

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 Rego Park Jewish Center

other name/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 97-30 Queens Boulevard

☐ not for publication

city or town Rego Park

N/A vicinity

state New York

code NY

county Queens

code 081

zip code 11374

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Richard P. Pappas
Signature of certifying official/Title

DSHPO

8/31/89
Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and 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

Rego Park Jewish Center
Name of Property

Queens County, New York
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ public-local
☒ private
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(check only one box)

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	
1	

buildings
sites
structures
objects
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 Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation masonry
walls masonry

roof asphalt
other

Narrative Description

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

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DESCRIPTION

The Rego Park Jewish Center is located at 97-30 Queens Boulevard, on the south side of the Boulevard between 64th Road and 65th Road, in the Rego Park neighborhood of the borough of Queens in New York City. A non-contributing addition to the structure called the "Youth Building," initially planned in 1956 and built in 1962-63, extends south through the block to Saunders Street. It is not visible from Queens Boulevard. Because of the slope of the land, the Saunders Street entrance to the Youth Building is at the third-story level of the original building. The boundaries of the property are described as Queens Tax Block 3084, Lot 14. On Queens Boulevard, the building is flanked by an apartment house to the east and a group of one-story stores on the west, typical of the Queens Boulevard streetscape in this section of the borough. The Saunders Street extension is flanked east and west by a long row of six-story apartment buildings, with similar buildings across the street.

Exterior: Queens Boulevard Elevation

The Rego Park Jewish Center was built in 1948 to designs by architect Frank Grad. It is adorned with a large mosaic on the front façade and leaded glass windows inside, all designed by A. Raymond Katz, a major figure in twentieth century American Jewish art. The Rego Park Jewish Center is a four-story building with an original two-story wing to the east and a later extension to the rear. The main portion of the original building, facing Queens Boulevard, has a massive stone-faced façade that steps back from the property line as it rises. The main façade is three stories tall. It is comprised of three, double-door entrances approached by a flight of steps with a large, long mosaic by A. Raymond Katz immediately above the entrances. Above the mosaic is a windowless blank stone wall adorned in the center with a large roundel in which a *magen david* is inscribed. Projecting out from the level of the entrance and flanking the flight of steps are two-story tall towers, each with a tall, narrow window capped by a slightly projecting modernistic tripartite lintel. Each tower rises to a slightly recessed cap with simple ornamental horizontal striations and a chamfered corner. Rising above the three-story-tall main façade is a fourth, recessed stone-faced story. While the façade at all levels is faced in stone, the visible portions of the side facades are faced in brick.

The entrance doors are deeply recessed behind a polished granite facing. Each set of double doors is adorned with six octagonal panels--three on either door--within which is set a sculpted Jewish symbol or Hebrew letter. Symbols include a hand holding a *shofar* (the ram's horn sounded at the Jewish New Year), a *lulav* and *etrog* (leaves and fruit used for celebrating the *Succot* holiday), an eight-branched *menorah* for *Hanukka*, and the Tablets of the Law. Several of these occur more than once. Above the entrance is a grand mosaic designed by A. Raymond Katz. Like the ornamented doors, the mosaic features Jewish religious objects including a Torah scroll, the tablets of the Ten Commandments and the ritual symbols of several Jewish holidays (*shofar* for the New Year, *menorah* and *dreidel* for *Hannuka*, *lulav* and *etrog* for *Succot*). In the center is one of Katz's characteristic elaborations of a Hebrew letter, in this case the letter "shin" (ש - often used as an abbreviation for the Hebrew word "*shaddai*," a Biblical name for God) sitting atop a menorah and including within its lines the bread, wine and candles of a traditional Sabbath evening meal.

Directly to the east of the main façade is a two-story wing, faced in the same stone, with a raised porch in front approached by a short flight of steps. A recessed set of three glass doors, each with a transom, is topped by a

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long, slightly projecting lintel. At the second story is a set of small square windows. Below the windows is an added projecting sign with the name "Rego Park Jewish Center."

The Saunders Street elevation or "Youth Building" was constructed in 1963-64 and is a two-story structure faced in white brick with blue brick trim. It is entered from a porch approached by a short flight of steps. The entrance is at the west end of the façade, through three glass doors. This area is enframed by slightly projecting blue brick piers. To the east, the façade is blank at the first story, with a strip of square windows at the second story. West of this wing is a playground, which extends north to the plain, brick-faced rear of the original building. The 1962-63 "Youth Building" connects directly to the original building through an extension and includes a second social hall with its own stage, and various meeting rooms and ancillary spaces, none of them architecturally significant.

Main Building Interior

Doors in a two-story side wing lead into an entrance vestibule connecting to various offices. Opposite the door is the entrance to a chapel. The chapel is a plain space with a beamed ceiling with the ceiling and walls painted white. There are various memorial plaques on the rear wall. Three leaded glass windows on the west wall (on the right looking towards the front) are each adorned with two scenes of the six days of Creation as recounted in the book of Genesis. Wood wainscoting runs along the lower half of the walls. At the front of the chapel is a recessed wood-paneled area enclosing the ark. Atop the ark is the traditional Hebrew inscription, "Know Before Whom You are Standing." The ark itself, also of wood, has an upper panel inscribed with the Hebrew words "אל שדי" ("El Shaddai"), a Biblical name for God. The ark is adorned with small square panels with various symbols, including a *menorah* and the flag of the State of Israel, founded in 1948, which is also the year that the synagogue was constructed.

The triple entrance in the main façade leads into a narrow vestibule, beyond which lies the main sanctuary. The three sets of doors leading into the vestibule from the main entrance have more of the octagonal panels with Jewish symbols seen on their outside. These doors are mirrored by another set of three similarly adorned double doors leading into the sanctuary, as well as a single set of doors leading into and out of the vestibule at either end. The wood-paneled walls are hung with various memorial plaques.

The main sanctuary is a long, two-story-tall rectangular room with a rear balcony. It has an enframed set of three, tall (almost floor-to-ceiling) leaded glass windows on either side. The main sanctuary also has plaster walls, a coved ceiling with a dropped section on either side and a front area, recessed behind what in a theater would be called a proscenium arch, in which an elaborate ark is set against a curving rear wall with a screen in the upper portion. The three windows on either side of the sanctuary are filled with ornamental polychromatic leaded glass. Each window is divided into a taller upper portion and a shorter lower portion. Each of the windows on the east side of the sanctuary (on the left, facing the ark) is identified at the top of the upper section by large letters spelling out the Hebrew names of the three traditional daily prayer services: *shachrit* (שחרית – morning service) closest to the ark, *minchah* (מנחה – afternoon service) in the center, and *ma'ariv* (מעריב – evening service) closest to the balcony. Each of these windows has a complex design interwoven with letters, symbols and abstract shapes and colors.

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The window inscribed *shachrit*, also identified as the "Abraham window," includes a large letter aleph (א) in the lower section and a Hebrew inscription in the upper part of the window (Genesis, chapter 13, verse 15): "All of the land which you see, unto you do I give it and unto your seed forever." Above these lines, outlined in red, is "the contour of the Land of Israel" with the Hebrew word "Zion" inscribed within it. The window inscribed with the word *minchah* (also known as the "Isaac Window") includes a representation of the *akeda* ("the binding of Isaac") at the bottom of the lower portion of the window, with an image of a stone altar and a ram (substituted as a sacrifice in place of Isaac). At the top of that portion are the Hebrew words *Kiddush ha-shem* (כְּרוּשׁ הַשֵּׁם) or "sanctification of the name," a reference to the martyrdom that Isaac faced. A *shofar*, or ram's horn, appears in the upper portion of the window, together with the Hebrew letters *yud* (י) and *tazdi* (צ), the first two letters in the Hebrew name of Isaac (Yitzhak).

The window inscribed with the word *maariv* (also known as the "Jacob Window") has in its lower portion a *magen david* inscribed with the Hebrew letter *yud* (י), which might be there because it is the initial letter of the Hebrew name for Jacob (Ya-akov), or Jacob's alternate name, Israel (Yisra-el). It is surrounded by twelve circles enclosing representations of what might be the twelve signs of the zodiac (not uncommon in synagogue ornament), but might also be a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, descended from Jacob's twelve sons. The upper portion of the window includes stars and what appears to be a candle, representative perhaps of the evening (this is the window of the evening service).

The three windows on the opposite wall are not named. The window closest to the ark features an enormous hand pointing downward in the upper portion, with vegetation sprouting below, suggesting a symbolic representation of Creation. The center window is inscribed at the top with the tetragrammaton--the four-letter name of God. The lower section shows what appears to be a prayer book and a pair of hands raised in prayer, below which is a representation of an altar. The window nearest the balcony in its upper section shows the two tablets of the Law on a mountain (presumably Mount Zion), while its lower section shows a Torah scroll. Conceptually, this window symbolizes Revelation. At the rear of the sanctuary, the balcony rail is adorned with simple panels that are repeated on the side walls in the areas between each upper and lower window. There is a slightly recessed area at the rear of the balcony with doors at either end leading to staircases.

At the front of the sanctuary, plain wall surfaces at either side each have a doorway and flank the central proscenium arch in front of the ark. The proscenium arch itself is formed by a wide, stylized pier at either side, with a plain frieze running across the top, inscribed with the Hebrew letters spelling out the *Sh'ma*: "Hear O Israel, the Lord Our God, the Lord is One." The area beyond the arch is a raised platform with a curving, wood-paneled rear wall and an ornamental screen at its top. At the wall's center is the ark. Its polished marble frame is inset with mosaic panels with various Jewish symbols (similar to those in the wooden doors of the ark in the small chapel). Top center is a representation of the two Tablets of the Law. Within the frame is the ark, with wooden doors adorned with inscribed octagons and topped with a panel in which is inscribed the Hebrew phrase *El Shaddai* (אֵל שַׁדַּי), a Biblical name for God.

A staircase leads to the basement, where a series of ancillary spaces connects to the social hall, located directly below the sanctuary. The hall is approached by a short flight of steps leading downwards into the space from a rear vestibule separated from the hall only by a set of square piers supporting a geometrically curving ceiling section. There is a stage at the opposite end of the hall. Though the hall is roughly square in plan, its ceiling is

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comprised largely of a very shallow round dome, which is its most significant architectural feature. A staircase entered from a stair hall just west of the far end of the vestibule between the main entrance and the main sanctuary leads upstairs to the gallery level of the sanctuary. This staircase is in the southernmost of the two short towers that flank the main synagogue entrance on Queens Boulevard. The tall narrow window is also leaded glass, apparently also designed by A. Raymond Katz. It includes elaborations of Hebrew letters alternating with Jewish symbols, set within circles among the various geometric patterns. One image in such a circle is a representation of the synagogue's façade on Queens Boulevard, but seen in reverse (the two-story wing is shown on the right instead of the left). Half way up, between the main sanctuary floor and the balcony, is a level of the building devoted to classrooms, utilitarian in character. Directly above the main sanctuary is a gymnasium with a basketball court, directly beneath the building's roof.

In general, the Rego Park 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 since its construction in 1948. Alterations primarily affect minor spaces such as offices and classrooms. The main façade, main sanctuary, vestibule and chapel all survive largely intact.

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Name of Property

Queens County, New York
County and State

8. Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or 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 the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☒ **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.

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 Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Religion _____

Ethnic Heritage: Jewish _____

Architecture _____

Period of Significance

1948-1956 _____

Significant Dates

1948 _____

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

Frank Grad _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other Name of repository:

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Rego Park Jewish Center is historically significant under Criterion A in the areas of ethnic history and religion as an early post-World War II modernist synagogue surviving in Queens. Constructed in 1948, it served the new and fast-growing Jewish population of Rego Park. The groundbreaking of the Rego Park Jewish Center in 1946 included remarks by Mayor O'Dwyer, who spoke about the need to resettle hundreds of thousands of displaced Jews then in limbo following the end of World War II.¹ The mayor returned in 1948 for the synagogue's dedication, attended by several thousand people.² The synagogue officially opened in January 1949.³ At some unknown date, the Rego Park Jewish Center was presented with a plaque of honor from Eleanor Roosevelt. Its name also reflects its status as a product of the Jewish Center movement that redefined American synagogues in the first half of the twentieth century. More than just a synagogue, the Jewish Center included social halls, classrooms, and athletic facilities. A large addition, the "Youth Building," was planned in 1956 and built 1963-64.⁴

The Rego Park Jewish Center is also architecturally significant under Criterion C and Criterion Consideration A as an early example of modernism in New York synagogues. Its design by architect Frank Grad appears to be modeled on Bauhaus-influenced European synagogues of the 1930s, in particular the Oberstrasse Synagogue built for a Reform congregation in Hamburg in 1931. Within a decade of the synagogue's construction, modernism became dominant in American synagogue design. Complementing the Center's architectural design are a large mosaic on the exterior and ornamental leaded-glass windows on the interior, all designed by Jewish artist A. Raymond Katz, famed for his ornamental treatment of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, interlocking with Jewish symbols. The Rego Park Jewish Center survives today as a distinctive architectural, cultural and religious landmark of the Jewish community of New York City.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Development of Rego Park and its Jewish Population⁵

Rego Park is a neighborhood in the east central area of Queens, adjoining Forest Hills on the southeast, Middle Village on the southwest and Elmhurst and Corona on the north. It is bordered by three wide boulevards: Queens Boulevard, Yellowstone Boulevard, and Woodhaven Boulevard. Rego Park takes its name from the "Real Good Construction Company" that was active in real estate development in the area during the 1920s. The company bought up a number of farms and built single-family and multi-family row houses and apartment buildings. The neighborhood's first stores were built in 1926 on Queens Boulevard at 63rd Drive, not far from the current site of the Rego Park Jewish Center. The opening of a railroad station in 1928 helped fuel growth,

¹ " 'Stalling' on Jews Charged by Mayor," *New York Times*, September 16, 1946, p.2.

² "O'Dwyer Dedicates Rego Jewish Center," *New York Times*, September 27, 1948, p.47.

³ *New York Times*, January 16, 1949, p.56.

⁴ New York City Department of Buildings, Alteration 94-1956 and Alteration 592-1960; Certificates of Occupancy 135086 of 1960 and 156118 of 1964. The synagogue newsletter for December 14, 1962, shows a rendering of "The New Youth Building to be erected on Saunders Street." The C of O for 1964 describes the work as completed "3/11/64." The synagogue newsletter of June 26, 1964, shows a photo of the completed building.

⁵ For general information on Rego Park, see "Rego Park," by Vincent Seyfried, in the *Encyclopedia of New York City*.

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but it was the extension of the Grand Central Parkway in 1935 and the opening of the IND subway station in 1936 on Queens Boulevard that led to major population increases in the neighborhood.⁶

Almost from its beginnings, Rego Park had a significant Jewish population, shared with the adjoining neighborhood of Forest Hills. Rego Park's Jewish population was part of the much larger Jewish population of New York City. Following a major wave of immigration from Eastern Europe that began in the 1880s and reached its peak in the early decades of the twentieth century, New York City became home to an enormous Eastern European Jewish immigrant community. Up until World War I, some two million Jews (roughly one-third of all the Jews in Europe) arrived in the United States.⁷ The vast majority first settled in New York City. The Jewish immigrants created an enormous Yiddish-speaking community. In this city within a city, Jewish immigrants were able to find kosher food, Yiddish-language newspapers and mutual aid societies. Major Jewish immigration to the Lower East Side only stopped after new restrictions went into effect with the passage in 1924 of new immigration laws.

Although the city's Jewish population was enormous, the pre-World War I Jewish population of Queens was quite small. In 1913, New York City's Jewish population was estimated at 1,330,000 and of that number, only 23,000 lived in Queens.⁸ Synagogues played a major role in the life of New York's Jewish population. New York's 1918 Jewish population, estimated at between 1 and 1.5 million, was served by 700 synagogues. In that year, West Queens had just one synagogue in one building while East Queens (east of Flushing Avenue) had 18 synagogues, only five of which had their own buildings.

Rego Park, together with neighboring Forest Hills, attracted new Jewish residents in the mid-twentieth century in part because of its unusually high proportion of rental apartment buildings, rare in the rest of the borough.⁹ As of 1940, the Bronx was densely developed with apartment buildings and had the highest proportion of Jewish residents of any borough (38.6%), while Queens was largely developed with one- and two-family houses and had the smallest Jewish population at 8.9%.¹⁰ From 1930 to 1940, the number of apartment buildings in Rego Park and Forest Hills grew as did the Jewish population from 1,364 to 9,783.¹¹ From 1940 to 1960, the neighborhoods of Forest Hills, Rego Park and Kew Gardens saw further major growth of their Jewish communities, while the Jewish population doubled in Queens as a whole. By 1960, Queens had the city's

⁶ Daniel A. Wishnoff, *The Tolerance Point: Race, Public Housing And The Forest Hills Controversy, 1945-1975* (PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 2005), pp. 153-4.

⁷ Moses Rischin, *The Promised Land: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (New York, 1970), p.20, cited in Dolkart.

⁸ *The Jewish Communal Register of New York City 1917-1918* (New York: Kehillah [Jewish Community], 1918), p.86.

⁹ The connection between apartment houses, Jewish population, and the prevalence in Queens of one- and two-family houses was made by historian Richard Plunz, cited in Wishnoff, p. 156.

¹⁰ In 1946, the year that the Rego Park Jewish Center was being planned, Queens's Jewish population stood at 107,855, or 8.7% of the borough's total population of 1,297,634, placing it behind every borough except Staten Island. By comparison, the Bronx had a Jewish population of 592,185, representing 44% of the borough's total population; Brooklyn's Jewish population was 974,765, representing 37% of its total; Manhattan had 351,037, or 19% of the total. Staten Island's Jewish population was negligible. *American Jewish Yearbook*, 5706 [1945-46], p.644.

¹¹ Table 1, "Estimated Jewish Population in New York City by Borough and Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester Counties, for Selected Years, 1923-1975," C. Morris Horowitz and Lawrence J. Horowitz, Kaplan, *The Jewish Population of the New York City Area, 1900-1975*, (New York: Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, 1959), 274-275; cited in Wishnoff, p.156 fn. 17.

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second largest Jewish population, exceeded only by Brooklyn.¹² The central Jewish cultural, community and religious institution in these post-World War II Queens communities was the local Jewish Center.

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 (no longer extant). In the intervening three centuries, synagogue architecture has gone through many forms as evidenced by surviving New York synagogues that included a number of distinct types, ranging from "stieblach," (store-front synagogues) and vernacular "tenement synagogues" of long narrow structures suited to the 100x20 foot lots typical of the Lower East Side (e.g. the Stanton Street Shul, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002) to the grand, high-style "cathedral" synagogues (e.g. the Central Synagogue, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1970). The twentieth century saw the development of a new, particularly American synagogue type known as the Jewish Center that in addition to being a place of worship, served as a center of community life. Besides a sanctuary, it included classrooms, social halls and in the largest buildings, even gyms and swimming pools.

The development of the Jewish Center was carefully chronicled by historian David Kaufman who traced the origin of the phenomenon to several sources that included the millennia-old tradition of the synagogue as a place of worship, study and assembly.¹³ Other influences were the nineteenth century Protestant development of the "institutional church" and the social requirements of newly-developed communities of middle-class, assimilated first- and second-generation Jewish families. One specific example of the form was the West Side Jewish Center built in 1917 on Manhattan's West 86th Street by the influential Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan. Kaplan has often been cited as the originator of the Jewish Center, but Kaufman argued 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."¹⁴

Nevertheless, Kaplan's Jewish Center exemplified 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 cacophonous milieu of the contemporary Jewish community; as formulated by Kaplan it became the germination of the synagogue-center movement."¹⁵ Kaplan described his conception of the Jewish Center in 1918:

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

¹² Wishnoff, 157.

¹³ David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Brandeis University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Ibid, p.7.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 232-233.

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problem of Jewish life and religion...¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

Kaplan saw the Jewish Center as meeting four different levels of need and described by Kaufman as "... '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."¹⁸

Erected in 1917 on West 86th Street, the building was unlike any prior synagogue. As described in 1917, the eleven-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."¹⁹ Kaplan's West Side Jewish Center was followed by a number of major such complexes in Brooklyn, including first and most famous, the Brooklyn Jewish Center built in the 1920s and 1930s, a major example of the type that continued being built in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Rego Park Jewish Center

As Jewish communities grew in Queens, they also turned to the Jewish Center model. The Rego Park Jewish Center first opened in 1939 at 63-51 Wetherole Street, five blocks from its current location.²⁰ (The congregation rented space in a new commercial building on Wetherole Street.) According to an unpublished congregational history, the center was formed by a small group of families, who had been meeting in a small building for services "conducted by the Jewish Center of Forest Hills West...attended by about 100 worshipers. Some time thereafter [after 1937] and before the next High Holy Days this building was destroyed by fire and never rebuilt."²¹ The Forest Hills West Jewish Center built a new home on its current site in Forest Hills, leaving the Rego Park families without a synagogue.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 238.

¹⁷ Ibid, 239.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ "Jewish Social Centre," *New York Times*, March 10, 1918, p. RE12.

²⁰ "O'Dwyer Dedicates Rego Jewish Center," *New York Times*, September 27, 1948, p. 47.

²¹ "History Rego Park Jewish Center," typescript in possession of the congregation, including a memoir written by one of the founding members of the congregation (unsigned, undated).

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According to a memoir of one of the Rego Park members:

At the end of 1938, or early in 1939, the late Dr. Max Weiner...rang my bell and asked us whether we would be interested in forming a Jewish Center in Rego Park. We agreed and met with him, his wife and five other families, and then and there the Rego Park Jewish Center was organized... More people became interested and we began holding meetings at Herman Finkelstein's office. We soon outgrew this space and some time in 1939, I believe, rented a room at the Lost Battalion Hill. A constitution and by-laws were drawn...and elections were to be held... On April 24, 1939, a certificate of incorporation, as a religious corporation, was filed in the County Clerk's office, Queens County... In order to raise money we ran Dutch suppers and card parties.²²

In 1941, the congregation hired its first rabbi (Rabbi Derby), a student from the Jewish Theological Seminary who served part time as the first permanent rabbi, remaining with the Rego Park Jewish Center for several years.²³ The memoir continued:

I will never forget that summer day in 1941 when a young Seminary student sat alongside of me at my office and we discussed that situation. I was very impressed with him and recommended his acceptance... That young man, Rabbi Derby...was engaged as our first permanent Rabbi for the year commencing September of 1941. This same Rabbi Derby is still with us today, so that time has taught us that our choice was a very wise one.²⁴

Rabbi Josiah Derby (1914-2002) was ordained in 1943 at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and served until his retirement in 1983. According to his obituary, "Rabbi Derby was born in Berdichev, Ukraine, and came to the United States in 1921. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics from Harvard University, completing his studies in 1937. During World War II, he served as a chaplain with the U.S. armed forces in Hawaii. Rabbi Derby was the seventh generation direct descendent of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, a prominent chasidic spiritual leader, and traces his lineage back 900 years through a long line of rabbis."²⁵

So quickly did the congregation grow that by 1942 it was able to purchase the property for a new home and reported that, "The Rego Park Jewish Center purchased for improvement with a temple and recreation hall a plot of 8,000 square feet on the south side of Queens Boulevard."²⁶ Even this brief mention in the press specified the inclusion of a "recreation hall" that suggested the focus of the Jewish Center's leaders. The following year, the synagogue elected a new president, Irving Lookstein, who served until 1950. Lookstein shepherded the construction of the new center.²⁷

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Rabbi Josiah Derby, 88," *The New York Jewish Week*, January 3, 2003, p.19.

²⁶ "Long Island Deals Are Residential," *New York Times*, January 17, 1942, p. 27.

²⁷ A plaque hanging in the synagogue reads: "Dedicated in eternal gratitude to the memory of Irving Lookstein, President 1943-1950, Honorary president and Lifetime trustee. Totally committed to Judaism and the synagogue, he was a major force in the building and support of this House of God."

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According to Rabbi Leon Rosenbloom of Congregation Beth Shalom, "At that point, most Jews in New York lived in Brooklyn and the Bronx... Queens was the hinterlands. Rabbi Derby built what would become a magnificent keystone of the Conservative movement.²⁸ The Rego Park Jewish Center became a multi-faceted center for the Rego Park Jewish community. As described by historian Daniel A. Wishnoff:

For many Jewish families...moving to Forest Hills, Rego Park or Kew Gardens was more than an expression of their upward mobility. They moved to these neighborhoods to live near other Jewish families and be part of a Jewish community. "For many Jewish families, settling here seems to have involved a new adventure in Jewishness," the writer Morris Freedman observed, "expressing itself in formal affiliation, for the first time in their lives, with a Jewish community institution." The "Jewish community institution" in central Queens was the Jewish Center. The Jewish Center served not only as the place where Jewish families worshipped but also as a central meeting place for leisure and educational activities in the suburban Jewish community. The religious significance of the Jewish Center, the historian Deborah Dash Moore observed, was secondary to the social and cultural activities it offered. Those moving to central Queens were second generation Jews who were more Americanized than their immigrant parents. The Jewish Center served as a touchstone to their Jewish ethnicity and as a sort of "bulwark" against complete assimilation into mainstream middle-class lifestyles. Aside from the traditional religious and Hebrew schools, the Jewish Centers provided dozens of athletic and social activities for children as well as adults²⁹...By 1955, there were four new Jewish Centers in central Queens. In an article describing the Jewish Center phenomenon, Morris Freedman recognized the centrality of Queens Boulevard in the growing suburban Jewish communities in Queens. Queens Boulevard ran through Rego Park, Forest Hills and Kew Gardens, featured several new luxury apartment complexes and was where the Rego Park and Forest Hills Jewish Centers were constructed only blocks from each other. The Rego Park Jewish Center was a "great white building looking somewhat like a bank, with a huge Jewish Star of David on one blank wall and flanked by some stores," Freedman wrote.³⁰

Like other Jewish Centers, the Rego Park building served many purposes. Besides the large sanctuary and a more intimate chapel, it included "...twelve school rooms, [a] gymnasium, [a] library, ... meeting rooms and [a] banquet hall.³¹ To design this large new center, which would indeed function as a multi-purpose center for the Rego Park Jewish community, the congregation hired architect Frank Grad. European-born Jewish architect Frank Grad (1882-1968) established his architecture and design firm in New Jersey in 1906. His sons, Bernard & Howard, joined the firm in 1932, and the Newark firm, now Grad Architecture Associates continues in practice to the present.

²⁸ "Rabbi Josiah Derby, father of Marin rabbi, dies in Fla.," *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*, January 3, 2003, p. 37.

²⁹ Wishnoff, p. 159. His references are to Morris Freedman, "New Jewish Community in Formation: A Conservative Center Catering to Present Day Needs," *Commentary*, January 1955, 36; and Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 237, 124.

³⁰ Wishnoff, p. 160.

³¹ "O'Dwyer Dedicates Rego Jewish Center," *New York Times*, September 27, 1948, p.47.

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As early as 1913, Grad established himself as a major architectural presence in Newark. As recounted in a history of the city published that year:

Among the architects of whom Newark can be genuinely proud is the young Austrian, Frank Grad, who as a youth of nineteen came to this country ten years ago, and in that short space of time has made a success of himself in his chosen profession of architecture. He was born in Austria, March 27, 1883, the son of Osios Grad, a painter and decorator in Austria, and his wife, Minnie (Keinstreich) Grad. After a course in preparatory schools in Austria, Frank Grad studied mechanical engineering in a school of technology. His education was further supplemented by a course in technology at Vienna, where he specialized in architecture. After completing his studies he spent a year and a half in England, working as a mechanical draughtsman. Believing that he could rise most rapidly in his profession in the United States, he sailed for America on the steamer "Melono" and landed in New York December 24, 1902. He immediately entered the employment of Gould & Eberhardt, of Newark, where he remained for a year and a half, after which he took a position with the Domestic Sewing Machine Company as draftsman. Ambitious to enter the profession which had attracted him from the first, the young man soon severed his connection with the Domestic Sewing Machine Company, and entered the offices of Laurence F. Weir, architect, of New York City. He remained with Mr. Weir for three years, thoroughly schooling himself in the technique of architecture, and in 1906, believing the time had come when he might successfully start in business for himself, he left New York, went to New Jersey, and after passing the state examinations, located in Newark.³²

Grad's early work in Newark included apartment houses, a jewelry factory, office buildings, a department store, private homes, a warehouse, and an "amusement hall."³³ Major work in Newark included the Center Market Building, Beth Israel Hospital, and the City Hall annex, as well as the New Jersey State Capitol in Trenton.³⁴ He also designed two Newark theaters (a building type having much in common with houses of worship), the Stanley Theater (opened in 1927) and Symphony Hall that opened in 1925 as the Salaam Temple of the Shriners fraternal organization. Also in the 1920s, Grad "...won a competition for its design of the famous traffic signal, built, in 1925, at the intersection of Market and Broad. In 1926, a survey firm hailed it as "the busiest traffic center in the world." The signal, made of bronze and stone, was known throughout the country and featured an officer inside it who changed the signals manually."³⁵ Though based in New Jersey, Grad also designed several buildings in New York City. His best-known such work was the Essex House hotel on Central Park South (1929-30).

Grad's experience designing the prize-winning Newark YM-YWHA in the early 1920s made him a good choice for the new Jewish Center. The Y was a similar building type, combining most of the elements that would be needed in Rego Park. As described in *The American Architect*, the Y included a swimming pool, gymnasium, locker rooms, spectators' gallery, reception hall, game room, women's social room, "Men' Department,"

³² Frank John Urquhart, "Frank Grad," *A History of the City of Newark, New Jersey* (Lewis Historical Publishing, 1913), p. 116.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *New York Times*, January 21, 1968, p.76.

³⁵ William B. Helmreich, *The Enduring Community: The Jews of Newark and MetroWest* (Transaction Publishers, 1999), p. 96.

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bowling alley, roof garden, and auditorium.³⁶ Grad also designed an Art Deco style pool and bathhouse for the WPA in the 1930s. In the years immediately following his work in Rego Park, Grad designed two other synagogues: Young Israel of the Concourse, 1015 Walton Avenue, in the Bronx, in 1949,³⁷ and Adas Israel in Washington, D.C. (Connecticut Avenue and Porter Street NW) in 1950.³⁸

The Design of the Rego Park Jewish Center: Early Post-war Modernism

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 wrote of this immediate post-war period of synagogue design that "...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.³⁹ 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. The organization stated that "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."⁴⁰

By the 1950s, modernism was 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. 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."⁴¹

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. The conference reported that "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

³⁶ "Building for Y.M. & Y.W.H. Association, Newark, N.J.," *The American Architect*, July 20, 1921, pp. 48 ff.

³⁷ "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times*, August 5, 1949, p.30.

³⁸ "Adas Israel to Hold Cornerstone Rite for Synagogue," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 1950, p.10.

³⁹ Samuel D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community*, p. 83.

⁴⁰ "Modern Design Urged in Houses of Worship," *New York Times*, June 24, 1947, p.6.

⁴¹ "Art for Religion," *New York Times*, May 24, 1953, p.X8.

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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."⁴²

Frank Grad's design for the Rego Park Synagogue ranked as one of the first of the new crop of modern synagogues in New York City. Grad's designs in the 1910s and 1920s reflected the historicist trends of the day, but by 1929 he began turning out Art Deco designs, notably the Lefcourt Building in Newark and the Essex House in Manhattan. In 1948, he designed the Rego Park Jewish Center as a modernist building, one of which can be imagined either as late Moderne or early Modern, with blocky massing and narrow, dramatic slit window in short projecting towers framing the main entrance, approached by a short flight of stairs. The short flanking towers and staircase hearkened back to synagogue designs of fifty years earlier, reinterpreted in a modernistic vein. The general model for the design, however, appeared to be the Bauhaus-influenced European synagogues of the 1930s, in particular the Oberstrasse Synagogue built for a Reform congregation in Hamburg, Germany in 1931 to designs by Jewish architects Felix Ascher and Robert Friedmann.

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."⁴³ Samuél Gruber wrote of the Hamburg synagogue, "The simple geometry and austere exterior of the building...was influential in postwar synagogues in Europe and North America."⁴⁴

Krinsky's description of the Oberstrasse design could just as easily have described the Rego Park Jewish Center with "...a rectilinear main block set back from the street, with projecting lower blocks (housing the weekday synagogue, community rooms, and office) to the left and right."⁴⁵ In terms of exterior ornament, where the Hamburg synagogue had a centrally placed blind roundel, inscribed with a stylized rectilinear *menorah*, in the center of a large stone expanse, the Rego Park Jewish Center had a centrally placed blind roundel, inscribed with a *magen david*, in roughly the same location. The Rego Park Jewish Center's main sanctuary was a Modern design, with spare ornament and modest geometric patterning. The building also had a large social hall beneath the sanctuary, as well as school rooms and a gymnasium in the upper stories.

Mosaic by A. Raymond Katz and Vincent Foscato

The Rego Park synagogue was a less "severe" modernist design than its Hamburg predecessor. Unlike the Oberstrasse Synagogue, the plain stone expanse of the Rego Park Jewish Center's façade was accented by its most striking feature, an enormous mosaic over the main entrance designed by A. Raymond Katz (1895-1964)

⁴² Ada Louise Huxtable, "Architecture: Designs for American Synagogues," *New York Times*, October 5, 1963, p.17.

⁴³ Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe* (MIT Press, 1985), P. 302.

⁴⁴ Gruber, p.94.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

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and produced by Vincent Foscato (d.1966). Hungarian-born A. Raymond Katz became perhaps the most prominent artist associated with twentieth-century synagogue art in the United States. According to his obituary, his work included:

...murals, stained glass and mosaics in many synagogues and other houses of worship. He was probably best known for his embellishment of the Hebrew alphabet. For example, he would take the Hebrew letter "Cheth," similar to an inverted English U, and grace it with the face of a beautiful woman. Or, he would take the letter "Aleph" and transform its sweeping lines into "Teacher and Pupil"...Mr. Katz was born in Hungary on April 21, 1895. His early days in the United States were spent in Chicago, where he studied at the American Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Academy of Arts. He won his first prize for art at the Century of Progress world's fair in Chicago in 1934. He moved east and in 1938 was commissioned to do four paintings, 12 feet by 8 feet each, for the Young Women's Hebrew Association of Elizabeth, N.J. Much of his work was symbolic and interpretive of Jewish traditions. He was said to have been among the first Jewish artists to receive the approval of Orthodox rabbis for his interpretive handling of such subjects as the Ten Commandments.⁴⁶

According to an introduction in a book by C.J. Bulliet, Katz's work was highly praised. Bulliet stated that "With décor for the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, New York, almost completed, A. Raymond Katz, after a quarter of a century of illustrious achievement, has arrived at leadership of Jewish mural artists in America. Not only is he a leader, but an important innovator, adding something fundamental to Jewish art the world over."⁴⁷ Katz's 1934 work at the Chicago "Century of Progress" World's Fair was followed by a commission for the Loop Synagogue in Chicago, in which Katz "...developed boldly...an idea on which he had been working nearly a score of years – more or less realistic forms based on motifs derived from the Hebrew alphabet."⁴⁸ Bulliet noted that by turning to the letters of the alphabet, Katz avoided the issues raised by the second of the Ten Commandments and stated that "For, while the forms that emerge from the floriation of the Hebrew letters are sometimes realistic, they are without human passions and emotions, though they go sometimes beyond the bounds prescribed by the most severely orthodox interpreters of the Commandment of Moses against the "making of graven images or any likeness of anything."⁴⁹

Katz's designs for the sanctuary windows took a similar approach, combining Hebrew letters with other Jewish symbols. Like so much of Katz's work, the mosaic at the Rego Park Jewish Center, typically Deco/Modern in its use of color and geometric patterning, avoided figurative painting. Instead, it featured Jewish religious objects including a Torah scroll, the tablets of the Ten Commandments, and the ritual symbols of several Jewish holidays (*shofar* for the New Year, *menorah* and *dreidel* for Hannuka, *lulav* and *etrog* for Succot). In the center, Katz placed one of his characteristic elaborations of a Hebrew letter, in this case the letter "shin" (ש – often used as an abbreviation for the Hebrew word "*shaddai*," a Biblical name for God) sitting atop a menorah and including within its lines the bread, wine and candles of a traditional Sabbath evening meal.

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, March 26, 1974, p. 44.

⁴⁷ C.J. Bulliet, "Introduction" to A. Raymond Katz, *A New Art for an Old Religion* (revised edition, New York: Russell F. Moore Company, Inc., 1952), n.p.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

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In 1945, Katz published a book on the subject: *27 Original Motifs Based on the Hebrew Alphabet*.⁵⁰ In 1947, he moved to New York City, where he "... specialized in stained glass windows and in mosaics, mostly for synagogues, but sometimes for Christian churches and chapels, working with Vincente Foscato, an Italian in New York who has revived the genuine old art of the mosaic. Their collaboration on the façade of the Rego Park Jewish Center on Long Island is signed 'Katz and Foscato.' It is an heroic creation in size, thirty-five feet long by six feet tall."⁵¹ Katz also did the façade for "...a Syrian Sephardic Synagogue in Brooklyn and murals for an Orthodox synagogue in the Bronx. He is now completing a series of windows based on one or the other of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament for a synagogue in Kansas City..."⁵¹ Earlier in his career, Katz did turn out figurative work, described by Bulliet as:

In the first edition of "Prelude to a New Art for an Old Religion"...Katz presented recognizable forms of men, women and animals stemming from a Hebrew letter. Even so, Katz was far more restrained there in the matter of "graven images" than such other world-respected Jewish artists as Marc Chagall, Chaim Soutine and the contemporary artists in Israel...Katz seeks to give new pictorial interpretations to the Hebrew letters... "My theory has had unexpected acceptance," he observed in a recent conversation, "by those Jews and Christians alike who feel that a Jewish house of worship ought to be as Hebraic as a Christian church is Christian."⁵²

Though Bulliet pointed to various non-Jewish sources for Katz's interest in the alphabet from ornament at the Alhambra back to Egyptian hieroglyphics, such an approach would also have resonated with any rabbi or congregation familiar with the ancient kabbalistic tradition, going back at least to the *Sefer Yetzira* of finding mystical significance in the Hebrew letters.⁵³

Katz apparently considered himself a modernist and part of a team creating any new building. One year before working on the Rego Park Jewish Center, he attended the UAHC conference on modern synagogues referred to previously, at which Ely Jacques Kahn said, among other things, that "...the artist and craftsman as well as the architect must play an important part in bringing about this change. 'The architect is not a soloist,' Mr. Kahn said, 'but rather the leader of an orchestra. It is his job to try to find the best-qualified men to work with him.'"⁵⁴ Katz later wrote in a similar spirit, "I heartily agree with [architect] William Lescaze...that 'architect, sculptor and painter be acknowledged so that they may work again together, dream again together, and make that wonderful and simultaneous creation happen again as it should and did in the Renaissance.'"⁵⁵ Katz established a collaboration with Vincent Foscato, president of F. Foscato, Inc., "...manufacturers and installers of mosaic and terrazzo... Foscato mosaics, fashioned of marble or *smalti* inlays imported from Italy, and terrazzo patterns, made of crushed marble and mortar, have been used in the decor of buildings throughout the United States and

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ For an explication of this work, see Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation* (Weiser Books, revised edition, 1997). Though its precise origin is unknown, some scholars date it back to Talmudic times. Among other things, it imagines God's creating the world through the power of the letters of the alphabet.

⁵⁴ "Modern Design Urged in Houses of Worship," *New York Times*, June 24, 1947, p.6.

⁵⁵ A. Raymond Katz, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, May 8, 1961, p.34.

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South America.”⁵⁶ Foscatto’s projects in New York included work at St. Thomas’s Church (Fifth Avenue) and the Waldorf-Astoria.

Windows by A. Raymond Katz and J. Gordon Guthrie

Katz’s designs for the synagogue’s stained-glass windows were executed by J. Gordon Guthrie. Guthrie’s *New York Times* obituary described him as a “designer of stained glass windows...His work adorns leading religious edifices in New York and other cities.... [Guthrie] had been a maker of stained glass since the age of 15, when he became an apprentice in his father’s studio in Glasgow, Scotland...Mr. Guthrie worked for several years with the late Louis C. [Comfort] Tiffany.”⁵⁷ Guthrie also did work for Riverside Church, St. Bartholomew’s, the Church of the Heavenly Rest, Temple Emanue-El, and the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer. His windows at Rego Park were mentioned in a 1954 *New York Times* profile.⁵⁸

Katz’s window designs for Rego Park were abstract compositions on Jewish themes consisting of three tall windows on either side of the sanctuary, each with a taller upper section and a shorter lower section. The windows on the east side of the sanctuary (on the left, facing the ark) included Katz’s characteristic use of Hebrew letters. Each window was identified at the top of the upper section by large letters spelling out the Hebrew names of the three traditional daily prayer services: *shachrit* (שחרית – morning service) closest to the ark, *minchah* (מנחה – afternoon service) in the center, and *ma’ariv* (מעריב – evening service) closest to the balcony. Each of these windows had a complex design interwoven with letters, symbols and abstract shapes and colors. An undated, incomplete typescript of uncertain origin in the congregation’s possession gave a lengthy description of the windows and their symbolism, describing the three eastern windows as the “Abraham window, Isaac window, and Jacob window,” a reference to the three patriarchs of the book of Genesis and the Jewish tradition that connects each of the patriarchs with one of the prayer services: Abraham with *shachrit*, Isaac with *minchah*, and Jacob with *ma’ariv*.

Among the symbols the manuscript identified in the Abraham window are a large letter aleph (א) in the lower section with “narrow bands of blue running across its four extremities, symbolic of the *tallit*” or the ritual prayer shawl. The manuscript also identified the Hebrew inscription in the upper part of the window as a quotation from Genesis (chapter 13, verse 15) with God’s promise to Abraham: “All of the land which you see, unto you do I give it and unto your seed forever.” Above these lines was “the contour of the Land of Israel” outlined in red with the Hebrew word “Zion” inscribed within it. The Isaac window was inscribed with the word *mincha* and included a representation of the *akeda* (“the binding of Isaac”) represented at the bottom of the lower portion of the window with an image of a stone altar and a ram (substituted as a sacrifice in place of Isaac). At the top of that portion were the Hebrew words *Kiddush ha-shem* (כְּרוֹשׁ הַשֵּׁם), or “sanctification of the name,” a reference to the martyrdom that Isaac faced. A *shofar*, or ram’s horn, appeared in the upper portion of the window, together with the Hebrew letters *yud* (י) and *tzadi* (צ), the first two letters in the Hebrew name of Isaac (Yitzhak).

⁵⁶ Obituary, *New York Times*, September 6, 1966, p.47.

⁵⁷ Obituary, *New York Times*, June 24, 1961, p.21.

⁵⁸ “At 80, Craftsman in Stained Glass Can See Life’s Work in Windows,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1954, p.19.

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The manuscript lacked information on the third window, but some of its symbolism can be deduced. The bottom portion included a *magen david* inscribed with the Hebrew letter *yud* (י), which might be there because it is the initial letter of the Hebrew name for Jacob (Ya-akov), or Jacob's alternate name, Israel (Yisra-el). It was surrounded by twelve circles enclosing representations of what might be the twelve signs of the zodiac (not uncommon in synagogue ornament), but might also be a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, descended from Jacob's twelve sons. The upper portion of the window included stars and what appears to be a candle, perhaps representative of the evening being the window of the evening service. The three windows on the opposite wall had more symbols rather than inscriptions. The window closest to the ark featured an enormous hand pointing downward in the upper portion with vegetation sprouting below, suggesting a symbolic representation of Creation. The center window was inscribed at the top with the tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of God. The lower section had what appears to be a prayer book and a pair of hands raised in prayer, below which is a representation of an altar. The window nearest the balcony, in its upper section, had the two tablets of the Law on a mountain (presumably Mount Zion), while its lower section held a Torah scroll. A smaller set of windows in a small chapel illustrated the six days of Creation but it is unknown whether these were also designed by Katz.

Conclusion:

Opened in 1949, the Rego Park Jewish Center immediately became a center of Jewish life in the Rego Park neighborhood of Queens that still continues to serve the community. Its late-Modern style lent itself well to the layout, design and decoration of the building that offered a place to strengthen both the body and spirit, and in its early years, be a place where first and second generation immigrants could be a part of American life. The building was an important part of the Jewish Center movement, a uniquely American movement that had its origins in the New York City area and made an impact in American Jewish communities across the country. The Rego Park Jewish Center became a model to follow, both in philosophy and design by featuring the work of prominent Jewish architects and artists in the physical expression of the Jewish center.

The Jewish population of Queens has grown enormously, but its make-up has changed. In recent years, Rego Park's Jewish population has absorbed many Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet republics. The synagogue, which remains a vibrant congregation, thereby reflects not only the history of Jews in Queens in the twentieth century, especially the history of Jewish Center movement, but also the history of Queens Jews at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It remains a vital part of the living history of its neighborhood, and of its city.

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Rego Park Jewish Center
Queens County, New York

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Katz, A. Raymond Letter to the Editor, May 8, 1961, p.34.

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Rego Park Jewish Center
Name of Property

Queens County, New York
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than once acre

UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 596310 4509217
Zone Easting Northing

2 18
Zone Easting Northing

3 18
Zone Easting Northing

4 18
Zone Easting Northing

☐ See continuation sheet

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 Virginia L. Bartos, Ph.D., Historic Preservation Program Analyst
organization NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation date 17 June 2009
street & number PO Box 189 telephone 518-237-8643
city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188-0189

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 the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name/title Rego Park Jewish Center
street & number 97-30 Queens Blvd telephone 718-459-0431
city or town Rego Park state NY zip code 11374

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

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Rego Park Jewish Center
Queens County, New York

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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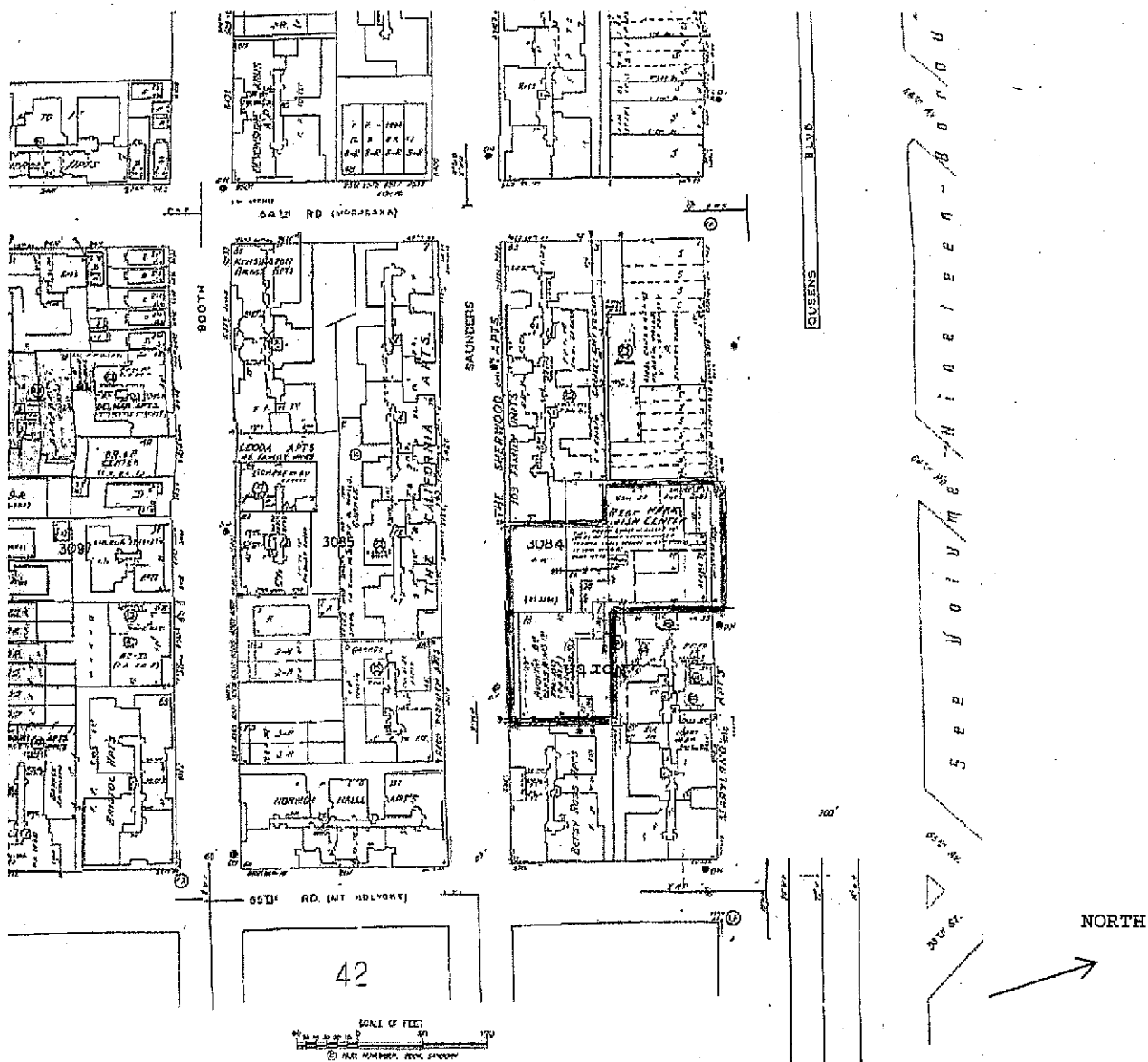
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Rego Park Jewish Center is roughly two conjoined squares encompassing 28200 square feet of Block 3084 Lot 14 between Queens Boulevard, Saunders Street and 64th and 65 Roads in Queens, New York as illustrated on the attached map.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Property boundary is the same as during the period of significance.



Rego Park Jewish Center

97-30 Queens Boulevard

Queens County, New York

Source: The Sanborn Building & Property Atlas of Queens, New York. Volume 20, Plate 40.

First American Real Estate Solutions, 2006. Scale: 60 feet to 1 inch.

NR BOUNDARY: —

Rego Park Jewish Center
Queens County, New York

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Description (section 7) and Statement of Significance (Section 8) prepared by:

Anthony W. Robins
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Fax: 212-877-9751
trob@pipeline.com

Rego Park Jewish Center
Queens County, New York

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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PHOTOGRAPH LIST

Rego Park Jewish Center, 97-30 Queens Boulevard, Rego Park (Borough of Queens), New York

Digital Images taken by Anthony W. Robins on 12 February 2009. Copy of images on disk on file in the offices of the Field Services Bureau of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Peebles Island State Park, Waterford, New York.

Photo #1: Rego Park Jewish Center, looking south

Photo #2: Queens Boulevard elevation, upper portion

Photo #3: Queens Boulevard elevation, entrance detail

Photo #4: Queens Boulevard elevation, mosaic over entrance

Photo #5: Queens Boulevard elevation, office entrance east of main entrance, looking south

Photo #6: Saunders Street, rear elevation, eastern portion

Photo #7: Saunders Street, rear elevation, western portion

Photo #8: Vestibule between main entrance and main sanctuary

Photo #9: Main sanctuary looking towards front

Photo #10: Main sanctuary, ark area

Photo #11: Main sanctuary, looking towards rear balcony

Photo #12: Main sanctuary, side wall windows

Photo #13: Small chapel

Photo #14: Basement social hall

HELEN MARSHALL
PRESIDENT



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June 5, 2009

Ruth L. Pierpont, Director
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
PO Box 189, Peebles Island
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: Rego Park Jewish Center

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I strongly urge the State Review Board to consider the nomination of the Rego Park Jewish Center to the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

Designed in 1948 by Frank Grad, it was considered to be among the first of the modern examples of synagogue architecture in New York City. Both its interior and exterior design, reflect the influence of European synagogues constructed in the 1930's that incorporated Bauhaus concepts.

Today, the Rego Park Jewish Center provides an educational and esthetic experience for anyone who enjoys exploring the hidden architectural gems found in Queens.

For over 60 years its members have taken loving care of this site, preserving it for us to see today. It is only fitting we assist them by granting National and State Registers of Historic Places to the site so it can be enjoyed by future generations.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helen Marshall".

Helen M. Marshall
Queens Borough President



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North, New York NY 10007 TEL: 212-669-7926 FAX: 212-669-7797

<http://nyc.gov/landmarks/>



KATE DALY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
kdaly@lpc.nyc.gov

June 3, 2009

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

Re: Rego Park Jewish Center, 97-30 Queens Boulevard, Rego Park, Queens

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of the Rego Park Jewish Center at 97-30 Queens Boulevard in Rego Park, Queens for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

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

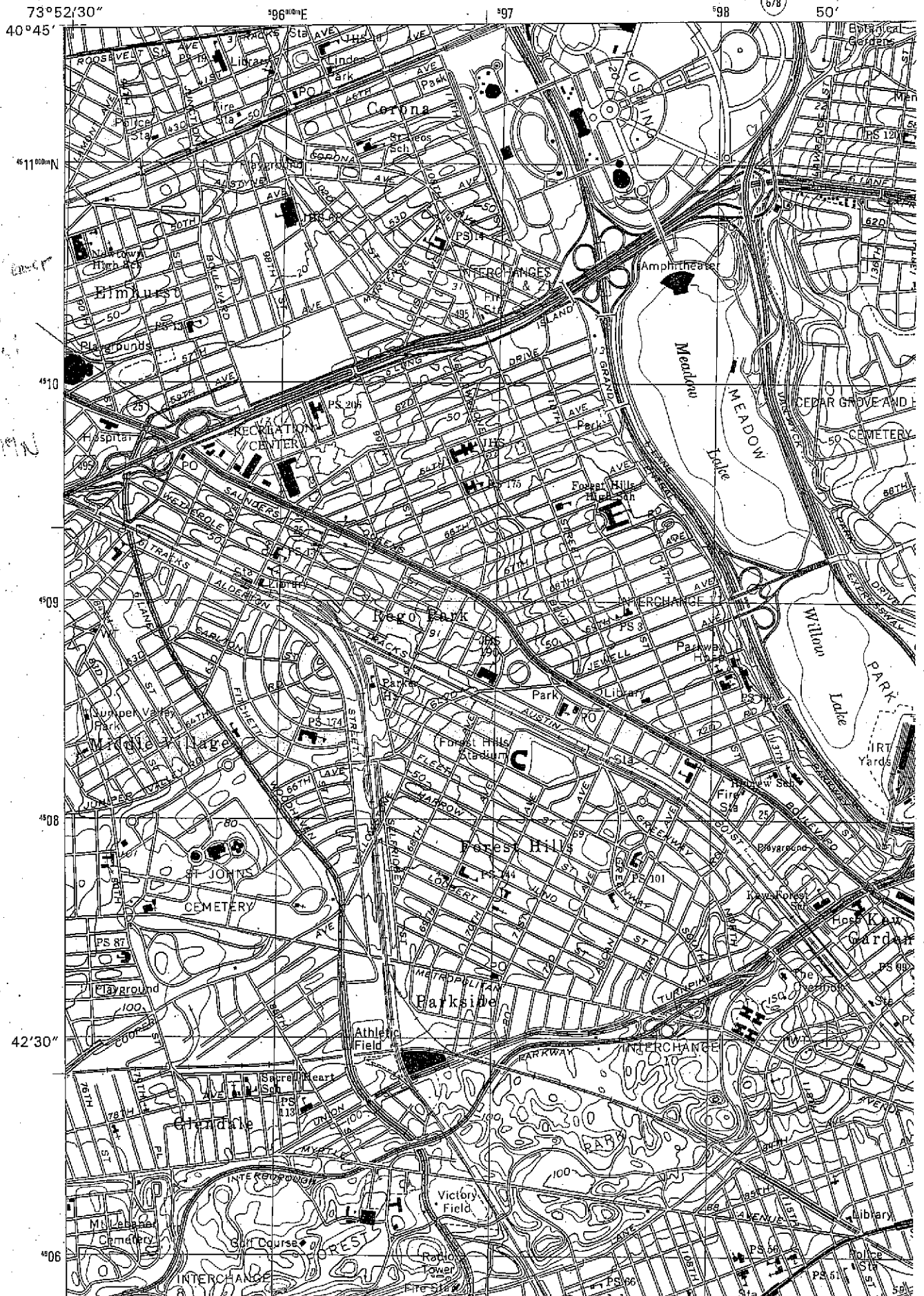
Sincerely yours,

Kate Daly

cc: Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Mary Beth Betts



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



35 Park Street corner
was located by
1/24/10' Survey
1/10/10' Survey
2/24/10' Survey









