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 Manhattan Beach Jewish Center

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 60 West End Avenue [ ] not for publication

city or town Brooklyn [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county Kings code 047 zip code 11235

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 — 4/1/15

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

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		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/ Jewish Center & Synagogue

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/ Jewish Center & Synagogue

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Granite faced

walls Limestone, Brick

roof Flat - Rubber

other

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

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

Social History

Period of Significance:

1951-1961

Significant Dates:

1951-1952, 1958-1961

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Jacob W. Sherman

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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.03 acres

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	585385	4592702	3	18		
2	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

name/title Anthony Robbins

organization _____ date _____

street & number 50 West 67th Street telephone _____

city or town New York state NY zip code 10023

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 Manhattan Beach Jewish Center

street & number 60 West End Avenue telephone _____

city or town Brooklyn state NY zip code 11235

Narrative Description of Property

Description

The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center is located at 60 West End Avenue, on the west side of the street, between Shore Boulevard and Hampton Avenue, in the Manhattan Beach neighborhood of the borough of Brooklyn in New York City. The boundaries of the property are described as Brooklyn Tax Block 8713, Lot 77.

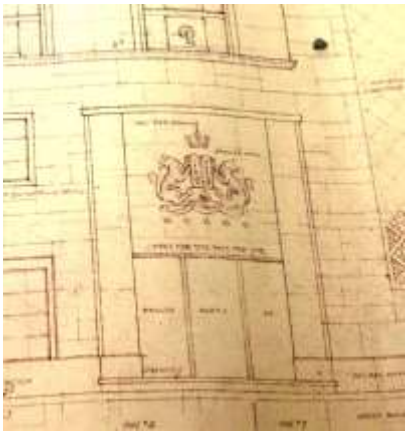
The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center was built 1951 to 1961, to designs by architect Jacob W. Sherman. Though designed in 1951, construction was delayed because of a lack of funds; while the synagogue was built 1951-52, the adjoining community center was not built until 1958-61.

Exterior: West End Avenue

The synagogue

The main portion of the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center on West End Avenue is a two-story-and-mezzanine synagogue with a limestone façade and granite base. It is organized asymmetrically: five window bays, including the main entrance, to the south of a short tower, and one window bay to the tower's north. The first and mezzanine stories read, visually, as a single story not much taller than the top story, from which it is separated by a narrow band course; this arrangement reflects the interior of a tall social hall (first and mezzanine stories) and, above, a sanctuary (second story).

At the northern end of the first story plus mezzanine, adjoining the short tower on its southern side, is a double-height recessed shallow entrance porch, flanked on either side by a single unadorned column. Within, the lower half of the porch contains three wood doors, each with three raised panels holding an ornamental metal relief of a Judaic symbol; the three symbols repeat on each of the three doors, but in alternating order. The wall of the upper half of the recessed porch is plain limestone, though original elevations by the architect show an ornamental panel with the two tablets of the Law flanked by lions and topped by a crown – a motif usually found above the ark in the sanctuary.[1]



[1] Drawings and plans on file in the synagogue's office.

In the porch ceiling there are three down-lights, each set within a *magen david* (star or shield of David) pattern. To the south of the entrance porch, each of the three central bays has a larger rectangular window at the first story and a smaller rectangular window at the second story. The fifth, southernmost, bay has no windows, but instead an inscription: "MANHATTAN BEACH JEWISH CENTER," above which is a roundel containing an ornamental *magen david*. Each of the five bays in the second story (above the mezzanine) has a tall rectangular window with a plain sill; below the sill is a fluted spandrel set within a half-round projecting limestone molding, with in the center a plain square with an inscribed circle, within which is a single Hebrew letter. The five letters spell ישראל ("Israel").

The short tower, which rises slightly above the level of the second story, projects out slightly from the rest of the façade, and is adorned with a geometrically patterned screen suggesting a Moorish motif, and topped by a large, stylized angular *magen david* atop a triple zig-zag wave pattern; there is a short parapet railing at the top supported on short round columns.

The single bay north of the tower repeats the tall rectangular window of the other bays; in place of a Hebrew letter in its spandrel, there is another *magen david*. The first- and mezzanine-story portion beneath the window is plain limestone.

The Community Center

The adjoining Community Center is recessed behind the level of the synagogue façade. Its first and second stories (NB: the second story of the Community Center corresponds to, and connects with, the mezzanine level of the synagogue) continue that façade's limestone facing. A wide, double-height recessed entranceway functions also as a carport, and has a broad projecting awning at half the height of the porch. Within the recessed porch, at the first story, are an entrance at the south end and two sets of large plate-glass windows set in metal frames extending to the north end; the two sets of windows and the entrance are separated by polished granite-faced piers, which appear to have been added c. 2003, as do the main entrance double doors and flanking side-lights. At the second story within the recess are similar plate-glass windows, above which is a ceiling covered in gold mosaics. To the south of the recessed entrance porch are two sets of small rectangular windows – a smaller one at the first story and a larger one at the second story – matching the similar pairs of windows on the synagogue façade. There are similar windows on the north side of the entrance, and then an expanse of plain stone. At the far north end the building is recessed, and at the first story has a metal doorway leading to a staircase that at one time was external but has since been enclosed.

The five upper stories of the Community Center are faced in brick. The third, fourth and fifth stories are lined with small, closely spaced, rectangular windows, with plain brick spandrels; these are set within a limestone frame that separates each window bay from its neighbor with a narrow projecting pier. The sixth and seventh stories each have, instead, two pairs of small square windows.

Exterior: side and rear elevations
The side (north and south) and rear (west) elevations of both the synagogue and the community center are absolutely plain, red brick with windows as required. The rear yard is occupied by a large swimming pool.

Interior: Synagogue
First and mezzanine stories (NB: the synagogue has no basement)
Entrance vestibule, staircase and mezzanine vestibule

The triple entrance in the synagogue's main façade leads into a narrow vestibule, beyond which – down a short staircase – lies the social hall. On the vestibule's marble-faced walls on the left (south), as one enters, hangs a memorial plaque. The travertine floor centers on a simple geometrical pattern of a diamond set within a rectangle.

A staircase leading to the mezzanine story – and occupying the narrow screened tower seen on the exterior – has travertine walls and is lit with one of the stained-glass windows produced by Malone Studio, Inc. (see below, under "Sanctuary"); this one includes the inscriptions "Torah," "Avodah" and "Gemilut Hasidim" ("Torah," "Worship," "Acts of Loving Kindness"). The staircase bannister includes a repeating geometric ornamental pattern suggesting a modern interpretation of Georgian motifs.

The staircase leads to a second-story mezzanine vestibule, or balcony, overlooking the double-height social hall; its ceiling is supported by a group of piers next to the balcony wall giving onto the social hall. Adjoining the balcony are lounges and restrooms, and a former "bridal room."

Social hall
The short staircase from the vestibule leads down to the social hall; it repeats the bannister motif of a modern interpretation of the Georgian. Identified as a "community hall" on Sherman's plans, but more recently called the "social hall" and used entirely by a caterer, this is a large two-story-tall space, much of whose detail was damaged or destroyed by superstorm Sandy. Among is surviving original design elements is a curving staircase at the southeast corner leading to a slightly lower balcony (identified on the architect's original drawings as an "orchestra balcony") adjoining the main balcony, and a suspended ceiling in a 1950's swooping shape, with a shallow dome from which hangs a recently added chandelier. Ornamental columns against the walls, supporting triangular pediments and framing mirrors, are recent additions by the caterer, not part of the original design.

The first story of the social hall extending beneath the main balcony has also suffered much damage from Sandy; little if anything remains of its original design.

Second story
Entrance vestibule to sanctuary
The entrance vestibule staircase continues – and is lit by another of the Malone windows – to the second story (NB: the second story in the synagogue corresponds to the third story in the adjoining Community House), where it leads to an entrance vestibule for the main sanctuary. The vestibule is lit by windows from the synagogue's façade. Its walls are clad in pink marble; it has a travertine floor; and three double doors leading into the sanctuary have travertine surrounds. The vestibule walls hold numerous memorial plaques.

Sanctuary
The synagogue's main sanctuary is a single large space, with a raked floor, into whose front wall is set a large proscenium arch. The ceiling is largely flat, but curves slightly down at the edges. The sanctuary is lit by a series of large, stained glass windows on the theme of Jewish religious holidays; these were commissioned from Malone Studio, Inc., of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, and created 1987-1991.[2] (Related windows appear elsewhere in the synagogue, notably the main staircase.)

Both the proscenium arch and the window frames are adorned with brightly colored mosaic ornament, produced by the Guastavino Company. Though seemingly abstract, they do include Judaic symbols and motifs. On the arch, these include a *menorah* (seven-branch candelabra), a pair of raised hands with fingers separated in the manner of the priestly blessing, and a *magen david* (six-sided star or shield of David). The mosaics framing each window repeat an identical abstract pattern from window to window, but include a rectangular panel rising above each window with a Judaic symbol. Each symbol represents a Jewish holiday: a *menorah* (eight-branched candelabra) symbolizing Chanukka; a *shofar (*ram's horn) used to signal the new year, symbolizing *Rosh Hashana*; and so forth. The windows, though added almost 40 years later, were specifically designed to illustrate the same holidays as the mosaics panels above them.

The sanctuary is notable for its use of Akoustolith tile, produced by the Guastavino Company, lining the walls (see discussion in Section 8: Significance). The tile is in half-a-dozen different colors and set in geometric patterns. Together with the mosaics around the windows and on the proscenium arch, the tile helps create a bright, lively coloration for the sanctuary as a whole.

The proscenium arch frames the *bema*, or raised platform used in prayer services. The rear wall of the *bema* is slightly curved, and composed of twelve tall, narrow panels, each adorned at the top with a symbol associated with one of the twelve tribes of Israel. A wooden sculpture depicts the two tablets of the Law (representing the tablets of the Ten Commandments) superimposed over a Torah scroll (the ceremonial scroll, containing the five

[2] Malone Studio Inc. web site: http://www.malonestudio.com/judaic.htm (accessed November 12, 2014). The studio was founded in 1976. In a letter to the author, Priscilla Malone wrote: "We were first contacted in March of 1987 to design, fabricate and install a stained glass window representing Chanukah for inside the Sanctuary…. The following year we submitted the design for Succot which was fabricated in 1989. The majority of the windows were commissioned and fabricated from 1990-91 for the Sanctuary. In 1991 we submitted the designs for The Five Books Of Moses for the hall, which (the designs) were accepted and created. Prior to the stained glass windows, there was only clear and in some areas, frosted, plate glass throughout the building."

Books of Moses, read during services). Below the sculpture is the ark holding the synagogue's actual Torah scrolls.

Fixed seating is organized into a men's and women's section by an ornamental *mechitza,* or ritual divider (not original to the sanctuary). The ceiling is plaster, with downlights and ventilation grilles. The floor is carpeted.

Doors on either side of the *bema* lead to a series of service rooms, including the rabbi's study through the door to the right (north) of the *bema*, as well as stairs, through the door to the left (south) of the *bema,* leading up to a choir loft behind it.

Interior: Community Center

Basement

The basement includes only utilitarian spaces, of no architectural significance.

First and second stories

New community or banquet hall

The first and second stories are occupied for the most part by a large, long, two-story-tall community hall – for many years used entirely by a caterer – much of whose detail was damaged or destroyed by superstorm Sandy. Most of the surviving detail – including rows of black classical columns along the walls, and the related detailing, as well as a large glass chandelier hanging from the center of the room – are recent additions by the caterer.

The first story of the social hall, extending beneath the second-story reception hall, has also suffered much damage from Sandy; little if anything remains of its original design, with the exception of a stylish curving staircase, with a cast-aluminum railing, leading to the second story.

Second-story ancillary spaces

The second floor includes various meeting rooms, administrative offices, kitchen and catering facilities, and other ancillary spaces, none of them architecturally significant. The second floor connects to the mezzanine of the adjoining synagogue building.

Second-story Reception hall

The reception hall is a bright, airy space lit by the large windows of the community center's façade; its ceiling is supported by a series of enclosed columns. Ornament is simple and utilitarian. The hall originally overlooked the community or banquet hall, but has since been walled off from that space.

Staircases

There are two staircases serving the community center, one at either end (north and south). The staircase at the north end (away from the synagogue) was originally an exterior staircase; it has since been enclosed with concrete block walls. It retains its original quarry tile floors. The staircase adjoining the synagogue building (to the south) has always been an interior staircase; it also retains its original quarry-tile floors.

Third and fourth stories

The third and fourth stories are occupied by classrooms and offices. The floors and walls have all been updated; little original architectural detail survives. The third story connects to the vestibule at the second story of the adjoining synagogue building. One of the rooms on the fourth floor has been converted into a small chapel for religious services.

Fifth and sixth stories

The fifth and sixth stories retain their original quarry-tile floors; they are occupied by classrooms, offices, bathrooms, and a superintendent's apartment. The sixth floor originally contained locker rooms; those spaces, though converted, retain their white tiled floors.

Seventh story

The seventh story is occupied almost entirely by a brightly lit gymnasium, along with a racquet ball court and various ancillary spaces. It has concrete block walls, a wood floor, and a concrete plank ceiling supported by exposed steel trusses.

Although it suffered significant damage during Superstorm Sandy, in general the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. It has been continuously maintained as a synagogue and community center since its construction. Alterations primarily affect minor spaces such as offices and classrooms. The main façades, main sanctuary, and vestibules, survive largely intact.

Statement of Significance:

The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, at 60 West End Avenue in the Manhattan Beach section of Brooklyn, is historically significant under Criterion A in the area of social history as a mid-20th-century synagogue surviving in Brooklyn. Begun in 1951, to designs of Brooklyn architect Jacob W. Sherman, the synagogue portion was completed in 1952, while construction of the adjoining community center – part of the original plan – had to be delayed for lack of funds until 1960-1962. The complex dates from a period when Brooklyn had emerged as one of the world's major Jewish population centers. Combining facilities for both synagogue and general community needs, including classrooms, meeting rooms, ballroom, gymnasium and swimming pool, it was a product of the "Jewish Center" movement then remaking the American synagogue landscape.

The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center is architecturally significant under Criterion C as an example of an intact early post-World War II modern synagogue in Brooklyn**.** Its design by architect Jacob W. Sherman reflects developments in Bauhaus-influenced European synagogues of the 1930s. By the time of the synagogue's construction, modernism had become dominant in American synagogue design. The synagogue's sanctuary is also notable for its use of Akoustolith tile, produced by the Guastavino company, which lines the walls, and the brightly colored abstract mosaic designs on the proscenium arch and on the window surrounds.

The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center 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.[3]

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

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

> …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.[4]

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…."[5]

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.[6]

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, [7] its Jewish population grew enormously. The subsequent

[4] ibid, 6-7.
[5] ibid, 8-9.
[6] ibid, 9.
[7] Ilana Abramovitch and Seán Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn* (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life; Brandeis University Press, 2001), "Introduction," p. 5.

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.[8] 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).[9] 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.[10] 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.[11]

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.[12]

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[8] 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).
[9] *The Jewish Communal Register of New York City 1917-1918* (New York: Kehillah [Jewish Community], 1918), p.86.
[10] Abramovitch and Galvin, p. 5.
[11] Abelow, p.13.
[12] Abramovich and Galvin, p.3.

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.[13]

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.[14]

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
> Central Brooklyn: 26 permanent, 26 temporary
> East New York: 24 permanent, 29 temporary
> Williamsburg: 49 permanent, 20 temporary[15]

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

[13] 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."

[14] 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.

[15] *Jewish Communal Register*, *op. cit.*

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.[16]

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.

Manhattan Beach

The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center is located on West End Avenue, a commercial thoroughfare in the Manhattan Beach neighborhood.

Manhattan Beach[17], a small Brooklyn neighborhood with a population under 5000, occupies the eastern end of a long, narrow peninsula on Brooklyn's southern shoreline; it shares the peninsula with the neighborhoods of Coney Island and Brighton Beach. Manhattan Beach is bounded on the west by Corbin Place, the border with Brighton Beach; on the north by Sheepshead Bay; and on the south and east by the Atlantic Ocean. Its main east-west corridors are Shore Boulevard bordering Sheepshead Bay, and Oriental Boulevard in the southern part of the neighborhood. West End Avenue, wider than most of the north-south streets, lies at the neighborhood's western extremity, just one block east of Corbin Place, and half a block south of Shore Boulevard. From West End Avenue, the neighborhoods streets are named in alphabetical order after English place names – Amherst Street, Beaumont Street, Coleridge Street etc.

Like much of the Brooklyn Atlantic shore, as well as the Rockaways in Queens, Manhattan Beach began as a shore resort. Austin Corbin's Manhattan Beach Improvement Company constructed two enormous hotels there, the Manhattan Beach Hotel and the Oriental Hotel. Once considered among the nation's finest,[18] they attracted "genteel and monied folk" who "made annual pilgrimages to escape the stifling heat of the city."[19] Corbin's Manhattan Beach Hotel "teemed with celebrities of the stage, sport, and the gay life of the city generally."[20] Verandas, an open-air café, concerts and opera attracted affluent holiday-makers. John Philip Sousa performed regularly, and even wrote a "Manhattan Beach March." Corbin's hotel, however, was specifically off-limit to

[16] Marc D. Angel, Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Jews," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 622.
[17] For an overview of Manhattan Beach, see Stephen Weinstein, "Manhattan Beach," in the *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (Yale University Press, 1991), p. 719 ff.
[18] Robert Patrick Smith, *Illusion and Reality in the Press and Other Contemporary Sources: Urban Recreation in Brooklyn, 1890-1898*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1973, p. 72.
[19] *The Citizen*, August 15, 1897, p.6, cited in Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[20] Henry Collins Brown, "Valentine's Manual of Old New York. The Last Fifty Years in New York" (New York, 1925), p.136, cited in Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Jews, as Corbin declared publicly: "We cannot bring the highest social element to Manhattan Beach if the Jews persist in coming. They won't associate with Jews, and that's all there is about it."[21]

After 1900, growing development throughout Brooklyn raised property values in Manhattan Beach to the point that property development appeared more profitable than the resort business. The *New York Times* reported in 1910:

> Manhattan Beach is gradually assuming a high-class residential appearance, and a short time only will elapse before this Summer resort will show the improvements provided in a perfect system of development.[22]

Both the Manhattan Beach Hotel and its companion, the Oriental Hotel, closed in 1911. As the *Times* reported that September, at the end of the season:

> Manhattan Beach Hotel Soon to Go; Famous Resort, Created by Austin Corbin, Will Disappear, It Is Expected, Before Snow Flies. Site to be Sold in Plots. Property Has Become Too Valuable to Maintain in its Present Condition….[23]

The former summer resort was replaced by "Manhattan Beach Estates," described by the *Times* as "a unique bungalow colony":

> Manhattan Beach Estates has been laid out with a view to furnishing desirable and practical home sites for those who appreciate the twofold benefits of seashore and suburban life. They combine the metropolitan with the rural. Boulevards of great width, and corresponding wide intersecting streets, have been cut through the property, and have been carefully graded, curbed and macadamized and lined with the best granolithic sidewalks….. Provision has been made for electric light, telephone, and telegraph wires, so that nothing unsightly may mar the beauty of the streets… The property enjoys excellent transit facilities from both Manhattan and Brooklyn.[24]

By 1913, a new seawall was completed

> …on the ocean front at Manhattan Beach…thus completing the first section of the great wall which will eventually run along the entire ocean front of the Manhattan Beach property, a distance of about two and a half miles.[25]

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[21] "Jews not welcome guests," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 25, 1879, p. 6. That was the mildest expression in Corbin's statement of his opinion of Jews.
[22] "Manhattan Beach Development," *New York Times*, May 8, 1910, p. XX7.
[23] "Manhattan Beach Hotel Soon to Go," *New York Times*, September 17, 1911, p. 7.
[24] "A Unique Bungalow Colony," *New York Times*, May 21, 1911, p. XX1.
[25] "Work on Great Sea Wall," *New-York Tribune*, March 23, 1913, p. B7.

Bungalows were erected on the side streets, including West End Avenue. The residential population grew, including – with Austin Corbin gone – a small Jewish community. In 1919, Temple Beth El of Manhattan Beach opened[26], followed in 1922 by Congregation B'nai Israel of Manhattan Beach, which would shortly become known as the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center.

Congregation B'nai Israel of Manhattan Beach / Manhattan Beach Jewish Center

As described in the synagogue's original certificate of incorporation[27], the founders of Congregation B'nai Israel included a group "two-thirds of us being citizens of the United States," suggesting the strong immigrant background of the community. The certificate defined the corporation's purpose:

> To own and maintain a synagogue for divine worship and for religious services, all in accordance with the tenets and doctrines of the Orthodox Hebrew faith….

as well as promoting "the Jewish faith," performing charity, maintaining a Hebrew school, and owning a cemetery. The congregation didn't officially change its name to Manhattan Beach Jewish Center until 1962, when it filed a "certificate of change of name."[28] But the use of that name dates back as far as 1923. On August 3rd, 1923, less than a year after incorporating, B'nai Israel joined with Temple Bethel – still a separate congregation today, located at No. 111 West End Avenue – to create the Jewish Center of Manhattan Beach, apparently to enable the two congregations to operate a joint religious school. As announced in the *Brooklyn Eagle*:

> Hebrew bodies amalgamate
>
> The Temple Bethel and the Congregation Bnai Israel of Manhattan Beach have amalgamated under the name of the Jewish Center of Manhattan Beach, and on Sunday, Aug. 5, at 2 p.m., will lay the cornerstone for their new Hebrew school, Talmud Torah Bnai Israel, at 60 West-End ave., Manhattan Beach.[29]

The following day, the *Brooklyn Standard Union* printed a similar announcement, adding that "prominent speakers will address the audience."[30]

Despite the "amalgamation," the congregations apparently remained separate institutions; a notice in the *Eagle* in 1926 named them as two separate synagogues: "Beth El Congregation of Manhattan Beach and Congregation Bnai Israel of Manhattan Beach."[31] By 1928, the name "Jewish Center of Manhattan Beach" appeared to refer

[26] "Serving south Brooklyn Since 1919"; Temple Beth El of Manhattan Beach web site, "History," http://templebethelmb.org/history/, accessed November 9th, 2014.
[27] October 19th, 1922, copy in the synagogue's files.
[28] A copy of the certificate is in the synagogue's files.
[29] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 3, 1923, p. 6.
[30] *Brooklyn Standard Union*, August 4, 1923, p. 10.
[31] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Dec. 2, 1926 (n.p.).

solely to B'nai Israel; an article that year called the new building at 60 West End Avenue by both names when reporting on a ceremonial presentation of a new Torah scroll:

> Congregation Bnai Israel, the Jewish center of Manhattan Beach at 60 West End avenue, celebrated with special exercises yesterday afternoon the presentation of a Torah, or Holy Scroll, to the synagogue by Mrs. Rose Edelstein.
>
> About 100 members of the congregation and their friends attended and enjoyed an elaborately [sic] programme. Prominent men of the section spoke of the material benefit to the community provided by the building of the new community center in which the services were held.[32]

Nevertheless, a 1929 article, recounting a similar event, referred to the synagogue only as "Congregation Bnai Israel."[33] The names appear to have been used interchangeably, referring always to the synagogue at 60 West End Avenue. The synagogue's 1949 newsletter, "Hashofar," used the name "Manhattan Beach Jewish Center" – but the caption under a photo of its building identified it as "Manhattan Beach Jewish Center – Congregation B'nai Israel." Letterhead on a letter from 1953 reads: "Congregation B'nai Israel of the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, 20 West End Ave."

From the start, the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center included a synagogue and a school. But only with its rebuilding in 1951, and expansion in 1960-62, would it fully embody the aspirations of the Jewish Center movement, which transformed the American synagogue in the early- to mid-20th century.

New York synagogues and the "Jewish Center" phenomenon

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, 02NR04917); to grand, high-style "cathedral" synagogues (e.g. the NR-listed Central Synagogue, 90NR00862). 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.[34] 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-

[32] *Brooklyn Standard Union*, March 19, 1928, p. 5.
[33] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 15, 1929, p. 7.
[34] David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Brandeis University Press, 1999).

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."[35] 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.[36]

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.[37]

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.[38]

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

[35] ibid, p.7.
[36] ibid, pp. 232-233.
[37] ibid, p. 238.
[38] ibid, 239.

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.[39]

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.[40]

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. Congregation B'nai Israel of Manhattan Beach adopted the name "Jewish Center" in 1923 for its new school, run jointly with Congregation Bethel. But the congregation didn't realize the full potential of the Jewish Center concept until its new building of 1951, and particularly with its extension of 1960-62. Only in 1962 did the congregation officially change its name to Manhattan Beach Jewish Center.

The new Manhattan Beach Jewish Center

In December 1950, the congregation's newsletter *Hashofar* announced: "New Building Plans Approved." The plan called for a

> …new building, covering the entire area, including the play area and annex. A new playground will be planned on the site recently acquired, adjoining our present building, occupied by the bungalows…. When completed, our edifice will be most outstanding, with ample room for class-rooms for our children, a beautiful Synagogue to accommodate all worshippers, social and athletic facilities for the entire Community. [41]

Construction took several years. Work began in April 1951, as reported in the *New York Times*:

[39] 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.
[40] "Jewish Social Centre," *New York Times*, March 10, 1918, p. RE12.
[41] Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, *Hashofar*, December 15, 1950, p. 1.

> Ground was broken yesterday afternoon at 60 West End Avenue, Brooklyn, for a synagogue for the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center. The principal speaker was Rabbi Samuel Belkin, president of Yeshiva University. Others were Joseph Sharkey, acting President of the New York City Council….[42]

In January 1952, *Hashofar* announced a "building fund campaign now in full swing":

> The progress thus far, has been financed by funds in our treasury. These funds are now depleted, and we must face the facts that our erectors must be paid for materials and labors they expend in our behalf…. Mr. Katz assured all they would look back in the near future, and be proud of the part they played in building this great House of Prayer, as well as a Community Center….[43]

The synagogue and community center were both part of the original plan, and imagined as a facility to serve the entire community, very much on the Jewish Center model:

> While under our sponsorship, the Synagogue and Community House, will serve every resident in our Community. Not alone will it answer the spiritual need, but also function as a social, cultural and athletic Center for all. After our membership has done its duty, we expect to contact all other neighbors, to participate in the building of this vital edifice, in our midst.[44]

The design for both the synagogue and the adjoining community house was filed in 1951.[45] As of 1953, the congregation had run out of money, so while the synagogue was completed, it would be several more years until the community house could be constructed as well. But the plans were in place. In the words of *Hashofar* in February 1953:

> Our new community center will have:
>
> 1 – A fully equipped school plant – many classrooms – library – kindergarten room, etc.
> 2 – Gymnasium
> 3 – Swimming pool and health room
> 4 – Open air playground
> 5 – Solarium
> 6 – Large auditorium for communal meetings
> 7 – Meeting rooms and lounge
> 8 – Administrative offices
> 9 – Arts and crafts, workshop and hobby room

[42] "Brooklyn Synagogue Begun," *New York Times*, April 16, 1951, p. 21.
[43] *Hashofar*, January 18, 1952, p. 1.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] New York Buildings Department, Brooklyn, Alteration 21 of 1951; referenced in the Certificate of Occupancy, 178655 of 1962. In New York, it is not uncommon for large new construction projects to be filed as "alterations" if an existing structure is connected to it; the original synagogue remained standing for several years after completion of the new building.

According to that issue, "Blueprints for NEW COMMUNITY CENTER completed. Excavations planned real soon."

Work was delayed for five years. Eventually, in 1958, funds were in place. Bungalows on the newly acquired site, and the old synagogue building, were ready to be demolished, as reported in *Hashofar*:

> Demolition Begins. A contract has been given out to demolish the bungalows recently purchased, as well as the old synagogue, and prepare the ground for the building of our new community center, one of the finest in the land… The long awaited community center will soon become a reality.[46]

In November 1958, demolition of the old synagogue was underway, and illustrated in *Hashofar*:

> The old and the promise of the new are shown in this picture. You see the old Synagogue being demolished, and in front, above the architect's and builder's temporary quarters, is the sign about our new Community Center. After demolishing the old Synagogue we will proceed full speed in building our Community Center.

In September 1960, construction was underway. A photo in the September 2, 1960 issue of *Hashofar* showed the steel structure of the community center rising adjacent to the new synagogue.

> Have you noticed the new skyline of our Community? The rising super structure signals a new era in our Community. Yes, the steel is going up but are you doing your part for its building and for providing a home for our children?[47]

With work underway, fundraising continued. On the first page of the November 18, 1960 *Hashofar*, beneath a photo of construction work, a plea for financial contributions touted the communal value of the project:

> The bricks you see on the scaffold will soon make a wall. Individuals banded together, moved by a vision, make a community. Help build our Center for our youth and ourselves….[48]

In March 1961, congregation offered members a "Guided Inspection Tour of our New Community Center."

> …the progress on the new building has proceeded to such a great extent that everyone will be able to see how the New Community Center will look.[49]

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[46] *Hashofar*, September 1, 1958, p. 1.
[47] *ibid*, September 2, 1960, p. 2.
[48] *ibid*, November 18, 1960, p. 1.
[49] *ibid*, March 10, 1961, p. 1.

In June 1961, the congregation held a "cornerstone dedication ceremony." *Hashofar* reported that "the end of summer will mark the completion of our Community Center:

> July and August…will be the busiest months for our Center. Work is proceeding; full crews are working every day to have the building ready for September. Even now, you can inspect the beautiful marble in the lobby the lathing and the plastering of the building and the tile that is being placed.[50]

Final approvals were issued in December 1961, and a Certificate of Occupancy in February 1962.

Jacob W. Sherman

To design the new home for the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, the congregation hired Brooklyn-based architect Jacob W. Sherman (?-1981[51]). Information about Sherman is sparse. He studied architecture at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, earning a degree in "architectural design" in 1925[52] and "architecture" in 1926.[53] He seems to have specialized in apartment buildings in Brooklyn and Queens, including, during the 1930s and early 1940s: a six-story apartment house at Woodhaven Boulevard and 89th Avenue in Jamaica, Queens, 1937[54]; six-story apartment buildings at 77-101 Lincoln Road[55] and 960 Sterling Place[56] in 1938; six-story apartment buildings at 48 Westminster Road,[57] 297 Lenox Road,[58] at Skillman Avenue at 40th Street in Long Island City[59], at 34-58 Lefferts Avenue,[60] at Skillman Avenue at 41st Street in Long Island City[61], and at 472-482 Lefferts Avenue,[62] all in 1939; and six-story apartment buildings at 2753 Ocean Avenue[63] and 1561 E. 13th Street in 1940.[64]

After World War II, Sherman seems to have turned to institutional and also suburban buildings. He designed eight two-family houses at 3353 to 3369 12th Avenue[65]; and ten one-family houses at 2934 to 2936 Nostrand Avenue,[66] in 1947.

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[50] *ibid*, June 30, 1961, p. 1.
[51] "Sherman, Jacob W.," obituary, *New York Times*, December 17, 1981, p. D23.
[52] *Brooklyn Standard Union*, June 19, 1925, p. 9.
[53] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 18, 1926, p. A5.
[54] *New York Sun*, July 15, 1937, p. 29.
[55] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 17, 1938 (n.pl).
[56] New York City, Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Crown Heights North Designation Report*, LP-2161 (New York: City of New York, 2011).
[57] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 3, 1939 (n.p.)
[58] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 21, 1939 p. 18.
[59] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 4, 1939 (n.p.).
[60] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 10, 1939 (n.p.).
[61] *New York Sun*, July 19, 1939, p. 35.
[62] *New York Sun*, January 26, 1939, p.33.
[63] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 3, 1940, p. 25.
[64] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 30, 1940, p. 17.
[65] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 3, 1947, p. 10.
[66] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 5, 1947, p. 9.

Sherman's post-war institutional buildings included a school, the Institute for Special Education, at Beach Channel Drive and Beach 62nd Street in Rockaway Beach, 1956[67]; and a ten-story housing complex for Maimonides Hospital at 49th Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues, in 1962.[68]

Besides his work for the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, Sherman did structural work for Congregation Solomon, at 1699 President Street, in 1947[69]; and in 1944 he designed a new home for Congregation Beth Israel at 94 Fulton Street, Hempstead, in Nassau County, completed c.1950 (today it is home to the Chamsarang Korean Methodist Church). The pamphlet announcing the building fund campaign for Beth Israel called the proposed new synagogue a "credit to Hempstead Jewry, a pride to Hempstead community and a glory to God."[70]

Sherman apparently maintained a personal connection with the Jewish Center of Manhattan Beach. Though he was living at the time in Flatbush, his daughter, Marian Sherman, was married at the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center in 1954.[71]

The design of the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center: early Post-war modernism

The design of the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center reflects the turn towards modernism in the post-war period.

The years immediate following the end of World War II saw a major shift in architectural style away from the late Art Deco or Moderne towards the International Style and other types of Modernism.

Historian Samuel Gruber writes of this immediate post-war period of synagogue design:

> …in the 1940s, it was not clear which way synagogue design would go [historicist or modern]… Some of the planning aspects of prewar Jewish centers, which allowed expansion of the sanctuary and the multiple use of spaces, dictated a more modern aesthetic.[72]

In 1947, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC, the official organization of Reform synagogues) sponsored a two-day meeting in New York City on the subject of modern design for synagogues:

> Artists and architects must work in close cooperation to create houses of worship in keeping with contemporary religious spirit, speakers agreed yesterday at the closing sessions of a conference on the modern synagogue….. Eli Jacques Kahn, president of the Municipal Art Society, predicted a change in all types of buildings to make them "more worthy of our present culture."[73]

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[67] *The Wave, Rockaway Beach*, March 8, 1956, section 1, p. 7.
[68] *New York Times*, February 9, 1962, p. 29.
[69] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 21, 1947, p. 16.
[70] *Nassau Daily Review-Star*, April 27, 1944, p.13, and *Hempstead Sentinel*, April 27, 1944, p. 1.
[71] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 20, 1954, p. 12.
[72] Samuel D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (Rizzoli, 2003), p. 83.
[73] "Modern Design Urged in Houses of Worship," *New York Times*, June 24, 1947, p.6.

By the 1950s, modernism had become the standard. In 1953, under the title "Art for Religion: Collaborative Project for a Synagogue Successfully Employs Modern Design," the *New York Times* covered an exhibition highlighting

> …sculpture by Ibram Lassaw and mural decoration by Adolph Gottlieb and Robert Motherwell, which has been made for the synagogue which Percival Goodman designed for Congregation Beth El in Springfield, Mass.[74]

The writer maintained that the exhibit

> …proves forcefully that modern art can have a grandeur, a beauty and a luxuriant richness which makes it appropriate as decoration for houses of worship.

In 1957 – ten years after its first conference – the UAHC put together an "exhibit and national conference on synagogue architecture and art" at the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel, "attended by 135 Jewish leaders and architects":

> American Judaism, an architect said yesterday, has embarked on an "adventure in architecture." Contemporary design, he noted, predominates in synagogues that are being built at the rate of about thirty a year in the New York area. The process is "most dramatic" in the suburbs, Lewis Davis [of Davis Brody]…remarked yesterday….
>
> Harry M. Prince, chairman of the architects' panel of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations…said that Judaism had "no coherent tradition of design, such as the Gothic." Judaism is therefore making greater use of contemporary design, he said, in an effort to adopt and express itself in American terms. This "adventure in architecture," he said, is an important force. Richard M. Bennett, a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, said…that progress in synagogue design in the last decade "will make a most interesting section in the history of American architecture for its intensity of change, its evolutionary richness and its variety of solution and expression."

By 1963, New York's Jewish Museum could devote its opening show to "Recent American Synagogue Architecture" and include examples by such leaders of the modern movement as "Pietro Belluschi, Marcel Breuer, Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, Eric Mendelsohn, Minoru Yamasaki and Frank Lloyd Wright."[75]

Jacob W. Sherman's design for the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center ranks as one of the first of the new crop of modern synagogues in New York City. The general model for the design appears to be Bauhaus-influenced European synagogues of the 1930s, for example the Oberstrasse synagogue built for a Reform congregation in Hamburg in 1931 to designs by Jewish architects Felix Ascher and Robert Friedmann.

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[74] "Art for Religion," *New York Times*, May 24, 1953, p.X8.
[75] Ada Louise Huxtable, "Architecture: Designs for American Synagogues," *New York Times*, October 5, 1963, p.17.

(Hamburg)

(Manhattan Beach Jewish Center)

According to historian Carol Krinsky:

> The synagogues of Hamburg-Oberstrasse, Plauen, and Zilina exemplify a current of taste in the years around 1930 in which geometric shapes and large stretches of plain wall reflected forms found also in other types of buildings. The similarities reveal that certain Jews in many parts of Europe embraced progressive aspects of design. Reform and Liberal Jews, eager to assimilate in society, saw themselves as intellectually progressive and sought to express their attitude with new architectural styles.[76]

Gruber writes of the Hamburg synagogue:

> The simple geometry and austere exterior of the building…was influential in postwar synagogues in Europe and North America.[77]

Though the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center doesn't follow the general shape or details of the Hamburg synagogue, it does reflect its austerity and simple geometry. The three-story synagogue has a spare limestone-faced asymmetrical façade along West End Avenue, with a short tower at its northern end. The façade includes modest, late Moderne ornament, such as an overhanging cornice, and simplified columns flanking the entrance. The façade also features a number of Jewish symbols, including a menorah (seven-branch candelabra) on the short tower, and, beneath each window, a panel, one with a *magen david* (shield or star of David) and the others each with a Hebrew letter which together spell "Israel." Additional Judaic symbols are inscribed on panels on the entrance doors. (Sherman's original design included an ornamental panel above the main entrance with the two tablets of the Law flanked by lions and topped by a crown – a motif usually found above the ark in the sanctuary.[78]) The taller community center building extending to the north has a simple stone façade at the ground story and brick above with modest stone trim.

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[76] Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe* (MIT Press, 1985), P. 302.
[77] Gruber, p.94.
[78] Drawings and plans on file in the synagogue's office.

The synagogue's main sanctuary is a single large space with a curving front wall with a large proscenium arch. It is lit by a series of large, stained glass windows on the theme of Jewish religious holidays; these were commissioned from Malone Studio, Inc., of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, and created 1987-1991.[79]

The sanctuary is notable for its use of Akoustolith tile, produced by the Guastavino company, lining the walls, and brightly colored abstract mosaic designs on the proscenium arch and the window surrounds.

Jacob W. Sherman contracted with the Guastavino Company for the "Furnishing and Installing the AKOUSTOLITH Tile and Ceramic Gold Strips to Walls of the Synagogue Manhattan Beach Jewish Center" in March 1952.[80] The Guastavino firm also supplied "mosaic-tile trim around the window reveals."[81] According to correspondence between Sherman and the company, the congregation was impressed with Temple Emanuel in Manhattan, the city's and the country's largest synagogue, and with the use of Akoustolith tile on the walls of the sanctuary there:

> Members of the Building Committee have inspected Temple Emanuel on Fifth Avenue, New York City, and are considering using a similar wall treatment for their auditorium.[82]

According to historian John Allen Ochsendorf, Rafael Guastavino, Jr., developed Akoustolith, a new acoustical tile, in collaboration with Harvard physics professor Wallace Clement Sabine, whom Ochsendorf credits with pioneering architectural acoustics:

> Guastavino Jr. had read of Sabine's work in various architectural magazines and decided to contact him in order to address the company's problems in developing materials with better sound absorption qualities.... Guastavino Jr. wrote to Sabine in 1911 in the hopes of developing an acoustical tile for use in the company's vaulting work…. The Akoustolith tile resembled a stonelike masonry material and was incorporated into the company's major building projects, such as the Buffalo Central Terminal (1929) and dozens of churches across the country….[83]

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[79] Malone Studio Inc. web site: http://www.malonestudio.com/judaic.htm (accessed November 12, 2014). The studio was founded in 1976. In a letter to the author, Priscilla Malone wrote: "We were first contacted in March of 1987 to design, fabricate and install a stained glass window representing Chanukah for inside the Sanctuary…. The following year we submitted the design for Succot which was fabricated in 1989. The majority of the windows were commissioned and fabricated from 1990-91 for the Sanctuary. In 1991 we submitted the designs for The Five Books Of Moses for the hall, which (the designs) were accepted and created. Prior to the stained glass windows, there was only clear and in some areas, frosted, plate glass throughout the building."

[80] "Agreement between R. Guastavino Company and Manhattan Beach Jewish Center," March 6, 1952. On file in the Guastavino papers at Avery archive, Columbia University.

[81] Letter from Jacob W. Sherman to Mr. Malcolm Blodgett, R. Guastavino Tile Co., February 11, 1952. On file in the Guastavino papers at Avery archive, Columbia University.

[82] Letter from Jacob W. Sherman to Malcolm Blodgett, September 17, 1951. On file in the Guastavino papers at Avery archive, Columbia University.

[83] John Allen Ochsendorf, *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tile* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010), pp. 132-133.

Guastavino Jr. died in 1950, two years before the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center commission, and the company, sold earlier to the Blodgett family, closed in 1962, after several years with very few orders. The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center is one of the last of the Guastavino projects.

Sherman requested that the tile be made in half-a-dozen colors, which, together with the polychromatic mosaics at the proscenium arch and the window surrounds, create a bright, lively coloration which contrasts with the more severe modernist exterior. The overall effect of the sanctuary is of a large, open space in which color and light play a major ornamental role. That effect has been enhanced by the stained-glass windows on religious themes installed more recently.

The adjoining community center matches the style of the synagogue, with the same austerity and minimal use of ornament. Its wide entrance combines with a carport, reflecting the new reliance on automobile transport of the post-World War II period. Its main interior spaces on the first and second stories rely on wide spaces and light from huge windows, typical of the post-World War II evolution of synagogue design away from a reliance on historical styles towards an architecture of space and light.

Recent history

Manhattan Beach continues to have a solid Jewish population, augmented in recent years by immigrants from the former Soviet Union, spilling over from the larger settlement in Brighton Beach just one block west of West End Avenue. The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center has continued to thrive – as a synagogue, school, catering facility and general community center.

Unfortunately, in October 2012, the surge from Superstorm Sandy submerged much of Manhattan Beach, and inundated the synagogue and community center, flooding the ground floor with five feet of seawater. As of this writing, the congregation is attempting to repair major damage to its facilities. Demolition and abatement were largely complete by December 2012, and the congregation was able to open the sanctuary for worship and the community center for school and senior services. The historic fabric of the complex remains intact.

The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center reflects the history of Brooklyn Jews in the 20th century – including the history of the Jewish Center movement – and now also the history of Brooklyn Jews at the beginning of the 21st century. It also reflects the changing taste in synagogue design, and is an early exemplar of post-World War II modernism. As such, the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center remains a vital part of the living history of its neighborhood, of Brooklyn, and of New York City.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated site is located 60 West End Avenue in Brooklyn, NY. The lot is rectilinear and the building faces east. See attached mapping.

Boundary Justification

The Manhattan Beach Jewish Center is located on the lands associated with its 1951 to 1961 period of construction and significance.


Manhattan Beach Jewish Center
Brooklyn, Kings Co., NY
60 West End Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11235
Coney Island, NY Quadrangle
Manhattan Beach Jewish Center
Sheepshead Bay
Manhattan Beach
BEACH
ROCKAWAY
KINGS CO
QUEENS CO
1:24,000
1 in = 2,000 ft
4495000
4494000
4493000
4492000
4491000
4490000
587000
588000
589000
590000
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter
Feet
0 625 1,250 2,500
Jewish Center
Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Manhattan Beach Jewish Center
Brooklyn, Kings Co., NY

60 West End Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11235

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

Feet
0 95 190 380

Jewish Center

Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Additional Information

Photo List

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2. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, West End Avenue facade, synagogue portion, looking west**
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4. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, West End Avenue facade, synagogue portion, tower detail**
5. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, West End Avenue facade, synagogue portion, window detail**
6. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, West End Avenue facade, synagogue portion, entrance doors**
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8. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, south elevation, looking northwest**
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11. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, Synagogue, 1st story vestibule**
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21. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, Community Center, 1st and 2nd stories, community/banquet hall**
22. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, Community Center, 1st and 2nd stories, cast-aluminum staircase**
23. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, Community Center, 2nd story, reception hall**
24. **Manhattan Beach Jewish Center, Community Center, 7th story, gymnasium**


MANHATTAN BE
JEWISH CENTE
BHY-3263


MANHATTAN BEACH
JEWISH CENTER
NO STANDING


New Star
Manhattan Beach Jewish Center


NO TRESPASSING
7FEET
7FEET


EXIT


ENDOWED BY
BUNNY and MILTON
FISH MAN


IN LOVING MEMORY OF
HARRY L. HARSHAY