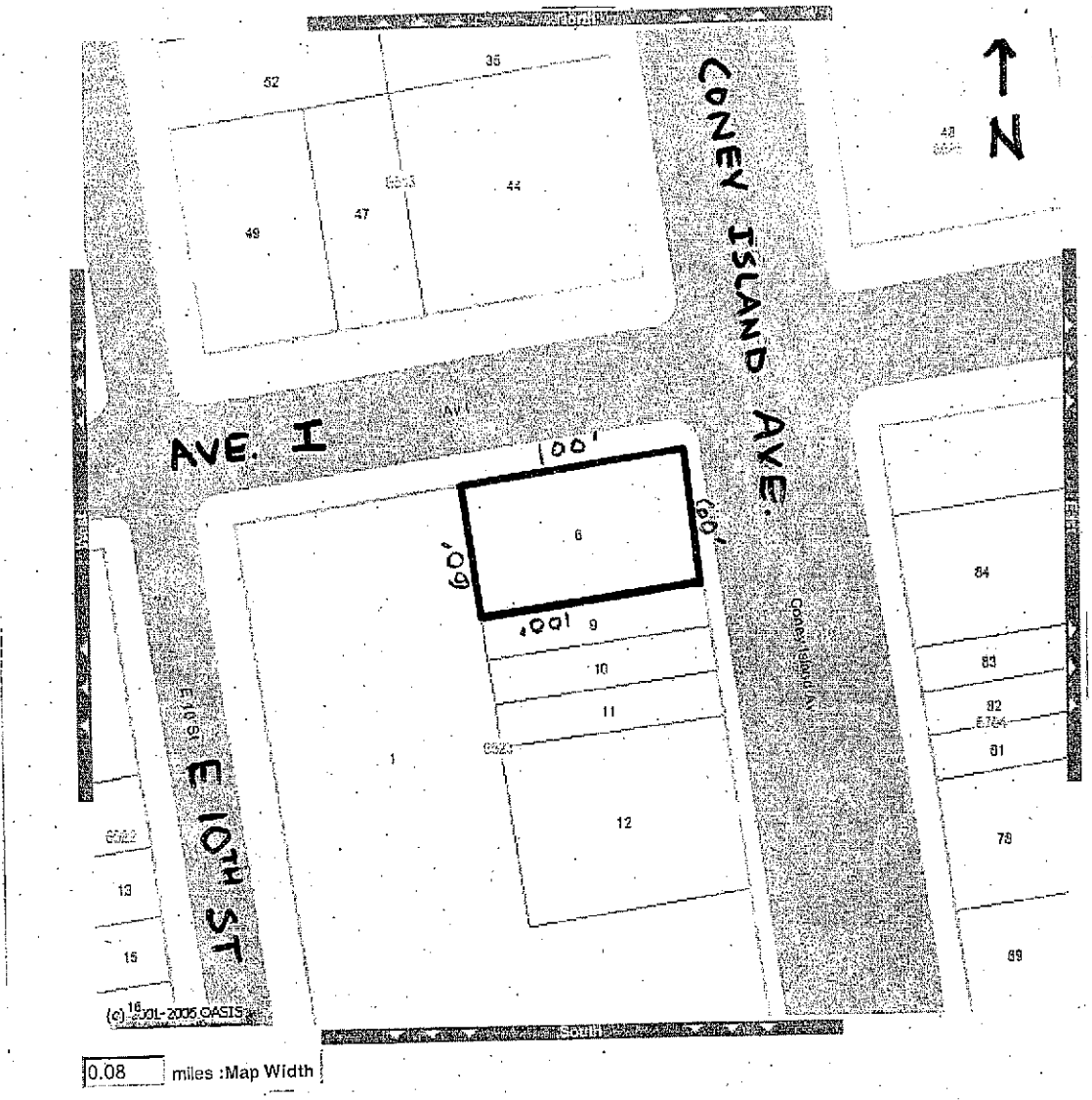


Young Israel of Flatbush
1012 Avenue I
Brooklyn, Kings County, NY

Brooklyn Tax Block 6253, Lot 6, Kings County, NY
Source: NYC OASIS map (accessed online 11/2009)
Lot Dimensions as shown: 60 'x 100'

NYC
Landmarks Preservation Commission

Kate Daly
Executive Director
kdaly@lpc.nyc.gov

1 Centre Street
9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

212 669 7926 tel
212 669 7797 fax

October 23, 2009

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

Re: Young Israel of Flatbush, 1012 Avenue I, Brooklyn

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

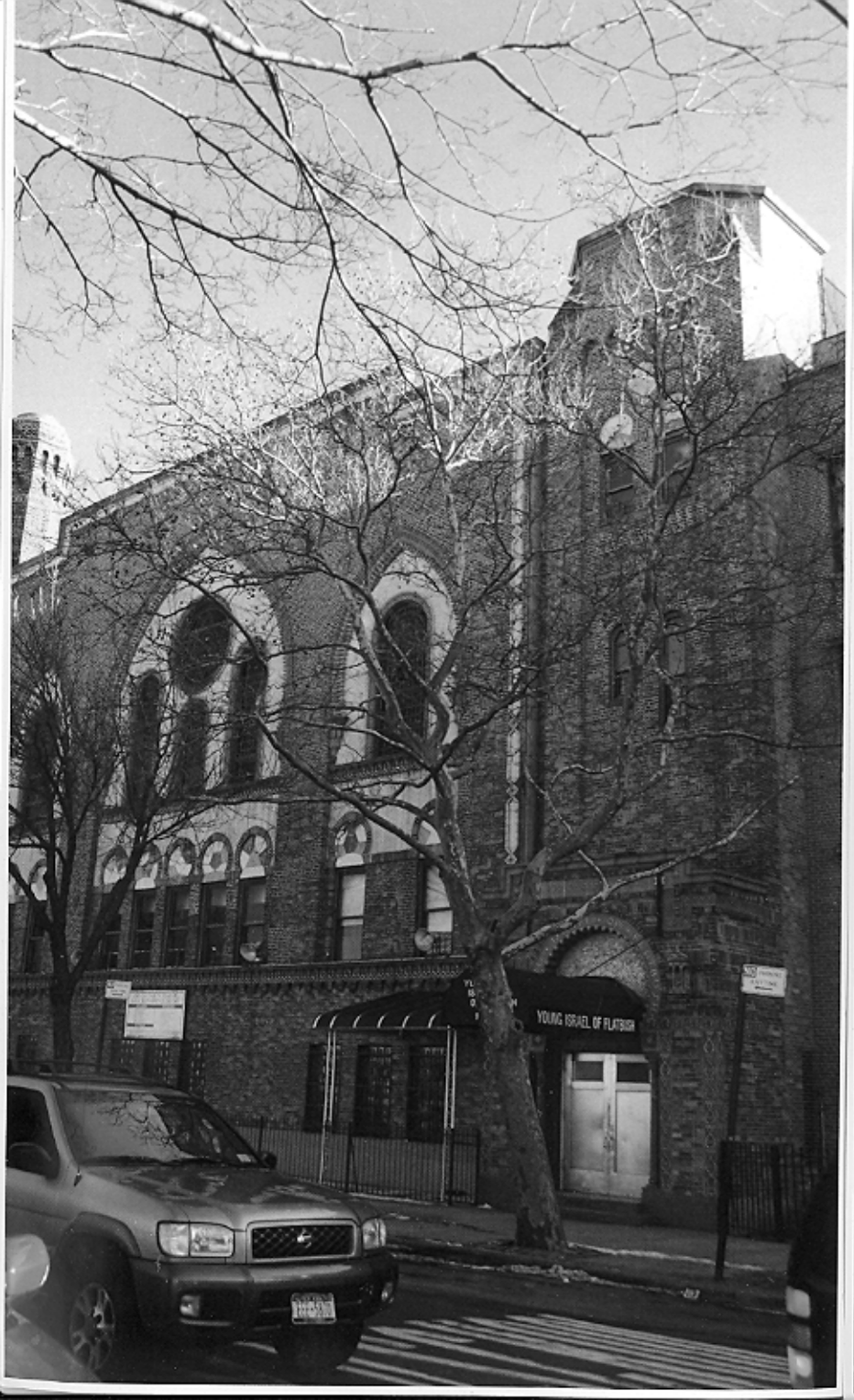
I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of Young Israel of Flatbush, located at 1012 Avenue I in Brooklyn, to the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

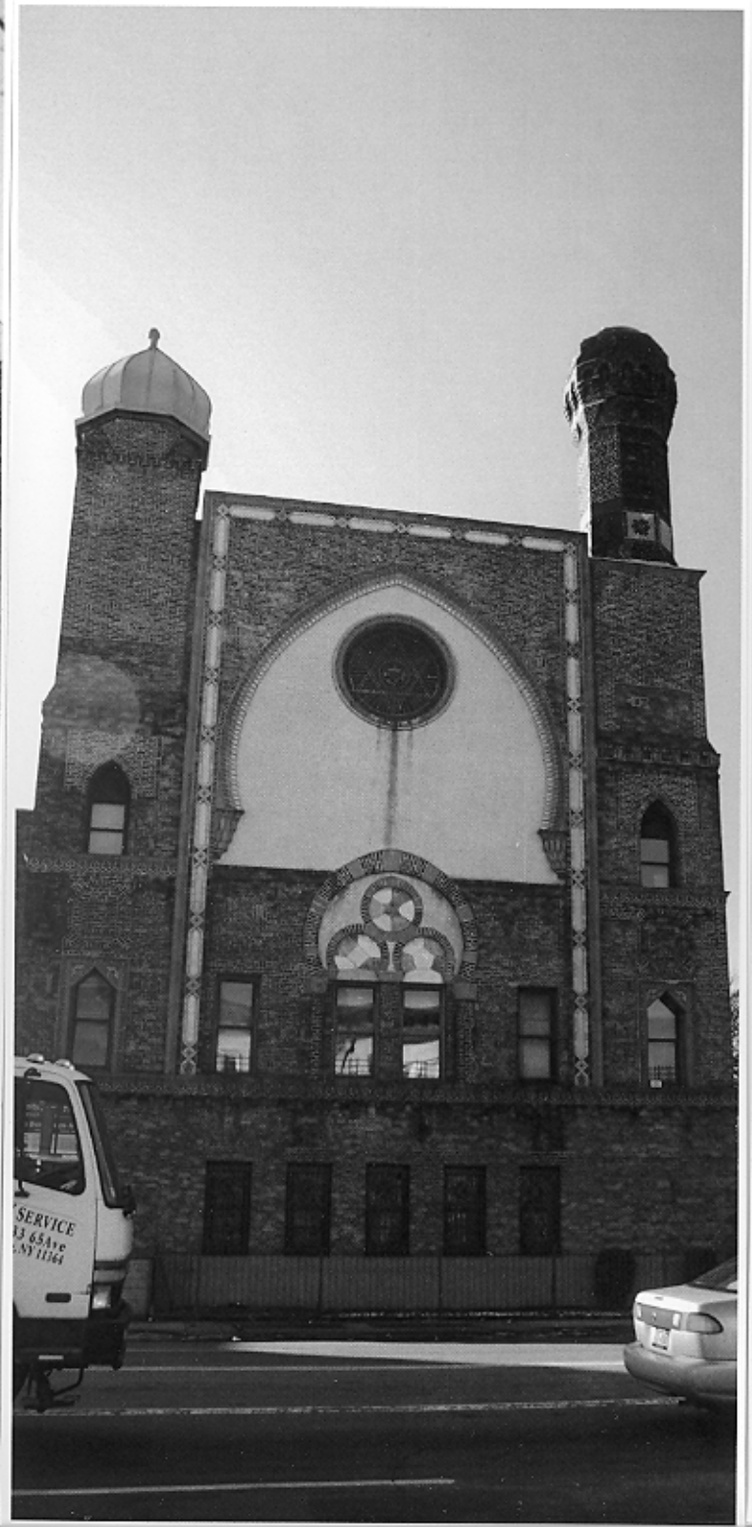
Based on the Commission's review of the property and the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau, the Commission has determined that Young Israel of Flatbush appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Therefore based on this review, the Commission supports the nomination of the Young Israel of Flatbush.

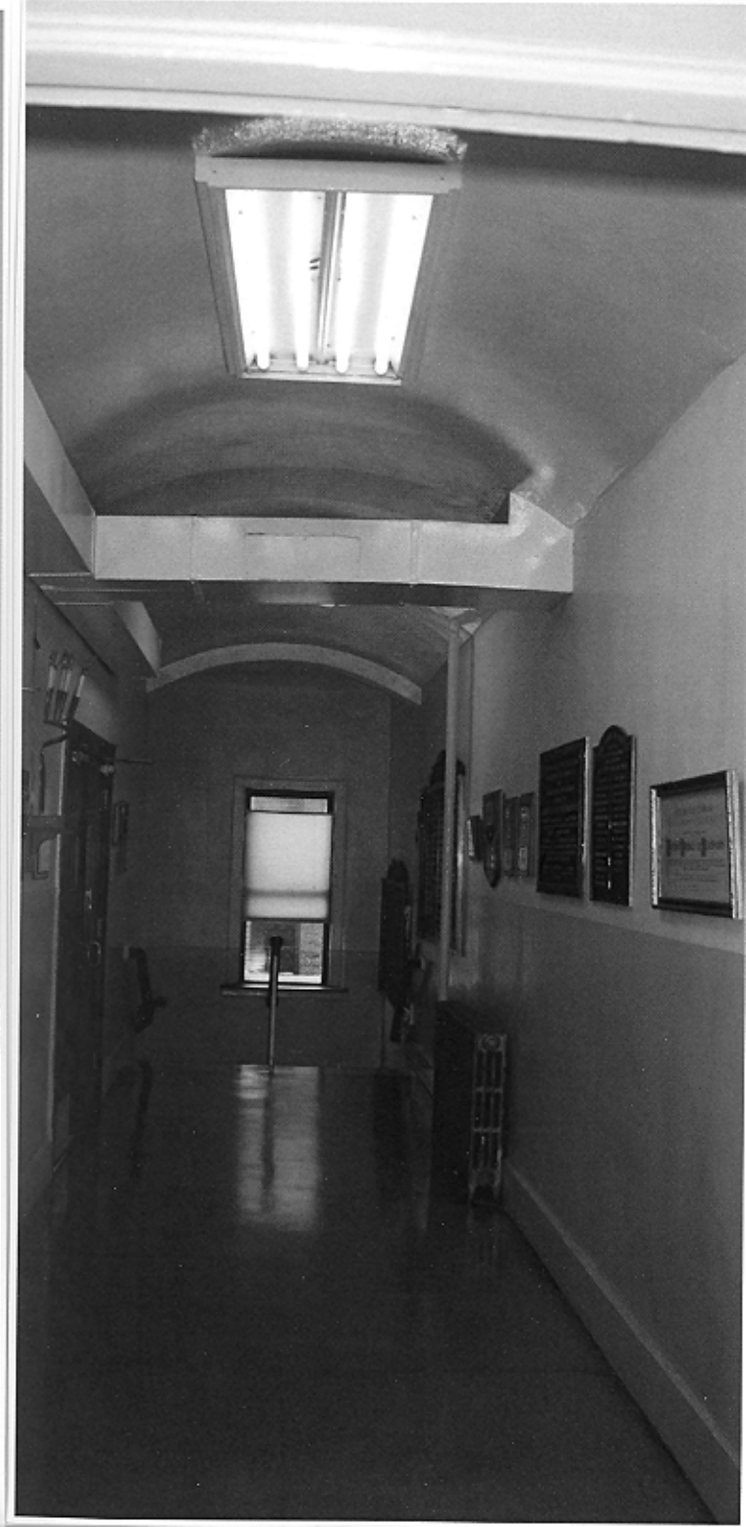
Sincerely,

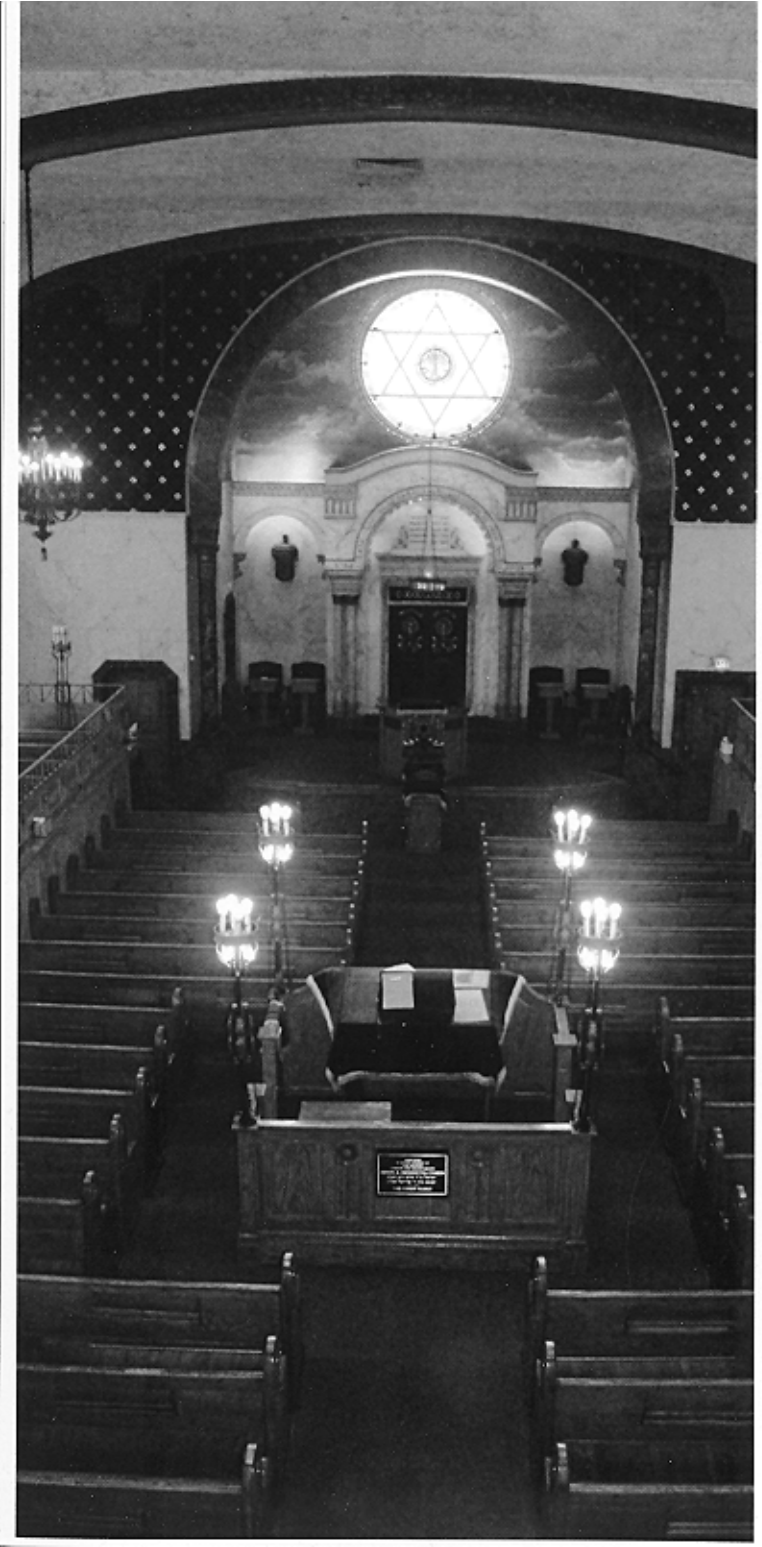
Kate Daly

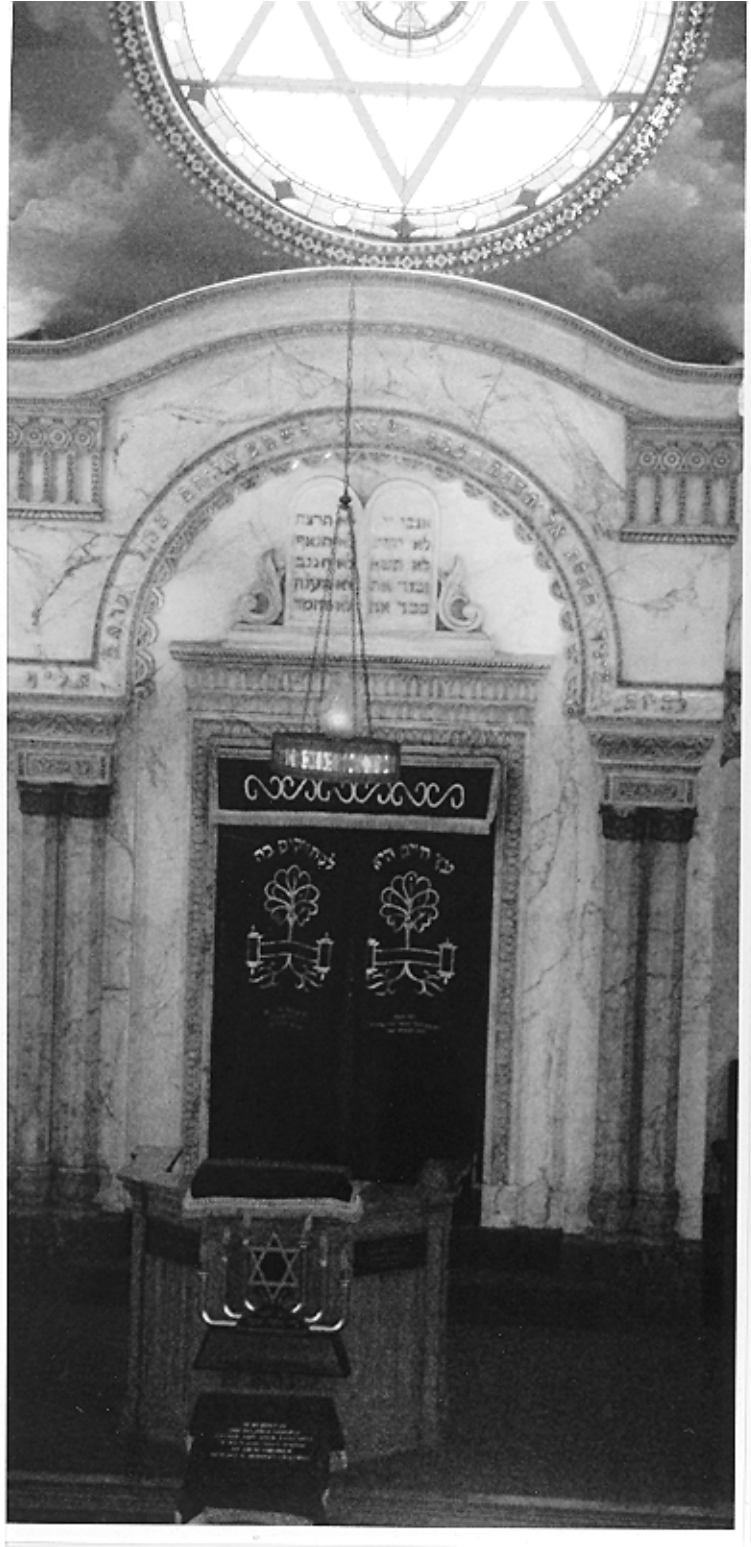
Kate Daly


YOUNG ISRAEL OF FLATBUSH










In Loving Memory
Sidney Landes
Dedicated by
Landes and Family