

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 Kingsway Jewish Center

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 2810 Nostrand Avenue [] not for publication

city or town Brooklyn [] vicinity

state New York code NY county Kings code 047 zip code 11229

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 [X] nationally [] statewide [X] locally. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ruth A. Rapant DSHPD
Signature of certifying official/Title

12/16/09
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

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property

Kings County, New York
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	TOTAL

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility; school

RECREATION & CULTURE/sports facility

SOCIAL

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility; school

RECREATION & CULTURE/sports facility

SOCIAL

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick.

Granite (polished).

roof Synthetics.

other Stained glass.

Narrative Description

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The Kingsway Jewish Center is located at 2810 Nostrand Avenue (aka 2920 Kings Highway and 1485 East 29th Street), occupying the entire block front of Kings Highway between Nostrand Avenue and East 29th Street, with secondary facades on both Nostrand and East 29th, in the Midwood neighborhood of the borough of Brooklyn in New York City. The boundaries of the property are described as Brooklyn Tax Block 7690, Lot 51. The surrounding neighborhood consists of a mix of early and late twentieth century commercial buildings on the opposite corners of Kings Highway and Nostrand Avenue and two-and-one-half-story brick duplex houses and row houses in various Craftsman, Mission, and Colonial Revival styles on the nearby side streets. Located south of the Kingsway Jewish Center complex, along Nostrand Avenue, is a city-owned playground -- the Pfc. Thomas Norton Memorial Playground -- which was originally built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and acquired by NYC Parks in 1940. The playground was recently re-designed and landscaped in 2007.

The Kingsway Jewish Center consists of a complex of internally connected buildings serving different functions including the main synagogue block (1951) fronting Kings Highway; school block (1957) behind the synagogue, along Nostrand Avenue; and a catering hall wing (ca. 1957) at the corner of East 29th Street and Kings Highway. Much of the complex was built to the designs of architects Martyn Weston and Herman Sohn. The synagogue is particularly notable for a series of 18 windows designed by prominent Abstract Expressionist artist Adolph Gottlieb.

Exterior: Kings Highway

The main portion of the Kingsway Jewish Center on Kings Highway is a four-story synagogue with a massive brick-faced façade that steps back from the property line as it rises. As described in a contemporary article:

Construction: Completely fireproof... of structural steel and reinforced concrete with gricrete concrete arches; buff face brick exteriors with cast stone trim and coping and Swedish red granite veneer at Main Entrance; projected steel sash; radiant floor heating.¹

The central part of the façade is composed of three double-door entrances recessed behind a polished granite ("Swedish red granite") facing, approached by a flight of steps. Each entrance has a pair of heavy wooden double doors with four square panels in each door. Directly over each pair of doors is a cast-stone relief panel with floral designs. Above each entrance is a circle inscribed in the granite, the central circle with an elaboration of a *magen david* (star or shield of David), and those at either end with an elaboration of a *menorah*. This granite-faced section is topped with large block letters carved from the stone spelling out "KINGSWAY JEWISH CENTER." Directly above the entrance portion is a brick-faced section divided into four bays by three narrow brick piers with a wide flanking pier at either end. Each bay, directly above the stone-faced entrance area, has a recessed square-headed window with leaded glass designed by Adolph Gottlieb (the designs are visible inside, at the rear of the balcony, see below). Each narrow pier rises to an ornamental cast-stone cap

¹ "Kingsway Jewish Center," *Empire State Architect*, (ca. 1951), p. 9.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 2

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

adorned with a floral pattern surrounding an open book; the wide piers rise to an ornamental cap with a floral pattern.

Projecting out from the level of the entrance, and flanking the flight of steps, is a pair of two-story-tall towers, each with a tall, narrow opening enclosing a grille of small square windows.

Abutting this main portion to the southwest (to the right when facing the entrance) along Kings Highway is a narrow, slightly recessed, two-story brick-faced wing with an entirely glass first story that serves as entrance to the Center's banquet hall. Directly next door to that wing is a more recent (or recently refaced) simple one-story wall that extends to the corner of East 29th Street.

Abutting the main portion to the northeast along Kings Highway is a recessed one-story stone-faced wing with a double-door entrance flanked by a large three-part window on either side.

Exterior: East 29th Street

The one-story wall on Kings Highway turns the corner onto East 29th where it is faced in brick and has several entrances. Beyond the wall is a fenced-in open area, within which is visible the simple brick-faced side of the main synagogue block, and the rear of the Center's school building. This is a simple three-story brick-faced building with long rectangular windows and several entrances.

Exterior: Nostrand Avenue

Along Nostrand Avenue, from the corner of Kings Highway to the south, behind a fenced-in areaway, is visible the brick-faced side of the main synagogue block, including a plain brick-faced projecting wing including two bullseye windows whose panes are inscribed with a *magen david* (these light the front end of the small basement chapel, see below). The synagogue side's main architectural detail is a series of five slightly projecting brick piers, with ornamental cast-stone caps, enframing five leaded glass windows by Adolph Gottlieb (these are more visible inside the sanctuary). Further along Nostrand is a fenced-in area, behind which, to the north, is visible the plain brick-faced rear of the synagogue block, including four leaded-glass windows by Gottlieb in the upper story (these correspond to the windows above the ark in the main sanctuary, see below), and the adjoining school building – three stories tall, with large rectangular windows and a simple entranceway including a plain projecting canopy displaying the words "Kingsway Jewish Center." Further south, the long south side of the school building is visible.

Interior

Lobby between the main sanctuary and the synagogue's main entrance

The main triple entrance in the synagogue's main façade leads into a narrow lobby, beyond which lies the main sanctuary. The three sets of double doors leading into the lobby from the main entrance face another set of three

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 3

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

double doors leading into the sanctuary, as well as a single set of doors leading into and out of the lobby at either end. The marble-faced walls ("Swedish Rose marble" according to the contemporary article cited above²) are hung with various memorial plaques. There is a coved plaster ceiling with indirect lighting as well as two metal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling.

Main sanctuary

The main sanctuary is a long, two-story-tall rectangular room with a rear balcony. It has plaster walls, a tall central acoustical-tiled ceiling with a dropped section on either side; and a recessed front area with the ark. Lighting is indirect (as described in the contemporary article cited above: "Lighting throughout is recessed and concealed cove lighting."³) The ark and wainscoting are "finished in Rift Oak."⁴

The long side walls each have a set of five tall, almost floor-to-ceiling, leaded glass windows, designed by the Abstract Expressionist artist, Adolph Gottlieb. Gottlieb created a pattern in which the five windows on each wall contain abstract designs that relate to ten Jewish holidays.

The following identification of the Jewish holiday theme of each window was researched by Sanford Hirsch, Executive Director of the Gottlieb Foundation.⁵ It is based on Mr. Hirsch's knowledge of Gottlieb's work, including images of the same holidays in other locations, as well as on Gottlieb's notes of his meetings with the synagogue's rabbi.

North wall (facing the ark) from front to rear (see attached window plan):

1. Purim
2. Tisha B'Av
3. Yom Kippur
4. Passover
5. Succoth

South wall (facing the ark) from front to rear:

6. Hanukah
7. Sabbath
8. Rosh Hashana
9. Shavuot
10. Tu B'Shvat

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation has been in operation since 1976 with two main purposes. The Foundation offers grants to individual visual artists through two programs: an annual Individual Support Grant and a separate program to assist visual artists in cases of catastrophic events through an Emergency Grant program. They also maintain an archive on the art and life of Adolph Gottlieb and organize exhibitions of his art and that of others.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 4

Four smaller leaded-glass windows, also by Gottlieb, rise above the ark, and another four are located at the back wall of the rear balcony, facing the windows above the ark. The rear balcony is arranged in a stadium plan, extending over the one-story entrance vestibule, so that the four windows on its rear wall are the four windows visible in the wall above the synagogue's main entrance.

The seating is organized in an unusual layout: a series of stepped benches placed perpendicular – rather than parallel – to the ark rise up to the side walls; a *mechitza* (ritual separation barrier) divides the seating areas on either side into men's and women's sections, in keeping with Orthodox practice. The *bima*, or reader's table, is centered between the two seating areas, facing the ark. The floor is covered with a red carpet, as specified in the original design.

At the front of the sanctuary, plain wall surfaces at either side angle in to the recessed ark area. There is a doorway in each of the two angled wall sections. The oak ark is approached by a short flight of steps. It is tripartite in form, with a central wider bay, the upper portion of which bows out in a gentle curve, and a narrower flanking bay to either side. An ornamental curtain hangs in front of the ark. Above the ark, set before the two central leaded-glass windows, is a modernist version of the traditional Tablets of the Law, inscribed with the Hebrew letters representing the Ten Commandments, flanked by ornamental floral forms and topped by a tall crown which is in turn topped by a small *magen david*. On the curving area between the sculpted group and the ark curtain there is a *ner tamid* ("eternal light") and the traditional Hebrew inscription: "Know Before Whom You Stand."

Basement below the Sanctuary: Gymnasium

The basement level directly below the main sanctuary is occupied by the upper part of the two-story-tall gymnasium and various service spaces (e.g., locker rooms).

Basement level small chapel

To the northeast of the gymnasium on this level there is a small chapel used for daily prayer services. Whereas the main sanctuary was planned to seat 800, the chapel was planned to seat 100.⁶ The chapel is a small rectangular space with wooden benches. It has a wooden ark at the front, flanked by wooden bookcases. To either side of the upper part of the ark, above the bookcases, there is a bullseye window inscribed with a *magen david*. The ceiling is coved with indirect lighting.

Sub-basement below the Sanctuary

The sub-basement includes the lower portion of the two-story gymnasium, and a large swimming pool (as described in the *Empire State Architect* article: "Natatorium is completely tiled; lighting is recessed."⁷) There are also various ancillary spaces (boiler room, showers, locker room) on this level.

⁶ *Empire State Architect*, *op. cit.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Section 7 Page 5

Later wing

The extension of 1957 connects directly to the original building. It includes a banqueting hall and various meeting rooms and ancillary spaces. Though none of the spaces is architecturally significant, they represent the important role the synagogue plays in the social history of the community.

School

The attached three-story brick school building, completed in 1957, houses classrooms and other related educational spaces. It represents the ongoing growth and development of this religious institution.

In general, the Kingsway 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 1951. Alterations primarily affect minor spaces such as offices and classrooms. The main façade, main sanctuary, vestibule, chapel, gymnasium and swimming pool all survive largely intact. The leaded-glass windows designed by Adolph Gottlieb also survive intact, though in need of conservation, and are the only complete set of such windows designed by Gottlieb, in their original location and frames, surviving anywhere in the world.

Two-story block entrance block and chapel (east elevation of school)

Facing the east elevation of the school, to the right (next to the synagogue), is a small two-story block. The entrance here leads into a vestibule connecting to various offices for the synagogue. Opposite the door is the entrance to a chapel. The chapel is a plain space with a beamed ceiling; ceiling and walls are 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.

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property

Kings County, New York
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

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

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

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Art
- Architecture
- Ethnic Heritage: Eastern European Jewish
- Religion

Period of Significance:

1951-1957

Significant Dates:

- 1951
- 1955
- 1957

Significant Person:

n/a

Cultural Affiliation:

n/a

Architect/Builder:

Weston, Martyn N. and Sohn, Herman M.
Gottlieb, Adolph (artist)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property
Kings County, New York
County and State

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Kingsway Jewish Center, at Kings Highway, Nostrand Avenue, and East 29th Street in Brooklyn, is historically significant at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of ethnic history and religion as a mid-20th-century synagogue surviving in Brooklyn. Built in Midwood in 1951 for a growing congregation, to designs by Brooklyn architects Martyn Weston and Herman Sohn, and expanded by the same architects later in that decade, it 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, a catering hall, a gymnasium and a swimming pool, it was a major product of the "Jewish Center" movement then remaking the American synagogue landscape.

The Kingsway Jewish Center is architecturally significant at the local level under Criterion C as an example of an intact 1950s post-World War II modern synagogue in Brooklyn. Its design 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 had become dominant in American synagogue design.

The synagogue is particularly noteworthy for its intact suite of stained glass windows designed by prominent Abstract Expressionist artist Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974). As historian Sam Gruber notes, "These little known windows are precious examples of the position of New York's abstract art world outside the world of galleries and museums."⁸ Commissioned by the congregation in 1955, Gottlieb's suite of windows is the sole surviving intact example of his architectural stained-glass work that remains in its original location and configuration, and is nationally significant under Criterion C in the area of art. Gottlieb is one of only a handful of modern artists to work in the medium. Gottlieb's stained glass windows at Kingsway represent the challenge of fitting abstract art into a religious setting. As one of the originators of Abstract Expressionism, his art is in the collections of every major museum in the United States and in many museums in Europe and, has been the subject of numerous exhibitions, including a retrospective exhibition jointly organized by the Whitney and the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in 1968, a memorial exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1975, and, most recently, an international survey exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York in 2002. Among his other accomplishments, Gottlieb was the first American recipient of the Gran Premio of the Sao Paulo Bienale (1963) and a Fellow of the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1972).

The period of significance for the Kingsway Jewish Center – 1951 to 1957 – encompasses the various phases of major construction at the complex including the completion of the synagogue in 1951, the installation of the stained-glass windows in 1955, and the opening of the school and catering wing in 1957.

⁸ Samuel D. Gruber, "Paned Expressions," *Tablet Magazine*, October 14, 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.tabletmag.com/arts-and-culture/18271/paned-expressions/>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 2

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property
Kings County, New York
County and State

The Kingsway Jewish Center survives as a distinctive architectural, artistic, cultural and religious landmark of the Jewish community of Brooklyn and New York City. The property rises to the national level of significance in the area of Art (Criterion C) for the stained glass windows by Abstract Expressionist artist Adolph Gottlieb.

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.⁹

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

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

His son, Michael, was

...the first Jewish boy of Brooklyn to attend any college. Although he was the only Jewish boy in Yale, he spoke at the graduation exercises on the topic, "The Modern Jew." He was selected as one of the speakers because of his high scholastic attainments. He graduated in 1876. Then he studied law at the Columbia Law School and, after graduation, opened an office in Brooklyn. He was proud of the fact that he never moved out of Brooklyn and was associated with many of the leading Jewish and civic movements.¹⁰

⁹ Samuel P. Abelow, *History of Brooklyn Jewry* (Brooklyn: Scheba Publishing Company, 1937), p.5.

¹⁰ Abelow, 6-7.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 3

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

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...."¹¹

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 1837.¹²

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 1880,¹³ its Jewish population grew enormously. The subsequent opening of the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg bridges, and the extension of the IRT subway into Brooklyn, facilitated the continuing growth of both the borough and its Jewish population.

Following a major wave of immigration from Eastern Europe of Jews fleeing poverty, religious discrimination, expulsion and massacres – a wave beginning in the 1880s and reaching its peak in the early decades of the 20th century – New York City, including Brooklyn, became home to an enormous Eastern European Jewish immigrant community. From about 1880 up until World War I, some two million Jews – roughly one third of all the Jews in Europe – arrived in the United States.¹⁴ 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.

¹¹ Abelov, 8-9.

¹² Abelov, 9.

¹³ Ilana Abramovitch and Seán Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn* (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life; Brandeis University Press, 2001); "Introduction," p. 5.

¹⁴ 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).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 4

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property
Kings County, New York
County and State

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).¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

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.

¹⁵ *The Jewish Communal Register of New York City 1917-1918* (New York: Kehillah [Jewish Community], 1918), p.86.

¹⁶ Abramovitch and Galvin, p. 5.

¹⁷ Abelow, p.13.

¹⁸ Abramovich and Galvin, p.3.

¹⁹ 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."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 5

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

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.²⁰

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 temporary²¹

After World War II, Brooklyn began losing much of its population and industrial employment. In particular, the population of Jewish neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn shrank due to death and movement away from city neighborhoods. The 1980s and '90s saw a resurgence of Brooklyn's Jewish population. The flight to the suburbs slowed, and many Jews moved to the city in the '80s from the Soviet Union, Israel, Iran and from other Middle Eastern countries. By 1990, there were 420,000 Jews in Brooklyn.²²

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

²⁰ 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.

²¹ *Jewish Communal Register*, *op. cit.*

²² Marc D. Angel, Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Jews," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 622.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 6

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Flatbush/Midwood/Kings Highway

The Kingsway Jewish Center is located at the intersection of Kings Highway and Nostrand Avenue, two of the major thoroughfares in Brooklyn generally and Flatbush in particular. It occupies the southeast corner of the boundaries generally ascribed to Midwood, a smaller neighborhood within the greater Flatbush area.

Midwood today is considered to be bounded by Avenue H, Flatbush Avenue, Kings Highway and Coney Island Avenue.²³ Its original Dutch name, "Midwout," meant "middle woods," and apparently derived from its location between the towns of Flatbush and Gravesend.

Kings Highway itself is a very old thoroughfare.²⁴ It is said to follow the path of a former Native American trail connecting the Narrows to various villages including New Utrecht, Flatbush, Flatlands and Bushwick. British troops made use of the trail during the Battle of Long Island of the American Revolution.

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

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

...the largest Jewish population area in Brooklyn.... Of the 101,100 Jewish individuals in the area, over half - 54% - self identify as Orthodox.²⁵

Consequently, the neighborhood is

...home to dozens of Orthodox Synagogues. The older synagogues (dating from the early part of the twentieth century) are generally large congregational structures located on busy intersections or on large thoroughfares.²⁶

The Kingsway Jewish Center is home to one of the oldest of these congregations.

²³ The following account of Midwood is based on "Midwood," by Elizabeth Reich Rawson, in the *Encyclopedia of New York City*, *ibid.*, p. 761.

²⁴ See Elizabeth Reich Rawson, "Kings Highway," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, *ibid.*, p. 617.

²⁵ Nehemia Stern, *Post Orthodoxy: An Anthropological Analysis of the Theological and Socio-Cultural Boundaries of Contemporary Orthodox Judaism* (submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology in the Graduate School of Binghamton University, State University of New York, 2008), p. 30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 7

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property
Kings County, New York
County and State

From Congregation Sha'are Rabbi Simcha Abeles to the Kingsway Jewish Center²⁷

Founded in 1928, the Kingsway Jewish Center began life as Congregation Sha'are Rabbi Simcha Abeles, shortened to Sha'are Simcha ("Gates of Joy"), named for the father of a congregant who had donated a Torah scroll to the synagogue. As recounted in the synagogue's 50th anniversary history:

In the year 1928, a group of men gathered for the purpose of founding a synagogue that would serve their small community, men bound by the spiritual concept of "The world is based on three principles: Torah, worship and kindness." The meeting was presided over by Morris Lieberman.... Sha'are Simcha officially filed a certificate in the County Clerk's office on August 7, 1928. The first congregational president was Jacob Greenberg and the synagogue's first location was in a small store at 1492 East 35th Street.

Before long, the congregation had moved to a larger storefront at 3315 Avenue N.²⁸ In 1934, the congregation decided to change its name.

The first name that they tried out was the Kings Highway Jewish Community Center but, realizing that it was just too long, shortened it somewhat. After several revisions, the name Sha'are Simcha was officially changed to Kingsway Jewish Center on August 13, 1934.²⁹

Four years later, the congregation moved again, to a new building at the corner of East 29th Street ("today the Smorgasbord Room of the Kingsway Catering Hall"), on the site of the current building. By this time, the congregation also supported a small *Talmud Torah*, or religious school.

Kingsway engaged its first rabbi, Rabbi Kurt Klapholz, in 1940; he was succeeded in 1942 by Rabbi Charles Rubell, whose tenure was equally short-lived. But in 1946, the congregation engaged Rabbi Samuel J. Chill, who served the congregation until his retirement in 1974.³⁰ Born in Brooklyn, Rabbi Chill studied both in Brooklyn and, for several years before World War II, at the famed Mirrer Yeshiva in Poland. It was Rabbi Chill who pushed for construction of a new complex for the congregation:

...through his efforts, [Rabbi Chill] succeeded in projecting Kingsway Jewish Center into national prominence.... It was due to his drive, energy, creativity and commitment to a dream... that the institution known as Kingsway Jewish Center exists today.

²⁷ Basic information on the congregation's history is drawn from "A History of Kingsway Jewish Center" prepared by Brenda Ness on the occasion of the synagogue's 50th anniversary.

²⁸ This building later became home to another synagogue, Adas Yeshurun.

²⁹ The decision might also have been influenced by the existence of a "Kings Highway Jewish Center" at 1218 Avenue P, some miles away. There are also a number of references to the synagogue as the "Kingsway Jewish Community Center" in the 1940s (e.g. *New York Times*, July 14, 1942, p. 19).

³⁰ "Samuel Chill," obituary, *New York Times*, January 2, 1979, p. C13.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 8

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Rabbi Chill arranged for the purchase of a vacant house on the same block as the old synagogue, and then undertook a major fundraising campaign. The main building was completed in June 1951.

The new Kingsway Jewish Center would 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 100 x 20 foot lots typical of the Lower East Side (e.g. the NR-listed Stanton Street Shul); to grand, high-style "cathedral" synagogues (e.g. the NR-listed Central Synagogue). The 20th century saw the development of a new, particularly American synagogue type – the Jewish Center – which served not only as a place of worship, but as a center of community life; besides a sanctuary, it included classrooms, social halls and, in the largest buildings, even gymnasiums and swimming pools.

The development of the Jewish Center has been carefully chronicled by historian David Kaufman.³¹ Kaufman traces the origin of the phenomenon to several sources, including the millennia-old tradition of the synagogue as a place of worship, study and assembly; the 19th century Protestant development of the "institutional church"; the social requirements of newly-developed communities of middle-class, assimilated, first- and second-generation Jewish families; and the specific example of the West Side Jewish Center built in 1917 on Manhattan's West 86th Street by influential rabbi Mordecai Kaplan.

Though Kaplan has often been cited as the originator of the Jewish Center, Kaufman argues that many of the necessary conditions were already in place, and that "Kaplan was simply the right man at the right time, giving audible voice to less immediately observable – but far more pervasive – historical processes."³² 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 cacophonous milieu of the contemporary Jewish community; as formulated by Kaplan it became the germination of the synagogue-center movement.³³

³¹ David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Brandeis University Press, 1999).

³² Kaufman, p.7.

³³ Kaufman, pp. 232-233.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 9

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property
Kings County, New York
County and State

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.³⁴

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.³⁵

Kaufman translates these four levels:

...“atmosphere,” or a Jewish environment; “light,” interpreted as “entertainment and joy-giving recreations”; the “food” of Jewish knowledge; and “exercise,” understood as the opportunity for practical action. In other words, the Kaplanian synagogue-center is intended to provide a spatial context for Jewishness, a recreational center, an institute for Jewish education (for all ages), and a headquarters for social and political activism. ... Created as a congregational entity and intended to revolve around a synagogal hub, the West Side Jewish Center was a synagogue-center and, as such, became the prototype for a new movement in American Jewish life.³⁶

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.³⁷

³⁴ Kaufman, p. 238.

³⁵ Kaufman, 239.

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ “Jewish Social Centre,” *New York Times*, March 10, 1918, p. RE12.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 10

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

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

The attraction of the concept was evident in 1934 when the small Sha'are Simcha congregation renamed itself the Kingsway Jewish Center. But the congregation didn't realize the full potential of the Jewish Center concept until 1951, when it constructed its new synagogue to designs by Martyn Weston and Herman Sohn.

Martyn Weston (originally Weinstein) and Herman Sohn

To design the new home for the Kingsway Jewish Center, the congregation hired architects Martyn N. Weston and Herman M. Sohn.³⁸

Martyn Weston (1895-1972; his surname was originally Weinstein) studied at the Hebrew Technical Institute (1911), Pratt Institute (1915) and Columbia University (1915-1917). He worked as a draftsman for Wilson Potter (1911-15) and George B. Post & Sons (1915-17).

By 1924, Weinstein was in a partnership with Samuel Malkind³⁹ (in 1923, one year earlier, Malkind was credited alone for an apartment building in Long Beach⁴⁰ while Weinstein was credited alone for Mansfield Manor, a development of one- and two-family houses on Avenue P near Kings Highway).⁴¹ In 1925 Weinstein and Malkind designed Georgian Hall, an apartment house at 612 Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn.⁴² In 1928, they announced a series of projects including ten six-story apartment houses, a public garage, a community centre for Congregation Beth-El of Astoria; the Capitol Club of Flatbush, the Arion Pythian Temple and Club House on Eastern Parkway, and a hospital at Kings Highway and East 26th Street.⁴³

By sometime in the 1930s, the two men appear to have gone their separate ways, though remaining in contact. Both were charter members of the Brooklyn Society of Architects; Malkind served as president of the organization in 1937 and 1938, with Weinstein as one of his vice-presidents; Weinstein served as president in 1939 and 1940 (he also served as president of the Brooklyn chapter of the AIA 1949-51). Weinstein went on in the 1930s, '40s, '50s and '60s to design large apartment houses in Brooklyn and Queens.

³⁸ Biographical information on Weston is taken from his entry in the *American Architects Directory* published by the American Institute of Architects in 1955.

³⁹ *American Architect and the Architectural Review*, Jan 30, 1924; 125, 2438, p.20: "Samuel Lewis Malkind and Martyn N. Weinstein, architects, formerly of 16 Court Street, announce the removal of their offices to the new Chanin Building, 105 Court Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. Manufacturers are requested to send catalogs and samples."

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, July 15, 1923, p. RE1.

⁴¹ Advertisement, *New York Times*, September 9, 1923, p. RE5.

⁴² *New York Times*, June 28, 1925, p. RE1.

⁴³ "Planning Building to Cost \$3,500,000," *New York Times*, March 25, 1928, p.184.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection 8 Page 11Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property
Kings County, New York
County and State

Both Weinstein and Malkind are credited as the architects for the Ocean Parkway Jewish Center of 1924-26, which would have made Weinstein a good choice to design the new Kingsway Jewish Center. It seems likely that the design of the Ocean Parkway complex should be credited to Malkind; Malkind had earlier worked for Louis Allen Abramson, the architect of Mordecai Kaplan's West Side Jewish Center, including during Abramson's time designing the Center, and would have been familiar with Abramson's subsequent designs for the Brooklyn Jewish Center (1919) and Flatbush Jewish Center (1921). And in fact the Ocean Parkway Jewish Center is similar in design to Abramson's Brooklyn Jewish Center, with its combination of neo-Classical design mingled with Judaic emblems. On the other hand, in his 1956 listing in an AIA directory, Weinstein listed the Ocean Parkway Jewish Center as one of his principal works. Given that so many of the early Jewish Centers had been designed by Abramson, it seems plausible that Malkind's connection with Abramson played some role in the firm's getting the commission, and that Malkind took a major role in the building's design. Weston's involvement in the design, however, would still have made him a likely candidate for the Kingsway Jewish Center.

Information about Herman M. Sohn is sparse. He received his B.S. in Architecture in 1911 from the University of Pennsylvania.⁴⁴ In Manhattan, Sohn designed apartment houses, an office building, several tenements and garages. In partnership with Weston, he designed a three-story firehouse for the City of New York in 1946, just a few years before the commission from Kingsway.⁴⁵ The firm's office at that time was in Brooklyn, at 44 Court Street. Other work by the firm in Brooklyn in those early post-World War II years included storefronts on Fulton Street;⁴⁶ single-family houses at 2071-77 Bragg Street,⁴⁷ 2051-83 Bragg Street,⁴⁸ 3085-3091 Avenue U,⁴⁹ an apartment building called Woodruff House at Woodruff and Crooke avenues,⁵⁰ and similar projects in Queens, as well as several small projects in Manhattan. By 1958, the partnership had ended – Martyn Weston was in a partnership with his son Don Weston.

The design of the Kingsway 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.

⁴⁴ University of Pennsylvania General Alumni Society, W.J. Maxwell, *General Alumni Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania* (Alumni Association, 1922), p. 209.

⁴⁵ Manhattan Buildings Department, New Building application 238 of 1946.

⁴⁶ "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times*, October 20, 1945, p.26.

⁴⁷ "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times*, November 16, 1945, p.34.

⁴⁸ "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times*, December 4, 1945, p.46.

⁴⁹ "3d Ave. Transit Plans New Garage Building," *New York Times*, December 1, 1945, p.32.

⁵⁰ "L.I. Builders Plan New Home Groups in 'Luxury' Class," *New York Times*, November 12, 1950, p.241.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 12

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property
Kings County, New York
County and State

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.⁵¹

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."⁵²

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.⁵³

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

⁵¹ Samuel D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (Rizzoli, 2003), p. 83.

⁵² "Modern Design Urged in Houses of Worship," *New York Times*, June 24, 1947, p.6.

⁵³ "Art for Religion," *New York Times*, May 24, 1953, p.X8.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 13

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

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."⁵⁴

Weston & Sohn's design for the Kingsway Jewish Center ranks as one of the first of the new crop of modern synagogues in New York City. They designed the Kingsway synagogue as a modernist building, one which can be imagined either as late Moderne or early Modern, with blocky massing and narrow vertically-oriented windows, flanked by short projecting towers framing the main entrance, approached by a short flight of stairs. The short flanking towers and staircase harken back to synagogue designs of 50 years earlier, reinterpreted in a modernistic vein. The general model for the design, however, appears to be Bauhaus-influenced European synagogues of the 1930s, in particular the Oberstrasse synagogue built for a Reform congregation in Hamburg in 1931 to designs by Jewish architects Felix Ascher and Robert Friedmann (see attached image of the Oberstrasse synagogue).

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.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶

Krinsky's description of the design could just as easily describe the Kingsway Jewish Center:

... 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.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ada Louise Huxtable, "Architecture: Designs for American Synagogues," *New York Times*, October 5, 1963, p.17.

⁵⁵ Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe* (MIT Press, 1985), P. 302.

⁵⁶ Gruber, p.94.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 14

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

A slightly earlier post-World War II synagogue in Queens – the Rego Park Jewish Center, designed by Frank Grad – shows similar influences; Weston and Sohn would likely have known of its design, as the Rego Park synagogue received much publicity.

The Kingsway Jewish Center's main sanctuary is a Modern version of a traditional Orthodox synagogue design. It has a handsome ark at the east end, and a reader's platform facing it in the center closer to the west end. But instead of pews facing the ark, it has rows of seats on the north and south sides, facing each other, as well as a small balcony on the west end, all in blond wood. Above each seating area is a low ceiling providing electric lighting and vents. The entire space is lit by sunlight pouring in through tall glass windows on either side, and smaller windows above and behind the ark.

Those windows may be the most extraordinary aspect of the sanctuary. They were commissioned by the synagogue in 1955 from one of the 20th century's major exponents of Abstract Expressionism, Adolph Gottlieb, whose work at Congregation Beth El in Springfield, Mass was mentioned above.

Adolph Gottlieb's stained-glass windows

Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974) was one of the country's major exponents of mid-20th century Abstract Expressionism. Born in New York City, Gottlieb studied at the Art Students League (including painting with John Sloan) as well as in Paris at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere. He met Mark Rothko in 1929, and the two men – both from Jewish families – became close friends. They shared a mentor in painter Milton Avery, with whom the two artists, along with Barnett Newman, often spent summer vacations in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁸

In 1935, Gottlieb became a founding member of "The Ten," a group devoted to expressionist and abstract painting. He was a founding member in 1943 of the "New York Artist Painters," a group of abstract painters, including Mark Rothko, John Graham and George Constant. He co-authored a letter with Mark Rothko, published in *The New York Times* (June 13, 1943), which described their credo as Abstract Expressionists. "We want to reassert the picture plane. We are for flat forms, because they destroy illusion and reveal truth."

As described by one historian:

Gottlieb's historical position is of the greatest interest. He was the last Abstract Expressionist to arrive at a holistic surface, the whole of which constitutes the visual image, what Clement Greenberg in 1955 called a field. ...Gottlieb's connection to Abstract Expressionism had an equivocal effect on his reputation. On the one hand, he was associated with a powerful group of artists who, like him, were to receive international attention; but, on the other hand, he received less than his full recognition. He knew Barnett Newman very well, and Rothko; his own early work, defining an American subject-matter in small canvases, is parallel to Rothko's.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ James E.B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 161 ff.

⁵⁹ Lawrence Alloway, "Adolph Gottlieb and Abstract Painting," from *Adolph Gottlieb: A Retrospective, 1981*, cited in David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 276.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 15

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Clement Greenberg, perhaps the chief critic/historian of the period, called Gottlieb

The most adventurous artist in the country: as much so in his readiness to look old-fashioned as in his commitment to innovation So thoroughly does he possess every technical resource of his art that he could, conceivably, astonish our eyes in any of the going, accepted ways of abstract or, for that matter, representational painting.⁶⁰

And Greenberg reported that

Picasso himself, when he saw reproductions of Gottlieb's pictographs in 1947, is reported to have been much struck by them; and they do seem to have influenced his large "Kitchen" of 1948.⁶¹

Beginning in 1941, Gottlieb developed his own particular contribution to Abstract Expressionism – the "pictograph" works, "where the entire canvas was painted in strictly 2-dimensional hieratic manner, with groups of painted signs arranged in rows that suggest a language, but in their complexity invite that viewer to arrive at a personal interpretation and understanding."⁶²

An article published in *Everyday Art Quarterly* in 1953 explains that Gottlieb was searching for a new style to replace

...the more geometric kind of abstract art [that] was becoming rather sterile – formularized, dehumanized.... After a period of search, Gottlieb began to develop the pictographic style for which he is best known. In these paintings a great variety of linear devices – eyes, fish, serpents, crescents, pudenda, arrows, geometric figures – are arranged up, down and across the canvas. Initially compiled by free-association, these symbolic motifs are accepted or rejected according to their effectiveness as elements of an over-all design.

The writer described Gottlieb's first efforts in this direction as

...sharply defined and enclosed in boxes, or within a vertical-horizontal grid. Colors are dry – Indian pottery colors.

But the style evolved:

⁶⁰ Cited in Shapiro, p. 273.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.274.

⁶² Samuel D. Gruber, "Paned Expressions," *Tablet Magazine*, October 14, 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.tabletmag.com/arts-and-culture/18271/paned-expressions/>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 16

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Gradually the rigid compartmentation is abandoned, until in the most recent work vestigial figures are scattered on the canvas like random inscriptions on a wall. And color is much warmer, much more lyrical. Each painting is really a single large pictograph composed of many smaller ones. There is no focal center; the canvas is seen all at once, or "read" from edge to edge like an ancient tablet inscribed in an unknown language.

Gottlieb's interest in symbols

...is that of a painter, not an iconologist. It is not mythic imagery he is creating...but a sort of strongly evocative pictorial metaphor for myth.

His use of symbols continued to evolve:

As he became more and more conscious of the conflicting meanings which symbols carry – have carried for so many thousands of years – Gottlieb found that he was no longer able to work with them freely. In his most recent work he has abandoned many of them for symbolically neutral motifs. In addition he is deliberately establishing a focal center and a more hierarchical order in his canvases.⁶³

It was during this period that Gottlieb took commissions to work for synagogues, and to design stained-glass windows.

Gottlieb's first synagogue commission came in 1951, when architect Percival Goodman invited him to design the ark curtain in a synagogue Goodman was designing for Congregation B'nai Israel in Milburn, New Jersey. Goodman was a pioneer of modern design in synagogue architecture, and the Milburn synagogue was his first important such commission. Besides Gottlieb, he also brought in painter Robert Motherwell and sculptor Herbert Ferber. All four men came from Jewish families.

Gottlieb worked again with Goodman at Congregation Beth El in Springfield, Massachusetts where he designed tapestries.⁶⁴ In 1952 Gottlieb received a commission to design a five-story 1,300 square foot façade of stained glass for Park Avenue Synagogue's new Milton Steinberg House. Completed in 1955 and dismantled in 1980, the project led directly to the selection of Gottlieb for the Kingsway windows.

The Milton Steinberg House at 50 East 87th Street – named in memory of the synagogue's late rabbi – was a five-story extension to the synagogue housing classrooms, a library, a music room, and an assembly hall. The façade was "constructed of ninety-one stained glass windows depicting Jewish traditions and holidays".⁶⁵

⁶³ James Fitzsimons, *Everyday Art Quarterly*, No. 25 (Walker Art Center, 1953), pp. 1-4.

⁶⁴ Congregation Beth El was destroyed by fire in 1965.

⁶⁵ "Memorial for Rabbi," *New York Times*, September 13, 1954, p. 18.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 17

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

As described by a contemporary *New York Times* art critic:

...the stained glass façade of the Milton Steinberg House...is said to be the largest such concentrated area in the world. It masks the whole height and width of the five story building, giving no clue of the disposition of rooms behind it and, when lighted from behind in the evenings, creates a glowing spectacle in the dingy side street.

The over-all design is a regular one, made up of colored glass panels, both opaque and transparent, that depict in semi-abstract terms symbols of Jewish thought and ritual as well as key episodes from the Old Testament. This is visual education indeed.⁶⁶

Gottlieb later recalled that this first venture into stained glass and architecture soon turned out to be "an extremely difficult problem" and his

...scanty knowledge of both architecture and stained glass were quite inadequate to cope with the problems. After all, I have devoted myself to painting for 25 years and it is only in the past few years that I have ventured into collaborations with architects. Therefore I could make no pretense of being expert in the field of stained glass or architecture.... I quickly learned one thing that kept me from throwing up the job. This was the simple fact that the experts in architecture and the experts in stained glass also had no idea about how to solve these problems for which there obviously was no precedent.

Asked if stained glass design posed difficulties not inherent in painting, he responded:

I think it must be obvious that the problem of designing a stained glass wall is entirely different from the problems encountered in easel painting.... For example, as a painter I am fascinated by the luminous brilliance of stained glass. Working with glass is entirely different than paint because with every change in the intensity of light the color and the character of the glass changes. Not only is it different on a gray day than on a bright sunny day, but when there are clouds in the sky as the clouds move the glass is continually changing as one stands watching. So one is not dealing with color which is fixed and precise as in paint, but with colored light that is constantly changing and has its own moods.⁶⁷

The glass was manufactured by Heinigke and Smith, whom Gottlieb described as

...one of the oldest and best firms in the country who employ only top craftsmen.... Both Mr. Heinigke and I felt this was a job that had experimental aspects, and I was astonished at the amount of time and effort Mr. Heinigke expended in experimenting to arrive at perfection in the execution of the design.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Stuart Preston, "Artists of Light: Recent Work by Four Artists Employs It Dramatically in Various Ways," *New York Times*, January 2, 1955, p.X12.

⁶⁷ "Q & A's on the Steinberg House," typescript in the possession of the Adolph Gottlieb Foundation.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 18

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

The Steinberg House was dedicated on September 19th, 1954. The dedication was attended by Mayor Wagner and other dignitaries, and the stained glass received a great deal of publicity, publicity which led directly to the Kingsway commission.⁶⁹

Gottlieb's involvement with Kingsway began on April 11th, 1955 – slightly more than six months after the dedication of the Steinberg House – when he got a phone call from Robert Judd, the Vice President of the synagogue.

He [Judd] had seen the stained glass at the Steinberg House and wanted me to meet with him and the committee to discuss stained glass windows for their Center.⁷⁰

Gottlieb went out to the synagogue that evening to meet with Judd and several others. Over the next few days, they discussed the cost of the project, eventually settling on a price significantly lower than the Steinberg project. The lowered cost was made possible in part by an agreement to use "plain areas of unleaded glass" in much of each window.

Gottlieb sent a proposal on April 28th, specifically referencing the Steinberg Building windows:

I propose to submit a design that will have the character and quality of the stained glass facade which I designed for the Milton Steinberg House. This does not mean a duplicate, because every building has unique requirements, and I have duly considered the unique needs of your building. I recommend that the glass be executed by Heinigke and Smith with whom I worked on Steinberg house. They are an old and reliable [sic] firm and do excellent work.

The contract was signed on May 16th. The following day, Gottlieb met with Judd, Rabbi Chill, and Michael Hoffmann, the Chairman of the Board of Directors, to review the initial design concept. Then on May 23rd Gottlieb met with Rabbi Chill to discuss the details. There were to be 10 main windows, five on either side of the sanctuary, which would represent 10 Jewish holidays. There would be eight smaller windows, four at either end, with simpler designs.

Rabbi Chill

...gave me detailed theological explanations of the ten (10) Jewish Holidays. These were to be used as the themes of the 10 panels, one in each of the side windows.

Gottlieb's notes include details of Rabbi Chill's explanations. The ten holidays to be represented were Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succot, Simchat Torah, Chanukka, Tu b'Shvat, Purim, Passover, Shavuot and Tisha

⁶⁹ *Dedication Ceremonies of the Milton Steinberg House* (New York: Park Avenue Synagogue, 1954).

⁷⁰ This and subsequent quotations are taken from a ten-page typescript, in the possession of the Adolph Gottlieb Foundation, chronicling the project from beginning to end.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 19

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

b' Av. Then Simchat Torah was taken out and the Sabbath added in its place. Typical of Gottlieb's brief notes on the Rabbi's explanation is the entry for Yom Kippur: "Mercy – Fasting, Penitence – no shoes – white clothes – confession."

Over the course of the project, Rabbi Chill and Judd requested several changes to the details of the designs, for instance omitting hands and a candle from "Sabbath," and leaving out several numerals in "Purim." There is no indication of the reasons offered for the changes.

Work proceeded over the summer months, and installation was completed on September 14th. An early photo shows the windows above the ark as clear, confirming that Gottlieb's windows were added after the synagogue had already opened.⁷¹

Historian Sam Gruber notes Gottlieb's consideration of the interplay of the stained glass with the architectural design.

Gottlieb conceived his design to reflect the architecture of the sanctuary, where there is banked seating parallel to the long walls of the sanctuary facing an open space in which the bimah occupies a central spot. This is an adaptation of the traditional Sephardic plan, one that very few Ashkenazi synagogues have ever used. For Gottlieb, it provided a seating arrangement where congregants would always be facing the side windows, which thus gain importance.

Gottlieb created a pattern in which the five windows on the north and south walls contain the designs that relate to the ten holidays. For the four high windows on the east (Ark) and west (entrance) walls, Gottlieb created a motif incorporating the Star of David and a symbol for light, arranged asymmetrically, to create a rhythmic pattern. Through the whole window program there is an overall pattern, where the facing walls reflect each other. Each of the side windows has the same shape, size and overall arrangement, but the changes in the shape and color of the smaller glass panes, and the specific design and images create a rhythm that pulses with each day's shifting light.⁷²

Gottlieb's windows were not universally welcomed by the congregation. In 1955, his work was considered avant-garde, perhaps too much so for some congregants. During the project, Judd had to assure Gottlieb that his work would be appreciated:

Judd said that the Kingsway congregation was largely professional, as compared with the Park Avenue Synagogue members who are mostly merchants. Therefore Kingsway should be more receptive to my work.

Judd's judgment proved too optimistic. On September 8th, as the windows were being installed, Gottlieb

⁷¹ Photo in a notebook in the possession of the Gottlieb Foundation.

⁷² Gruber, "Paned Expressions."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 20

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

...phoned Judd in the afternoon. He said people did not like the windows. I asked him if he personally liked them. He said he did, but the committee was giving him a hard time. He also said he had a relative of his, an artist, see the windows. The artist said that I had done a good job but that it would take this congregation five years to appreciate it. I suggested that the committee was judging the glass quantitatively rather than qualitatively. Judd said this was the problem.

The difficulties Gottlieb encountered at Kingsway may reflect the manner in which he was commissioned to do the work: one well-placed congregant liked his work and arranged to hire him, after the synagogue had already been designed and constructed. By contrast, his commission at Milburn came directly from the architect, Goodman, who knew what he wanted, and Gottlieb's work there was part of the initial design. According to one writer at the time:

The [Milburn] congregation in commissioning the architect [Goodman] gave him full freedom to choose the artists with the understanding that whatever they would do would be accepted. The only provision stipulated was that the artists cooperate with the architect on structural grounds and be answerable to the rabbi on the iconography used.⁷³

The very need to specify that the congregation would "accept" the work of the artists "whatever they would do" suggests the perceived potential lack of appreciation of abstract art on the part of the congregants in the early 1950s.

Nevertheless, as noted by historian Sam Gruber:

The congregation was certainly ahead of the curve in commissioning such an untraditional artist as Gottlieb. But they were not alone – in Chicago, the Orthodox Chicago Loop Synagogue engaged Abraham Ratner to create an enormous stained glass wall for its new synagogue, and Percival Goodman arranged for abstract stained glass in some of his new modernist buildings. Whatever doubts the Brooklyn congregation might have had were probably assuaged somewhat in 1957 when the Jewish Museum mounted a Gottlieb one-man exhibition – the first for a living Abstract Expressionist in a major New York museum venue.⁷⁴

Recognizing which of the Kingsway windows represent which Jewish holidays can be difficult because they are abstract.⁷⁶ The Passover window can be easily identified because it includes the Hebrew words for ritual foods associated with the holiday, but the others have no such inscriptions. The Milburn congregation may have found the images on their Gottlieb ark curtain similarly difficult to interpret. They issued a booklet entitled

⁷³ Lionel Reiss, "Art for the Synagogue," *The Reconstructionist*, October 19, 1951, Vol. XVII No. 12, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Gruber, "Paned Expressions."

⁷⁶ See the Description section of this nomination for the identification of each scene.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 21

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

“Symbols and Inscriptions in the Synagogue of Congregation B’nai Israel”⁷⁷ in which each symbol was identified. The uppermost section of the curtain, for instance, included five pictographs identified as “Section of Fluted Column of Temple” for a series of five diagonal lines, “Classical Column of Temple” which looked recognizably like a column, “Side view of Crown” which looked like a simple representation of a crown, “Top view of Crown” which was simply a circle, and “Cross section of Capital of Temple” which looked like a large asterisk – the first, fourth and fifth pictographs quite simply could not be identified without the assistance of the written description.

As Sanford Hirsch, director of the Gottlieb Foundation, points out:

One great difference between Gottlieb's synagogue projects and the rest of his work is the relationship to literal meaning. In effect, Gottlieb seems to work against his own creative invention – his key role in creating a non-geometric abstraction – by taking on these projects in which the images purport to have specific meanings. This was ultimately unsatisfying to him and he claimed, after the fact, that he simply argued that the images symbolized different Jewish themes or holidays so that he could have his challenging work accepted by the conservative congregations. There is some truth to that, but the images in the stained glass works do, in fact, relate to specific themes, which he researched in order to develop.⁷⁸

Despite their initial mixed reception by the congregation, the windows stayed in place. By the 1960s, Judd – who had commissioned the windows – had become the synagogue's Board Chairman. Since that time, the windows remain but are in need of conservation. By contrast, the Steinberg House was disassembled when a new building was erected on the site in 1980, though some of the glass panels were re-used in the new building. With the disassembly of the Steinberg House, the Kingsway windows are now the only surviving intact architectural stained-glass work by Gottlieb anywhere in the world.

According to historian Samuel Gruber, Gottlieb's Kingsway windows “...have national significance ...for their pioneering place in the struggle to fit abstract – and often universalist artistic art – into a particularist religious setting. Chagall, Shahn, and Ratner were other Jewish artists who faced this challenge – but it was easier for them since all of them still maintained some aspects of the figurative and/or narrative tradition in their work.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Symbols and Inscriptions in the Synagogue of Congregation B’nai Israel*, Millburn New Jersey (Millburn: Congregation B’nai Israel, n.d.). In the possession of the Gottlieb Foundation.

⁷⁸ Sanford Hirsch as quoted in Samuel D. Gruber, “Paned Expressions,” *Tablet Magazine*, October 14, 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.tabletmag.com/arts-and-culture/18271/paned-expressions/>.

⁷⁹ Samuel D. Gruber, email correspondence to Kathy Howe at NYS OPRHP, October 8, 2009.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 22

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

The Center's expansion and subsequent history

From the beginning, the Kingsway Center encompassed a number of spaces and functions. The large complex was planned with

...a two (2) stage construction schedule. The main structure is stage No. 1 and this stage is now [1955] fully completed and in daily operation. This structure contains the main Synagogue seating Eight Hundred (800), daily service chapel seating One Hundred (100), Committee Rooms, Office, Rabbi's Office and Study, Caretaker's apartment, gymnasium, lockers and showers, swimming pool, boiler and mechanical equipment room.

Stage No. 2 contemplates the conversion of the present one (1) story building into a modern three (3) story structure containing nine (9) class rooms, Library, Lecture Hall, Principal's Office and Teachers' Room on the 2nd and 3rd stories. The first or ground floor level is to be converted into a Banquet Hall complete with Cocktail Lounge, Kitchen and Serving pantry.⁸⁰

The first stage – the synagogue – was completed in 1951.⁸¹ While a one-story banquet/catering hall was built in 1957 at the corner location of Kings Highway and East 29th Street (on the site of the former ca. 1928 synagogue), the upper stories for the school were not built as had been shown in the model and renderings that appeared in the *Empire State Architect* article (see attached). Instead, the Kingsway Jewish Center built an entirely separate, three-story school wing along Nostrand Avenue, behind the synagogue. The school building addition was completed in 1957.⁸² In 1960-63, a "grand ballroom" building was added to the catering hall, and the sanctuary was remodeled:

A decorative grillwork and the Ten Commandments were installed over the ark and beautiful gilt figures symbolizing the Twelve Tribes of Israel were set into the walls behind the Rabbi's and the President's seats.

In 1972, an "Early Childhood Center,"

...an ultra-modern building complete with kitchens in every room and a fully equipped gym just for the little ones.... And a unique, private park with an in-ground swimming pool and modern, permanently constructed playground equipment was completely shortly thereafter.⁸³

The neighborhood continues to have a solid Jewish population, and the synagogue continues to thrive – as a synagogue, school, catering facility and general community center. The Kingsway Jewish Center reflects the history of Brooklyn Jews in the 20th century – including the history of the Jewish Center movement – and now

⁸⁰ "Kingsway Jewish Center," *Empire State Architect* [FIX]

⁸¹ From the congregational history, *op. cit.*

⁸² Westyn filed plans for the school in 1955; see "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times*, May 4, 1955, p. 48.

⁸³ From the Congregational history, *op. cit.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 23

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

also the history of Brooklyn Jews at the beginning of the 21st century. As such, the Kingsway Jewish Center remains a vital part of the living history of its neighborhood, and of its city.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 1

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Bibliography

- Abelow, Samuel P. *History of Brooklyn Jewry*. Brooklyn: Scheba Publishing Company, 1937).
- Abramovitch, Ilana and Seán Galvin. *Jews of Brooklyn*. Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life. Brandeis University Press, 2001.
- Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation. Various typescripts and papers.
- Alloway, Lawrence. "Adolph Gottlieb and Abstract Painting," in *Adolph Gottlieb: A Retrospective, 1981*, cited in David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- American Architect and the Architectural Review*. Jan 30, 1924.
- American Architects Directory*. American Institute of Architects, 1955.
- Angel, Marc D. and Jeffrey S. Gurock. "Jews." *Encyclopedia of New York City*. Ed. Kenneth T. Jackson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Breslin, James E.B. *Mark Rothko: A Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Dedication Ceremonies of the Milton Steinberg House*. New York: Park Avenue Synagogue, 1954.
- Epstein, Isidore. *Judaism*. Penguin Books, 1959, reprinted 1973.
- Fitzsimons, James. *Everyday Art Quarterly*, No. 25. Walker Art Center, 1953.
- Gruber, Samuel D. *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community*. Rizzoli, 2003.
- Gruber, Samuel D. "Paned Expressions." *Tablet Magazine*, October 14, 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.tabletmag.com/arts-and-culture/18271/paned-expressions/>.
- Jewish Communal Register of New York City 1917-1918. New York: Kehillah [Jewish Community], 1918.
- Kaufman, David. *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History*. Brandeis University Press, 1999.
- "Kingsway Jewish Center," *Empire State Architect*, n.d. (ca. 1951), pp. 8-9. (On file at Kingsway Jewish Center).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 2

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property
Kings County, New York
County and State

Krinsky, Carol Herselle. *Synagogues of Europe*. MIT Press, 1985.

Manhattan Buildings Department. New Building application NB 238-1946.

Maxwell, W.J. University of Pennsylvania General Alumni Society. *General Alumni Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania*. Alumni Association, 1922.

Ness, Brenda. *A History of Kingsway Jewish Center*. Prepared on the occasion of the synagogue's 50th anniversary.

New York Times articles:

Huxtable, Ada Louise. "Architecture: Designs for American Synagogues." October 5, 1963, p.17.
Preston, Stuart. "Artists of Light: Recent Work by Four Artists Employs It Dramatically in Various Ways." January 2, 1955, p.X12.

"3d Ave. Transit Plans New Garage Building." December 1, 1945, p.32.

Advertisement. September 9, 1923, p. RE5.

"Art for Religion." May 24, 1953, p.X8.

"Building Plans Filed." October 20, 1945, p.26.

"Building Plans Filed." December 4, 1945, p.46.

"Building Plans Filed." May 4, 1955, p. 48.

"Building Plans Filed." November 16, 1945, p.34.

"Jewish Social Centre." March 10, 1918, p. RE12.

"L.I. Builders Plan New Home Groups in 'Luxury' Class." November 12, 1950, p.241.

"Memorial for Rabbi." September 13, 1954, p. 18.

"Modern Design Urged in Houses of Worship." June 24, 1947, p.6.

"Planning Building to Cost \$3,500,000." March 25, 1928, p.184.

"Samuel Chill" obituary. January 2, 1979, p. C13.

July 15, 1923, p. RE1.

June 28, 1925, p. RE1.

"Q & A's on the Steinberg House." Typescript in the possession of the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation.

Rawson, Elizabeth Reich. "Midwood" and "Kings Highway." *Encyclopedia of New York City*. Ed. Kenneth T. Jackson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Reiss, Lionel. "Art for the Synagogue." *The Reconstructionist*, October 19, 1951, Vol. XVII No. 12.

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 3

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Stern, Nehemia. *'Post Orthodoxy': An Anthropological Analysis of the Theological and Socio-Cultural Boundaries of Contemporary Orthodox Judaism*. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology in the Graduate School of Binghamton University, State University of New York, 2008.

Symbols and Inscriptions in the Synagogue of Congregation B'nai Israel, Millburn New Jersey. Millburn: Congregation B'nai Israel, n.d.. In the possession of the Adoph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation.

Kingsway Jewish Center
Name of Property

Kings County, New York
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 589225 4496572
Zone Easting Northing

3 18
Zone Easting Northing

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 (See continuation sheet for author)

name/title Contact/Editor: Kathy Howe, Historic Preservation Program Analyst

organization NYSOPRHP, Field Services Bureau date December 4, 2009

street & number P.O. Box 189, Peebles Island telephone 518-237-8643, ext. 3266

city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

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

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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

name Kingsway Jewish Center attn: Alice Loubaton, Board Chairwoman

street & number 2920 Kings Highway; 2810 Nostrand Avenue (office) telephone 718-258-3344

city or town Brooklyn state NY zip code 11229

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

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 1

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The Kingsway Jewish Center occupies Brooklyn Tax Block 7690, Lot 51, Kings County, New York. It is situated at Nostrand Avenue, Kings Highway, and East 29th Street. The property boundary is delineated on the accompanying map.

Boundary Justification

The nomination boundary includes the entire lot upon which the historic synagogue, school, and catering hall complex is located.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 1

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Form prepared by:

Tony Robins

Thompson & Columbus, Inc.

50 West 67th Street, Suite 1-F

New York, NY 10023

212-877-7637

Prepared on behalf of:

The New York Landmarks Conservancy

One Whitehall Street

New York, NY 10004

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 2

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Additional Documentation

Photographs

Kingsway Jewish Center
2810 Nostrand Avenue
Brooklyn, Kings County, NY

Photographer: Tony Robins

Date taken: January, 2009.

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

1. Kingsway Jewish Center, Kings Highway synagogue (north) façade, looking southeast
2. Nostrand Avenue, south (rear) and east elevations of synagogue (right) and east elevation of adjoining school (left), looking west
3. East 29th Street, south (rear) and west elevations of school (at right), side elevation of synagogue (center), looking east
4. Lobby of main sanctuary, looking southwest
5. Main sanctuary, looking east towards front of space
6. Main sanctuary, looking west towards rear of space
7. Small chapel in basement, looking northwest
8. Gymnasium in sub-basement
9. Swimming pool in sub-basement looking northeast
10. Sanctuary window (north wall): Passover theme (Green window), facing north
11. Sanctuary window (south wall): Hannukah theme (Weinberg window), facing south
12. Sanctuary window (south wall): Hannukah theme (Weinberg window), detail, facing south
13. Sanctuary window (north wall): Yom Kippur theme (Judelson window), facing north
14. Sanctuary window (north wall): Purim theme (Sussman window), facing north
15. Sanctuary window (south wall): Purim theme (Meyerson window), facing south
16. Sanctuary window (south wall): Rosh Hashanah theme (Malina window), facing south
17. Sanctuary window (south wall): Shavuot theme (Walfish window), facing south
18. Sanctuary window (north wall): Succoth theme (Schneiderman window), facing north
19. Sanctuary window (north wall): Tisha b'Av theme (Gershman window), facing north
20. Sanctuary window rear (west wall), facing west
21. Sanctuary window rear (west wall), facing west

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 3

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

Supplemental documents

Bird-eye view showing the complex, 2009 (Bing Map, accessed online).

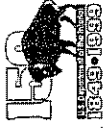
“Kingsway Jewish Center Window Designation” plan and “Jewish Holidays on Stained Glass Windows” plan by Sanford Hirsch, 2009.

Image of the Oberstrasse synagogue in Hamburg, Germany, Felix Ascher & Robert Friedman, 1931.

“Kingsway Jewish Center,” article in *Empire State Architect*, n.d. (ca. 1951). On file at Kingsway Jewish Center.

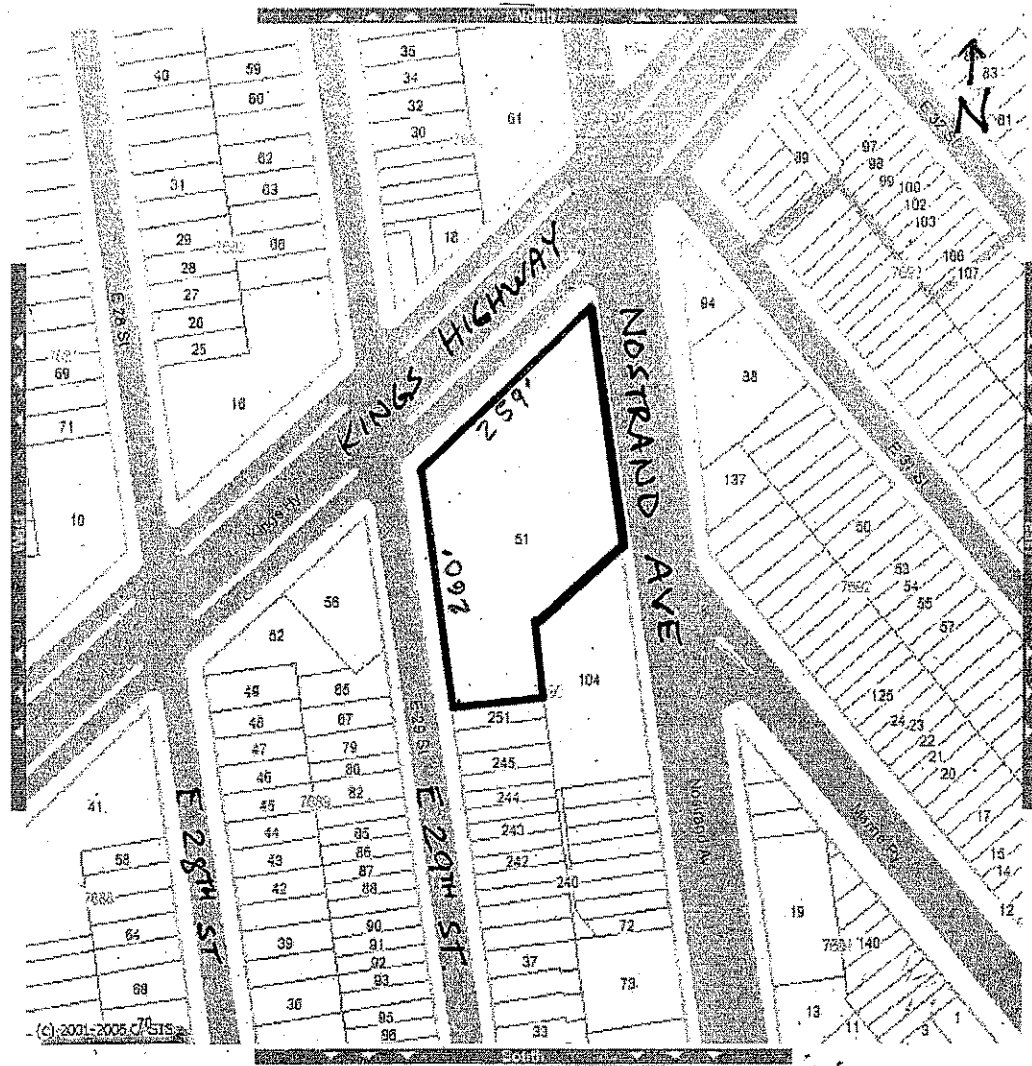


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



74 00' 98 50m E
40 37 30 44
88 12 190 000 FEET (NJ)
57 30"
89

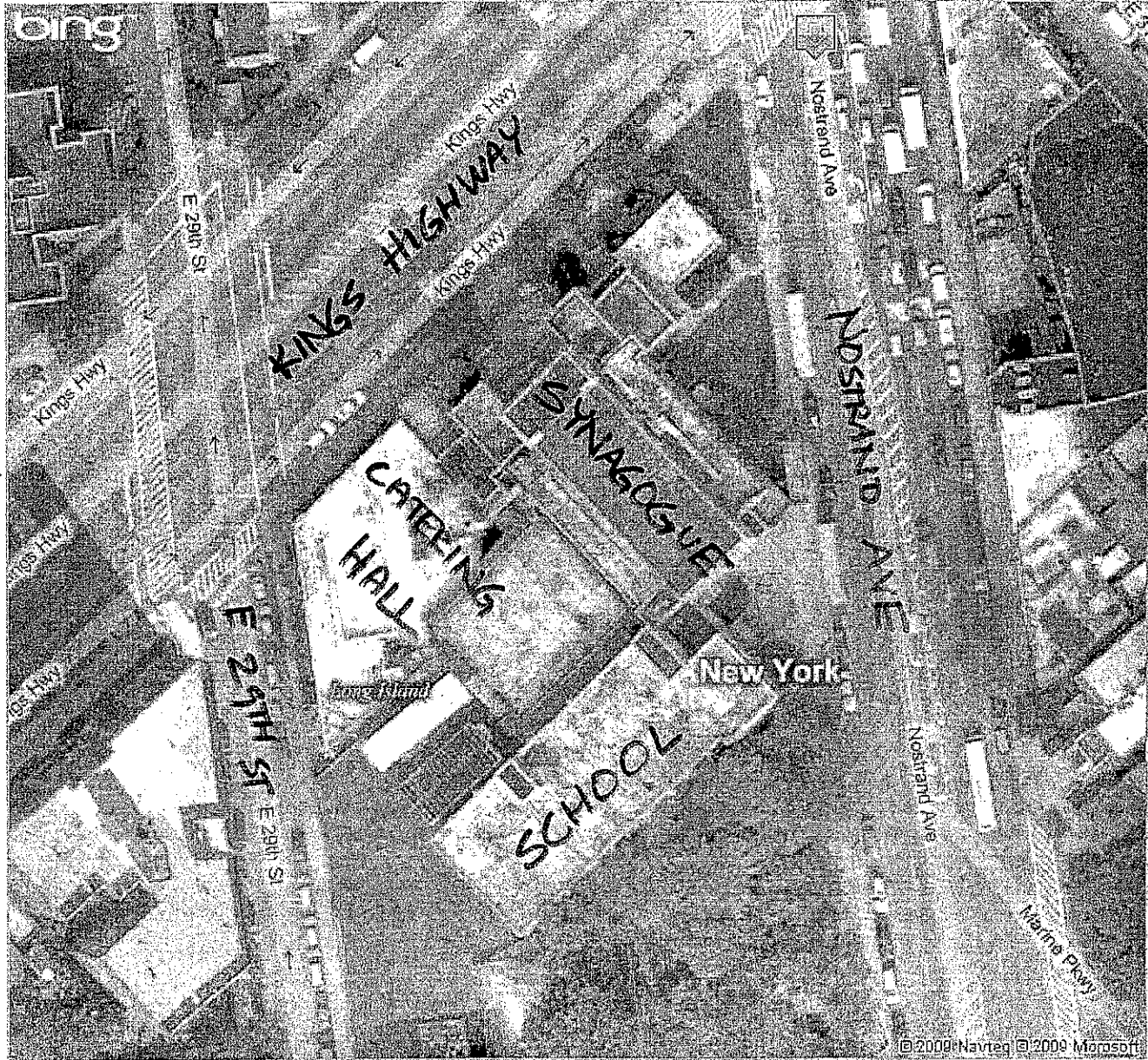
Kingsway Jewish Center
2810 Nostand Ave (NJ)
Brooklyn, Kings Co., NY
Zone 18
Easting 589225
Northing 4496572
USGS - Coney Island Quad 1:25000



0.21 miles :Map Width

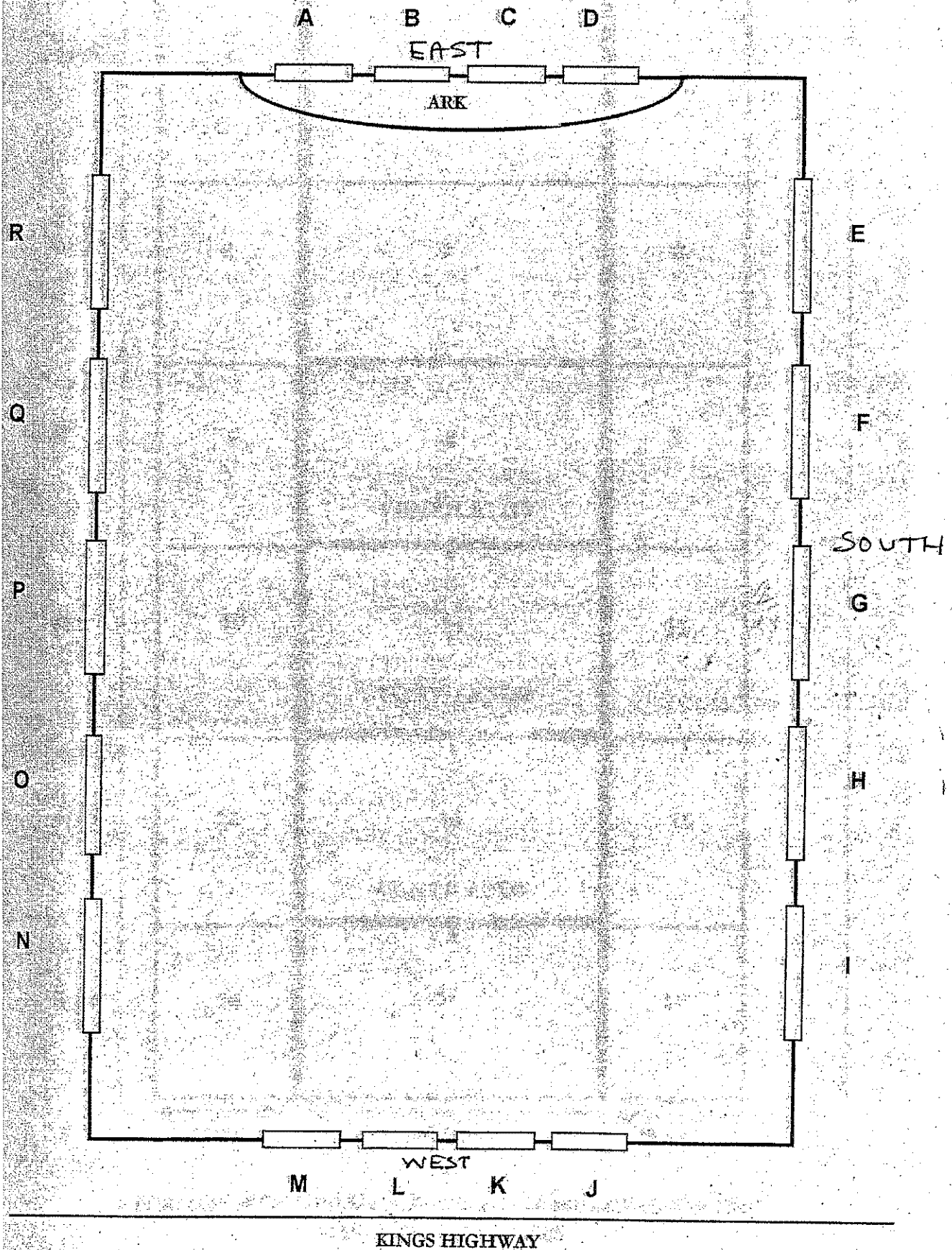
Kingsway Jewish Center
2810 Nostrand Avenue
(aka 1485 East 29th Street and
2920 Kings Highway)
Brooklyn, Kings County, NY

Brooklyn Tax Block 7690, Lot 51
 Source: NYC OASIS (2009)
 Scale: 1-1/4" = 260'



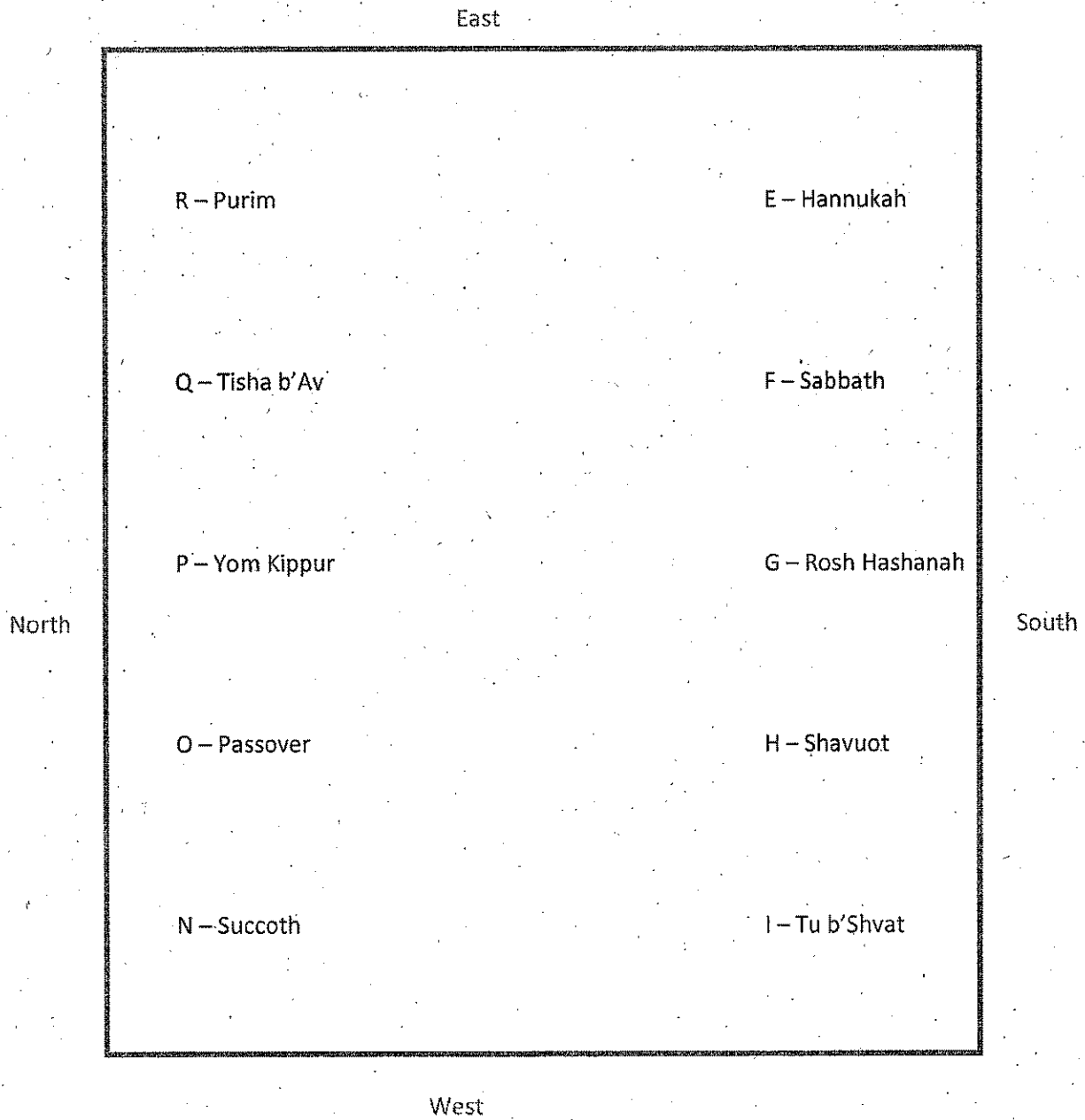
Kingsway Jewish Center at Kings Highway, Nostrand Avenue, and East 29th Street, Brooklyn, Kings County, NY. Birds-eye view showing the complex. Source: Bing Maps, accessed online (October 8, 2009). Not to scale.

Kingsway Jewish Center Window Designation



Kingsway Jewish Center
Jewish Holidays on Stained Glass Windows

(letter designations per Kingsway Plan)



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

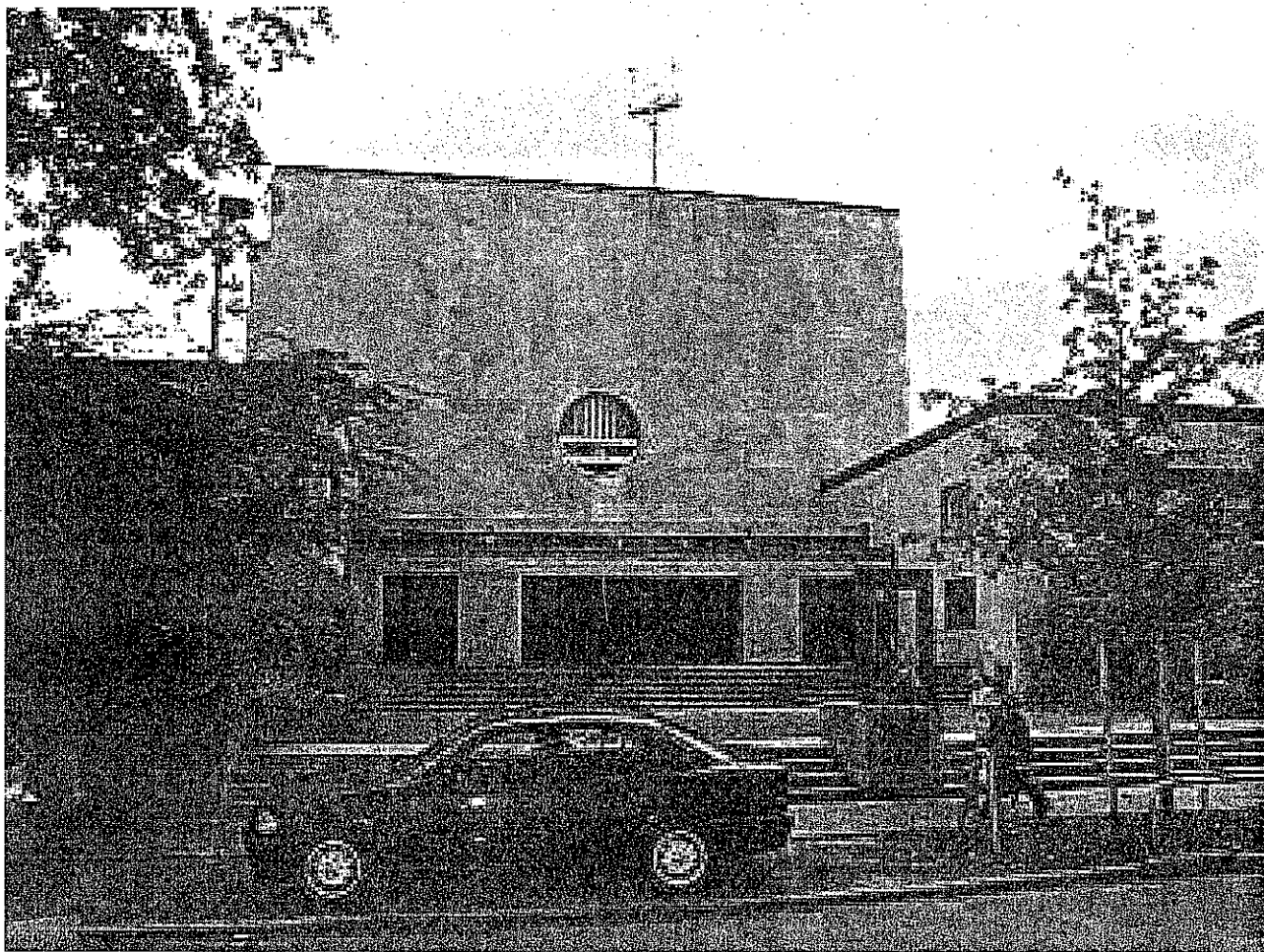
Section 11 Page 3

Kingsway Jewish Center

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

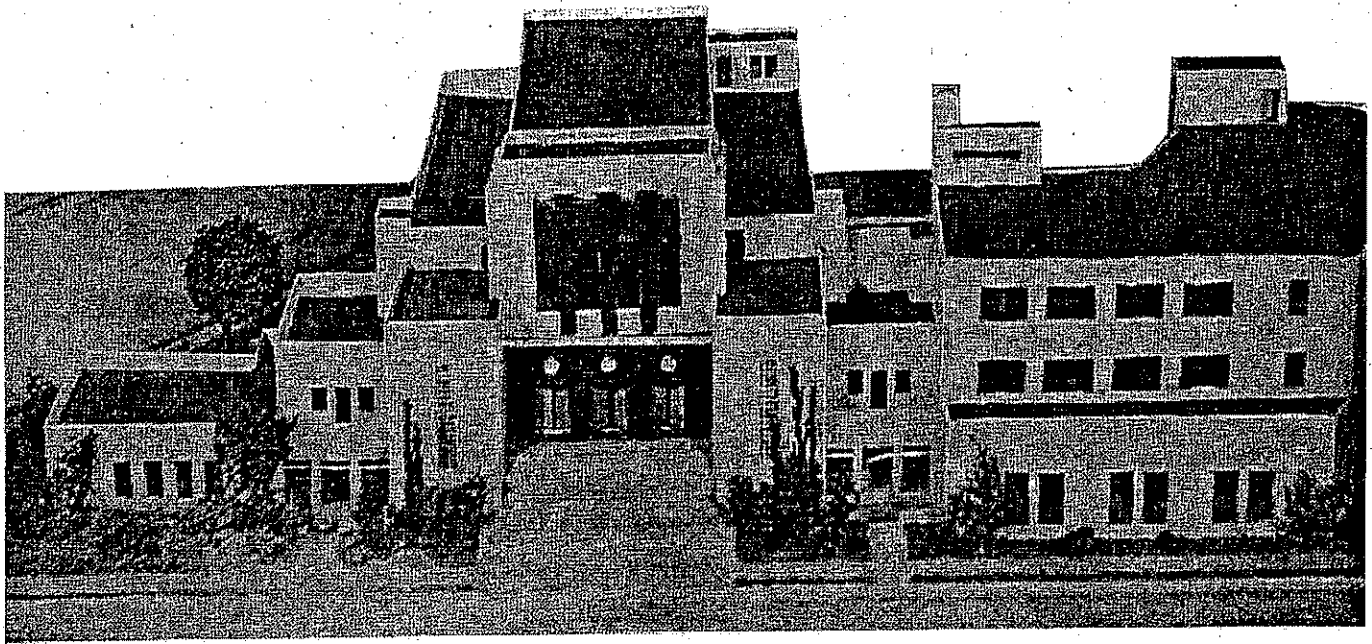


Oberstrasse synagogue in Hamburg, Germany. Felix Ascher & Robert Friedman, 1931.

KINGSWAY JEWISH CENTER

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

MARTYN N. WESTON AND HERMAN M. SOHN, *Architects*



Site comprises an irregular plot on a busy intersection bounded by Kings Highway, Nostrand Avenue and East 29th Street in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn.

The original synagogue was erected in 1928 on the East 29th Street corner (right wing in perspective) and consisted of a one (1) story non-fireproof structure which because of lack of funds necessarily functioned as a general all-purpose room depending upon the particular occasion and use to which it was put.

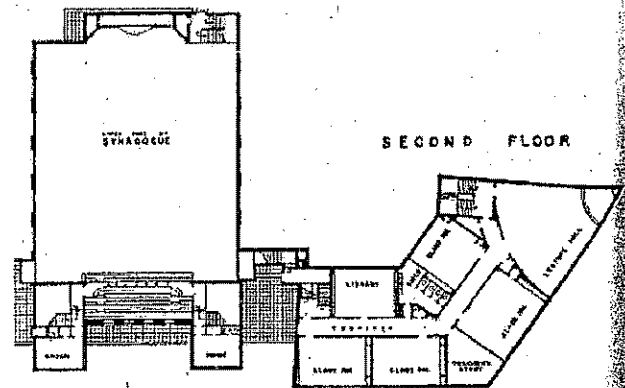
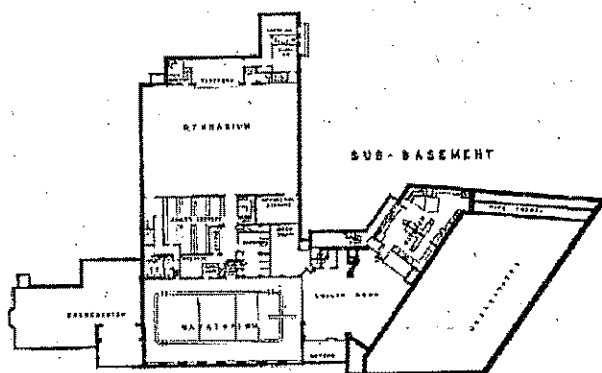
The overall plan contemplates a two (2) stage construction schedule. The main structure is stage No. 1 and this stage is now fully completed and in daily operation. This structure contains the main Synagogue seating Eight Hundred (800), daily service chapel seating One Hundred (100), Committee Rooms, Office, Rabbi's Office and Study, Caretaker's apartment, gymnasium, lockers and showers, swimming pool, boiler and mechanical equipment room.

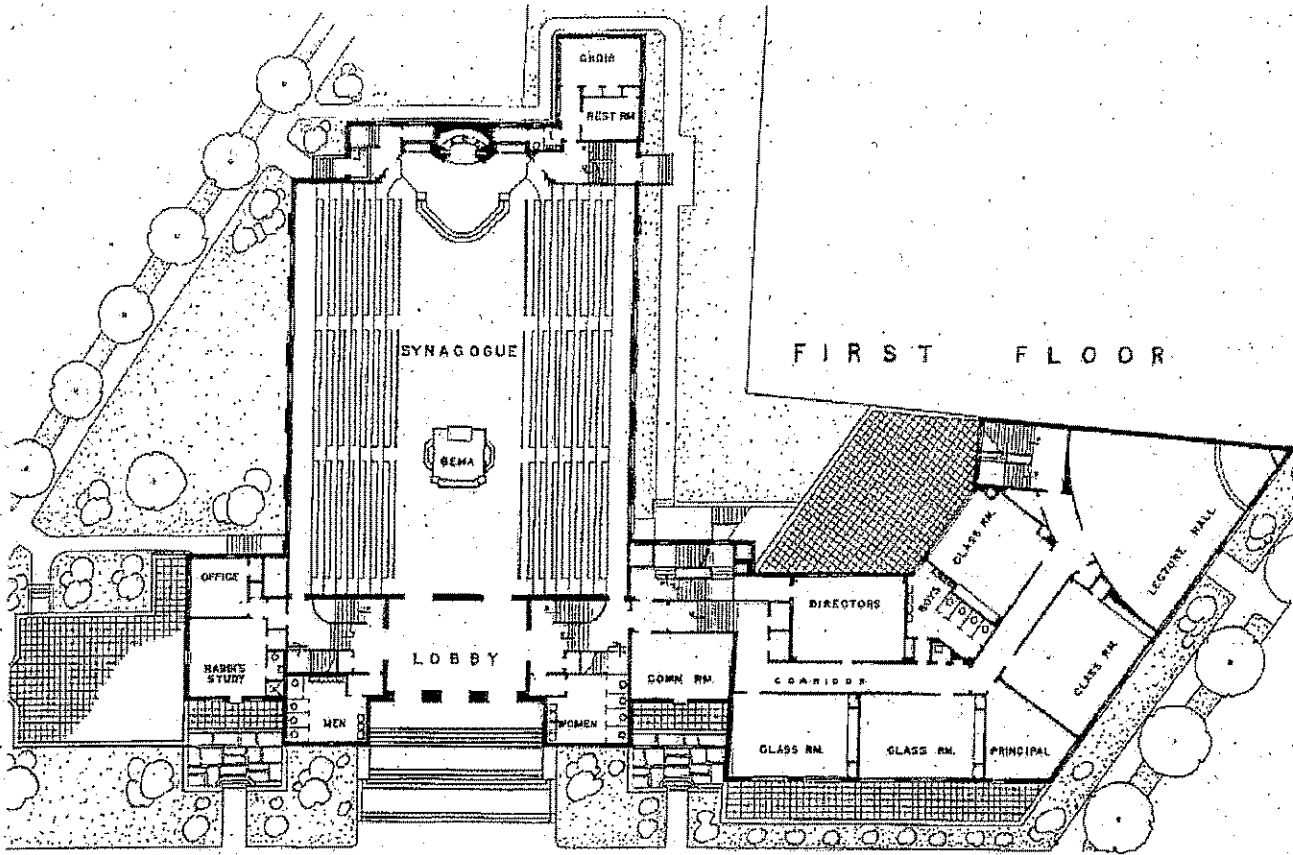
Stage No. 2 contemplates the conversion of the

present one (1) story building into a modern three (3) story structure containing nine (9) class rooms, Library, Lecture Hall, Principal's Office and Teachers' Room on the 2nd and 3rd stories. The first or ground floor level is to be converted into a Banquet Hall complete with Cocktail Lounge, Kitchen and Serving pantry.

Construction: Completely fireproof (including future stage No. 2) of structural steel and reinforced concrete with gricrete concrete arches; buff face brick exteriors with cast stone trim and coping and Swedish red granite veneer at Main Entrance; projected steel sash; radiant floor heating.

Interiors: Main Synagogue is built for stadium type seating, set-up along both long axis of room. The central body of the Synagogue is free of seating and is covered with red carpet from the entrance lobby doors extending back to the Sanctuary. The Bema (platform for reading of the Holy Scrolls) is located in the center of the temple on this field of carpet.





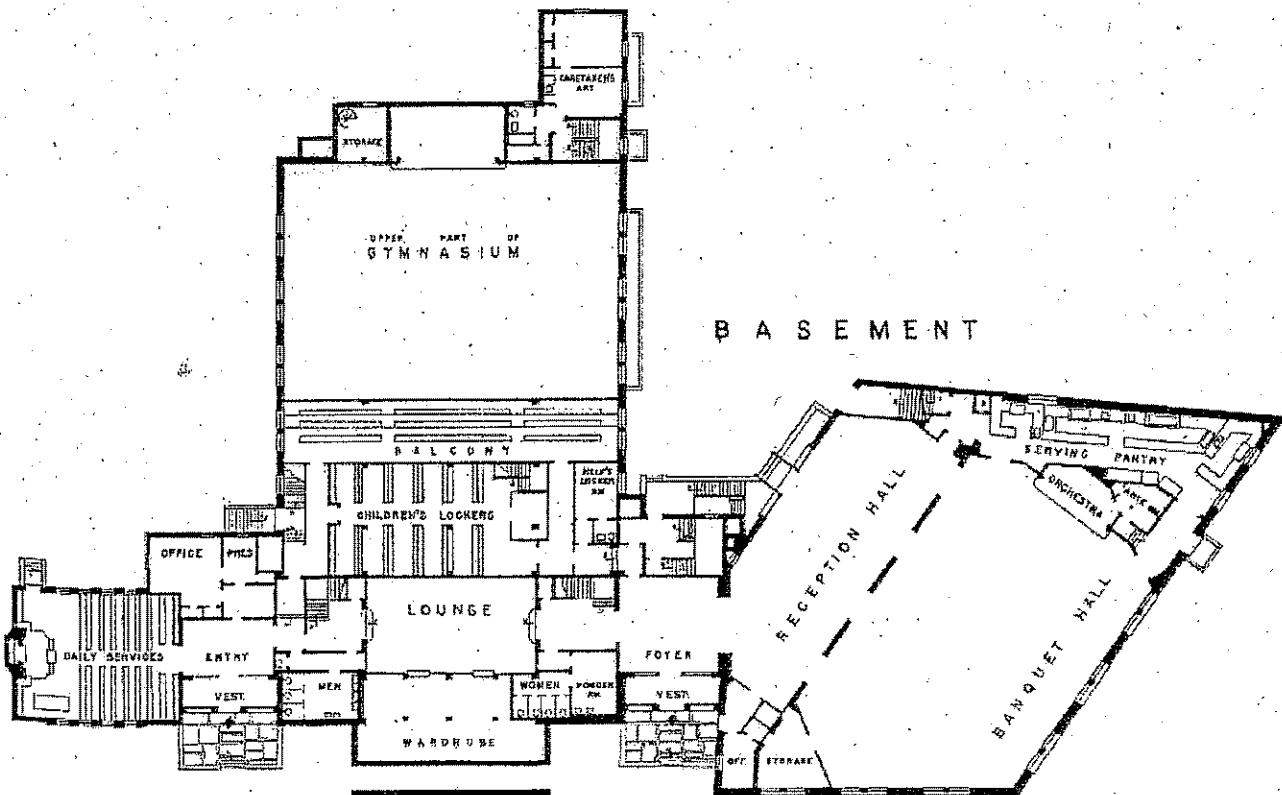
Ark as well as Temple wainscoting is finished in Rift Oak. Ceilings are of Acoustic tile. Lighting throughout is recessed and concealed cove lighting. Bodiform seats (no pews).

Lobby Walls are of Swedish Rose marble. Ceiling is of vaulted construction with concealed cove lighting. Flooring is terrazzo.

Natorium is completely tiled; lighting is recessed. Completed stage No. 1 contains 600,000 cubic feet and costs \$750,000.00.

Future stage No. 2 will contain an additional 250,000 cubic feet.

The General Contractor was - PLANET CONSTRUCTION CORP.



"NO OBJECTION" STATEMENT BY OWNER

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

I, ALICE LOUBATON, am the owner of the property at

(print or type owner name)

2920 KINGS HIGHWAY (SYNAGOGUE)

Office:

2810 NOSTRAND AVE BROOKLYN NY 11229

(street number and name, city, village or town, state of nominated property)

and I have no objection to its consideration and inclusion in the State and National

Registers of Historic Places.

Alice Lubaton Chairman of the Board
(signature and date) Kingsway Jewish Center

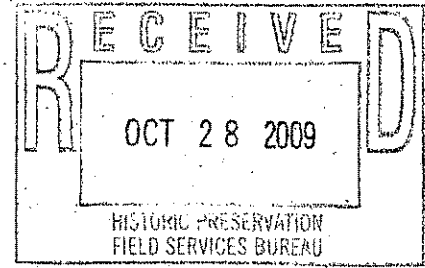
Kingsway Jewish Center Nov 17 2008

2810 Nostrand Ave

Brooklyn NY 11229
(mailing address)



Landmarks Preservation
Commission



Kate Daly
Executive Director
kdaly@lpc.nyc.gov

October 23, 2009

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

212 669 7926 tel
212 669 7797 fax

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

Re: Kingsway Jewish Center, 2810 Nostrand Avenue, Brooklyn

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of the Kingsway Jewish Center, located at 2810 Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn, to the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Based on the Commission's review of the property and the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau, the Commission has determined that the Kingsway Jewish Center appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Sincerely,

Kate Daly



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



74°00'
40°37'30"

98°00' E

98 1 2 190 000 FEET (NJ)

987

57'30"

99

Kingsway Jewish
Center

2810 Nostrand Ave (NJ)
550 000 FEET

Brooklyn, Kings Co,
NY

Zone 18

Easting 589225

Nothing 4496572

USGS -
Coney Island Quad
1:24000



