

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BETH SHOLOM SYNAGOGUE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Beth Sholom Synagogue

Other Names/Site Number: Temple Beth Sholom

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 8231 Old York Road

Not For Publication: N/A

City/Town: Elkins Park (Cheltenham Township)

Vicinity: N/A

State: PA County: Montgomery

Code: 091

Zip Code: 19027-1595

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local:

Public-State:

Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District:

Site:

Structure:

Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

1

3

Noncontributing

1 buildings

 sites

1 structures

 objects

2 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register:

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

Designated a
National Historic Landmark

MAR 29 2007

by the
Secretary of the Interior

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

____ Entered in the National Register

____ Determined eligible for the National Register

____ Determined not eligible for the National Register

____ Removed from the National Register

____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Religion Sub: Religious facility, church school

Current: Religion Sub: Religious facility, church school

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Modern Movement (Wrightian)

MATERIALS

Foundation: Reinforced concrete

Roof: Metal (steel, aluminum)

Walls: Concrete, metal, glass, synthetic

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance

Beth Sholom Synagogue is nationally significant as one of Frank Lloyd Wright's most important commissions during his long, productive, and influential career. Constructed between 1954 and 1959, the building is Wright's only synagogue among a relatively small number of religious commissions. Both a product of its time and place, and symbolically and liturgically grounded in Judaic tradition, the glass pyramid is an unforgettable presence in the suburban Philadelphia landscape, day or night. Its power as a building stemmed from the fruitful collaboration between the famous architect and the congregation's rabbi, Mortimer J. Cohen. A letter to Cohen accompanying the initial set of plans presented the design to the congregation as a "promised hosanna" and a "coherent statement of worship." Beth Sholom Synagogue is one of a group of sixteen Wright buildings singled out in 1959 by the American Institute of Architects and the National Trust for Historic Preservation as his most important "to the nation...which ought to be preserved in their original form."¹ The building remains essentially unchanged and exhibits an unusually high degree of integrity.

Site and Location

The Beth Sholom Congregation property sits at the crest of, and commands a south-facing ridge near the top of a dramatically steep rise on Old York Road in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. Elkins Park is a community in the inner ring suburbs just beyond Philadelphia's northern city limits in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County. Wright sited the synagogue building to take advantage of this location, and it is visible from a distance, particularly at night when lit. Beth Sholom Synagogue stands out from the surroundings and buildings in its immediate viewshed and its dramatic presence acts as a beacon of faith, both during the daytime and at night. The area was first settled during the colonial period as an agricultural district located well to the north of the city of Philadelphia's initial boundaries. By the mid-nineteenth century, the area surrounding Beth Sholom had been established as a region of elite country estates. With the expansion of the city's boundaries through consolidation in 1854, Philadelphia became adjacent to what would come to be known as Elkins Park, in honor of traction magnate William L. Elkins, whose large estate stood in the vicinity.

The area within which the Beth Sholom property sits attained a suburban, middle-class character in the decades following World War II. The adjacent residential development was a key reason for the synagogue's eventual construction in that locale. Old York Road is the axis along which a number of other Jewish congregations relocated from Philadelphia neighborhoods during the postwar period. The suburban lanes branching off of Old York Road near the Beth Sholom property have a relatively modest scale and are lined with medium-sized, detached single-family houses on treed lots.

¹ See Aline Saarinen, "Preserving Wright's Architecture," *New York Times*, April 19, 1959: X-17, "Watch on Wright's Landmarks," *Architectural Record* 126 (September 1959): 9, and Anne E. Biebel et al., "First Unitarian Society Meeting House," National Historic Landmarks Nomination (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2004): 17-18, fn. 27. The list included: W. H. Winslow House, River Forest, IL; Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, Oak Park, IL (NHL, 1976); Ward Willitts House, Highland Park, IL; Frederick C. Robie House, Chicago, IL (NHL, 1963); Aline Barnsdall "Hollyhock" House, Los Angeles, CA; Taliesin, Spring Green, WI (NHL, 1976); "Fallingwater," Bear Run, PA (NHL, 1976); S. C. Johnson & Son, Inc., Administration Building, Racine, WI (NHL, 1976); Taliesin West, Phoenix, AZ (NHL, 1982); Unitarian Meeting House, Madison, WI (NHL, 2004); S. C. Johnson & Son, Inc., Research Tower, Racine, WI (NHL, 1976); V. C. Morris Shop, San Francisco, CA; H. C. Price Tower, Bartlesville, OK; Beth Sholom Synagogue, Elkins Park, PA; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; and Paul R. Hanna House, Palo Alto, CA (NHL, 1989). Sometime between 1959 and 1964, Unity Temple in Oak Park, IL (NHL, 1970) was added to the list, making a total of seventeen buildings. See R. R. Cuscaden, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Drawings, Preserved," *Prairie School Review* 1 (1964): 18.

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The Beth Sholom Congregation property sits on the east side of Old York Road, which in this area is a four-lane state road (Route 611) that runs essentially north-south. Foxcroft Road forms the northern border of the lot, which backs up to other properties on its southern and eastern sides. Containing just under four acres, the property slopes downward to the south and east from its highest point located in the northwest quadrant—the site of the Wright-designed synagogue building. The synagogue sits back slightly from Old York Road, and is fronted by a grass lawn and low, reinforced concrete fountain of Wright's design on axis with the main door on the building's west elevation. The fountain consists of a shallow, lozenge-shaped pool with low-level jets. An access drive—also part of the original Wright scheme—curves around the fountain in front of the building from Old York Road to Foxcroft; it is currently not in frequent use. To the south of the main synagogue building is the non-contributing administrative and educational building, which consists of the Sheerr Religious School and the Samuel and Anna Cross Annex built in 1951 and 1969, respectively. The east, or rear of the property consists primarily of a paved parking lot that serves the complex and can be accessed from either an entrance on Old York Road positioned to the south of the administrative-education building, or from Foxcroft Road to the east (rear) of the synagogue. A covered walkway—not part of Wright's scheme—connects the two edifices. Garden areas have been established between the buildings and around the non-contributing building.

Exterior

The synagogue that Frank Lloyd Wright designed for the Beth Sholom Congregation remains in excellent condition, with virtually no alterations since its construction. There have been no substantial repair or replacement campaigns since its completion, and regular maintenance has consisted of: repainting the exterior, selected repair of some of the exterior glazing panels, and maintenance of other surfaces.

The synagogue building is composed in a single, complex volume. It consists of a glazed, pyramidal tower, broad in form and made up of three sides, and a base of reinforced concrete, steel, and glass. These components rise from an irregular, yet bilaterally symmetrical, hexagonal plan in which the main (west) elevation faces Old York Road where the southeast and northeast elevations come to a point opposite, facing east. This axis orients the worshipers to the arks placed near the building's eastern point, facing in the direction of Jerusalem, an orientation that reflects a planning convention used in many Conservative Jewish synagogues built in the mid-twentieth century.

The pyramidal building both shelters and expresses the main sanctuary space on the interior through its massive, yet simultaneously airy presence. This duality corresponds to two dominant metaphors voiced from the beginning of the project by Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen (1894-1972), Wright's collaborator: that of a tent and that of a mountain (see Section 8 for a discussion of the symbolism associated with the building at the time of construction and after). Both the exterior and interior are organized on repeating motifs of triangular and hexagonal forms realized in both two and three dimensions both in the fundamental structure and as decorative overlay.

Below the glazed pyramid, two horizontal, interlocking layers of distinct materials comprise its base. The lower layer is reinforced concrete painted in a sand color and rakes slightly inward on all sides as it rises. On the rear (east) portion of the building, this part of the base is a larger portion of the whole because it drops further downward, responding to the falling contours of the sloping site. The corners of concrete base (facing northwest, southwest, and east) are prismatic and diamond-like in form and project at an angle that visually accentuates the upward lift of the pyramid's steel tripod above. Lamps resembling menorahs embellish the west sides of the northwest and southwest projections, which flank the main entrance piercing the center of the base's west side. A concrete platform reached by five low stairs painted red in the manner of the original scheme

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extends across this elevation and provides access to the doors. Triangular, frosted-glass light fixtures are inset into the base and articulate the point of intersection between the platform and the wall. A one-story glass and bronzed metal entrance pavilion juts outward from the center of the facade, which is sheltered by a broad, triangular canopy that extends outward from the top of the concrete portion of the base. The front of the canopy is decorated with repeating, aluminum coated metal panels designed on a variation of the building's triangular theme, echoed again in the handles of the two sets of glazed doors. Two slender posts rise upward from the forward portion of the entrance pavilion for added structural support.

The second layer of the building's base provides transition between the concrete below and the glazed pyramid above. This layer is also hexagonal in plan, but extends upward and outward from the concrete base, using the same materials, metal and glass, used in the pyramid above. The lower half of this layer, immediately above the concrete, is sheathed in raked courses of glazing panels, and the upper portion, comprising the roof of the base, is covered in rectangular metal panels edged with the same repeating motif as used on the entrance canopy.

The pyramidal tower is the most memorable feature of the building's exterior. On the whole, the scheme is a very complex variation – in scale, geometry, and materials—on nineteenth-century construction techniques commonly used in greenhouses in which lapped glass panes set in either iron or wood frames served both as roofing and glazing material. With Beth Sholom, the raked courses of panels are set on and in a metal frame consisting of both large vertical and smaller horizontal members. The three structural-metal legs of the tripod are articulated by seven lamps set at regular intervals and by the familiar geometric decorative motifs. The glazing appears to hang from the tripod, not unlike the sides of a tent from its poles. The courses of glazed panels follow the angle of the lines in the transitional layer of the base. The exterior panels themselves consist of a double layer of corrugated, sand-blasted glass reinforced with chicken wire, all of which superficially resembles the fiberglass and acrylic panels common to the period.² On each of the pyramid's three sides, a central bevel projects slightly from the other glazed sections. These bevels, which in the early versions of Wright's design were intended to hold stained glass panels, are articulated by metal vertical members topped by a decorative metal panel. The upper portion of the building is topped by an aluminum finish cap which continues the decorative rectilinear motif of the other metal portions of the exterior.

Interior

The two-part arrangement of the exterior reflects a two-part arrangement of interior space: the upper, main sanctuary contained within in the glazed, tripod tower situated over a smaller sanctuary and social and service spaces on the ground floor of the base. As in elevation, the interior floor plan is bilaterally symmetrical along the east-west axis. Virtually all of the original, Wright-designed details survive unaltered, from the room divisions to finishes, including: light fixtures, furniture, colors, flooring, and trim. The main doors on the west elevation give onto the Harold L. Neuman Memorial Foyer, a typically Wrightian compressed entry area enclosed by glass and plain plaster walls, and topped by an interior extension of the exterior entrance canopy. Beyond the second set of doors and a descending stair on the main entry access is the Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen

² One persistent misconception about Beth Sholom Synagogue's exterior glazing is that low-flying military jets from nearby Willow Grove Air Force Base in breaking the sound barrier, have caused the failure and subsequent replacement of the exterior panels with ones crafted from acrylic. Fieldwork conducted as part of research for this nomination revealed that the double-layer, corrugated reinforced glass system survives, with only a small number of failures in random panels over the decades. The corrugated structure of the glass panels, which resembles acrylic panels of the period, coupled with a degree of yellowing on the exterior is likely to blame for this confusion, compounded by construction correspondence discussing the possibility of using plastic for an *interior* glazing layer. The dialogue between Wright and several of the members of the congregation related to the glazing can be found in the Beth Sholom Correspondence Binders (BSB) Volume 4, Beth Sholom Congregation Archives, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania.

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Foyer. The doors are similar to others in the public areas and characterized by simple, bronze-finish metal frames surrounding single glass panels and opened by the building's signature door handles. Echoing the exterior entrance platform, the floors of the two entry foyers are covered with Cherokee red linoleum and feature the inset, floor-level triangular fixtures used outside. The walls are articulated in smooth- and rough-finished plaster. Handrails with an aluminum finish and decorative planters constructed of walnut and decorated with the repeated geometric decorative motif also contribute to a seamless interior-exterior composition. The doors to the men's and women's lounges are located to the right and left of the stair in the second foyer.

Further along the entrance axis on the other side of this foyer, a second descending stair provides access to a smaller worship space known as the "Sisterhood Sanctuary." The auditorium seating, in copper-colored leather upholstery, is angled toward a reader's platform, the *bimah*, at the eastern end of the diamond-plan space from which worship services are conducted. The floor slopes toward the *bimah*, featuring Wright-designed furniture and aluminum-finish decorative panels, over which hangs a lamp of eternal light, the *ner tamid*. In addition to the *ner tamid*, the room is lit by recessed lights in a ceiling cove above the *bimah* and triangular ceiling fixtures found elsewhere on the lower level.

Two mirror-image public spaces flank the Sisterhood Sanctuary and interior foyer: the Robin Lounge on the north and the Presidents' Lounge on the south. These are both entered using stairs descending from the foyer and feature Cherokee red linoleum flooring and corner fireplaces, but differ slightly in their furnishings. The President's Lounge includes access to space once used as a service kitchen, but used primarily for storage.

The upper level of the interior is taken up almost entirely by the remarkable main sanctuary, reached by two generous staircases rising from the Neuman Foyer. Pairs of glazed doors to either side of the doors into the Cohen Foyer give access to the stairs. Only after arriving at the top of the stairs are visitors able to perceive the sanctuary space in its entirety. This dramatic introduction to the space, which extends upward for the full height of the glazed tripod tower, is a unique and powerful moment in experiencing Beth Sholom Synagogue. This perception was a planned contrast intended to have an awe-inspiring effect on the approaching worshippers. From the top of the stairs, the space not only opens upward, but also downward with a floor sloping toward the space's center. The *bimah* rises at the sanctuary's eastern end, placing the rabbi and the other officiates at approximately the same height as those people seated midway down the seating area for the congregation, a crucial point of the design.

Original Wright-designed decorative elements are concentrated at certain points in the room for both effect and meaning, as well as for the more practical aspects of religious practice. At the northwest and southwest corners of the room at the point where the tripod legs meet the concrete base of the building, a pyramidal concrete form rises upward and echoes similar forms projecting from the corners of the base on the exterior. These triangular features hold memorial plaques constructed of walnut and topped by panels bearing panels with an abstracted flame-like design. The flame motif is repeated in several places throughout the room, most notably in the bright seraphim-wing lamp rising above the ark, framing a key focal point: the word "*kadosh*" or "holy" in Hebrew letters. The *bimah* contains a number of pieces of Wright-designed furniture, including: chairs for the rabbi, cantor, and others, two lecterns, and two menorahs standing on either side at the edge of the platform. To either side of the ark, a half height wall is topped by a perforated screen that is visually enlivened by zigzag or saw-tooth pattern, which nods to the triangle theme used throughout the building. The area behind the screen houses the organ and what was originally the rabbi's study.

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One of the most significant elements of Wright's scheme for the main sanctuary is the large chandelier hanging from the glazed tower's cap and suspended in the middle of the space. The form of the stained-glass chandelier is an inverted, three-sided pyramid; one of the corners points directly eastward toward the *bimah*. The materials and treatment of the tower's interior is similar to the exterior, with the structural members of the tripod finished with aluminum-finished panels bearing familiar geometric patterning. The translucent inner layer of glazing panels between the supports is clearly visible.

The plan, form, and detailing of the synagogue designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for the Beth Sholom Congregation survives in its entirety and maintains a high degree of physical and historical integrity. There have been no major changes or wholesale replacement of materials since the building was completed.

Contributing structure:

Access drive

As originally completed, an access drive extended south from Foxcroft Road between the synagogue and fountain, providing automobile access for the main entrance before turning eastward into the parking lot on the property's east side. Sometime after 1965, the segment of the road between the synagogue and the school building, connecting to the parking lot, was removed with the construction of the annex and present covered walkway. The portion of the drive parallel to the synagogue's west (main) face—a design integral with both the entrance stairs and fountain—is considered a contributing structure.

Contributing object:

Fountain

Part of the original design for the site, Wright situated a fountain with a shallow, lozenge-shaped pool and low-level jets on axis with the building's main doors on the west elevation. The fountain is located across the entry road from the doors and is a symbolic representation of the *laver*, a place where ancient practitioners of Judaism washed before entering sacred spaces or performing sacred rituals. The fountain is considered a contributing object.

Non-contributing building:

Sheerr Religious School and Samuel and Anna Cross Annex

Situated to the south of the Wright-designed synagogue, the Sheerr Religious School Building and the Samuel and Anna Cross Annex were not part of Wright's work for the Beth Sholom Congregation. Since Wright's design is the basis of the synagogue's national significance, this administration-education building is a non-contributing building. The L-shaped Sheerr Religious School Building, now comprising the building's northern and western sections, was completed on plans by Philadelphia architect Israel Demchick two years before Wright's involvement with the Congregation. It was the first building constructed after the congregation's purchase of the property in 1949. This portion of the reinforced concrete building contains two-stories on an L-shaped plan, and is faced in yellow brick with reinforced concrete details, metal strip windows, and a flat roof. The original entrance, oriented to Old York Road and now rarely used, is on the building's western side and fronted by a flat-roofed portico supported on a single reinforced concrete column. The second portion of the building is also L-shaped and comprises the southern and eastern sections of what now is a building with a footprint in the shape of a square doughnut. This portion of the building was completed in 1969 on plans by Philadelphia architects Thalheimer and Weitz, and is similar in detail to the Demchick portion, with its flat roof

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and rectilinear volumes faced in tan brick. The original school building and its later addition are considered non-contributing.

Non-contributing structure:

Covered walkway

A covered walkway connects Beth Sholom Synagogue and the Sheerr Religious School and Samuel and Anna Cross Annex. It extends from the entrance canopy over the main door on the east side of the school/annex to an entrance on the southeast side of the synagogue. Because the flat-roofed canopy was not part of Wright's design and was completed ca. 1969 with the Cross Annex—after the period of significance—it is considered a non-contributing structure.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National
Register Criteria

A B C X D

Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions):

A X B C D E F G X

NHL Criteria:

4, Exception 1

NHL Theme(s):

III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. Architecture, landscape architecture and urban design

Areas of Significance:

Architecture

Period(s) of Significance:

1954-1959

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Wright, Frank Lloyd

Historic Contexts:

XVI. Architecture
S. Wrightian

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Introduction

Beth Sholom Synagogue is nationally significant as one of the most important works of the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The building's significance is equal to that of such other National Historic Landmarks as Wright's First Unitarian Society Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin (1950; NHL, 2004), and the Johnson Wax Company Administrative Offices and Research Laboratories in Racine, Wisconsin (1936-39, 1944-50; NHL, 1976), and the Marin County Civic Center in San Rafael, California (1962; NHL, 1991). Beth Sholom was one of a handful of Wright buildings singled out in 1959 by the American Institute of Architects and the National Trust for Historic Preservation for their invaluable contribution to American culture. Brendan Gill, who among the well-known Wright authors speaks most eloquently on Beth Sholom and its importance, described the process of designing Beth Sholom Synagogue as "one of the most important events in Wright's career."³

Wright's contributions to architecture and overall influence in this country and across the globe are, perhaps, unmatched. He worked on well over one-thousand projects including houses, office buildings, churches, schools, libraries, bridges, stores, and museums. Of these projects, an estimated 430 were seen to completion (not including work that may have been done on projects with other principal architects) and a vast majority of these are still standing.⁴ As Wright's only commission for a synagogue and his only non-Christian ecclesiastical design, Beth Sholom Synagogue possesses singularity among an already rarified group of Wright-conceived religious buildings. It also holds weight within Wright's long and distinguished career for the unusually collaborative relationship between Wright and Beth Sholom's rabbi, Mortimer J. Cohen (1894-1972). The finished building is a striking religious design quite unlike any other and is a benchmark in Wright's career, mid-twentieth century architectural trends, and in the story of American Judaism.

Beth Sholom Congregation

Beth Sholom Congregation was founded in the Logan neighborhood of north Philadelphia in 1919 in a period of rapid expansion for Conservative Judaism in American cities.⁵ Beth Sholom's first building (constructed from plans by local architect Jacob Feldstein), was located at the intersection of Broad Street, the city's principal north-south thoroughfare, and Courtland Street. Most of this area was characterized by dense residential and industrial blocks largely developed between the Civil War and World War I, while religious institutions, commercial structures, and larger residences were built on major roads, of which Broad was the most prominent.

Just as Beth Sholom's founding corresponded to the pre-Depression pattern of expansion for Conservative Judaism in the United States, the congregation's decision to move out of Philadelphia after World War II reflected the postwar "synagogue boom" in the American suburbs. As historian Jack Wertheimer has noted, this boom stemmed from a substantial demographic shift within Conservative Jewish congregations. In this, Jews coming of age after the war broke with the patterns of previous urban generations and joined the general

³ Brendan Gill, *Many Masks, a Life of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 461.

⁴ For a catalog of Wright's work, see: William Allin Storrer, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright: A Complete Catalog* (1978) (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

⁵ Jack Wertheimer, "The Conservative Synagogue," in Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 116-23.

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American population in the postwar middle-class exodus from cities.⁶ The younger members of the Beth Sholom Congregation were thus becoming more integrated into general American culture than their parents and grandparents, who had lived in “densely populated Jewish enclaves.”⁷

Rabbi Mortimer Cohen (who had been with the congregation since its founding) and Beth Sholom’s board began contemplating the move that would lead to Wright’s commission in the late 1940s. They purchased the Elkins Park property in January, 1949, under the pretext of building a new school for the congregation rather than a new synagogue since there was resistance among some members on the issue.⁸ Philadelphia architect Israel Demchick (1890–1980), a member of the congregation who also specialized in synagogue design, was hired for the project.⁹ The building was completed in the fall of 1951 and soon dubbed the “Beth Sholom Annex.” The leaders of the congregation had noted in 1949 that “in the course of the past five to ten years, we have watched the tendency of our children, when they marry, to move northward” from Philadelphia into lower Montgomery County, including the area around Elkins Park.¹⁰ Spurred by Rabbi Cohen, the leadership wished to “keep Beth Sholom a young and strong Congregation” by moving the temple to Elkins Park and spent the next couple of years diplomatically persuading congregants to back the cause.¹¹ In 1953, Rabbi Cohen learned of a possible merger between two other Jewish congregations who planned to relocate to a site near Beth Sholom’s property in Elkins Park. In addressing the board of directors, he maintained:

that time is in our favor and that if we work fast we could be The Synagogue in this area and find that we meet the needs of sufficient members to maintain a fine and growing institution in an area which is fast becoming populated with Jewish families.¹²

Rabbi Cohen went on to voice his fear that if Beth Sholom did not move with all deliberate speed, that they would lose members to competitors in the area. The board concurred, and a full move to Elkins Park began in earnest.

Frank Lloyd Wright, Rabbi Mortimer Cohen, and an “American Synagogue”

Wright’s career has been loosely divided into five chronological periods that provide a flexible framework for comprehending the constancy and change in his work over time. The divisions are as follows: Early Period (1890-1900), First Mature Period or Golden Age (1900-12), Second Period (1913-29), Third Period (1930-41), and Fourth Period or Second Golden Age (1941-59). At the time of the Beth Sholom commission, Frank Lloyd Wright was enjoying a major resurgence of his career, life, and fame during his “Second Golden Age.” At the time, the architect-octogenarian was further refining designs for his Usonian houses, and overseeing such large-scale projects as the Price Tower (1952-56), the Dallas Theater (1955), the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church (1956), and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1956-59). During the same period, the Guggenheim Museum exhibited his work as *Sixty Years of Living Architecture: The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright* (1953), and he published such works as *Genius and the Mobocracy* (1949), *The Future of Architecture*

⁶ Ibid., 125.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Leo and Vera Posel to Beth Sholom Congregation, July 6, 1949, Montgomery County Deed Book 2001, 287 et seq., Office of the Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds, Norristown, Pennsylvania.

⁹ See Emily T. Cooperman and Sandra Tatman, “Demchick, Israel,” Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project, http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/22676, accessed April 1, 2005.

¹⁰ *Beth Sholom Letter* [newsletter], September 19, 1949, Beth Sholom Congregation Archives (hereafter BSCA), Elkins Park, Pennsylvania.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Minutes of the Board of Directors, September 14, 1953, BSCA.

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(1953), *The Natural House* (1954), and *The Story of the Tower: The Tree That Escaped the Crowded Forest* (1956), chronicling the contemporaneous Price Tower commission.

Frank Lloyd Wright's engagement with Beth Sholom began with a suggestion made by sculptor Boris Blai (1890–1985), then dean of the nearby Tyler School of Art. Blai had come to know Wright while teaching at Florida Southern College and suggested that Wright might provide a means for creating “The Synagogue” that Rabbi Cohen sought.¹³ In November 1953, Rabbi Cohen wrote to Wright and introduced himself. This crucial first contact would establish the foundation of their working relationship in several respects. Rabbi Cohen couched his idea for the new building in terms that related to the greater social “mainstreaming” of the synagogue’s younger congregants, placing its design within a broader American cultural context. After introducing himself and the plan for a new synagogue, Rabbi Cohen went right to this point:

There is a dream and hope in my heart and in [Dean Blai's] of erecting a Synagogue...(in simple, modern design) that will be an inspiration for generations to come, so that people will come from all over the country to see it and find here a ‘new thing’—the American spirit wedded to the ancient spirit of Israel.¹⁴

Rabbi Cohen further elaborated on the fundamentally democratic, and therefore American, aspects of Judaism:

Judaism has been and is a democratic religion whose leaders are not set apart from the congregations, but lead and guide from the very midst...In spirit, Judaism is so close to the American democratic spirit that we need a new type of Synagogue to express this remarkable spiritual fact. Our churches, too, once they become fully democratized will recognize this marriage of Christianity and Americanism by building a new type of building to embody this conception. Judaism has already, through the ages, created that type of democratic building in the traditional synagogue.¹⁵

It was undoubtedly Cohen’s democratic, ecumenical argument that persuaded Wright to accept a commission for a building type he had heretofore eschewed. As George Goodwin has noted, Jewish clients were a significant and substantial presence in Wright’s career; Wright cannot be accurately described as anti-Semitic.¹⁶ However, in a speech at an initial fundraising dinner for the Beth Sholom project in June 1954, Wright admitted that he had “been asked to design a Jewish synagogue once or twice before...and I have always declined. I said I would design an American Synagogue for Jews in America, but I would not design a Jewish Synagogue.”¹⁷ Robert McCarter has noted that Wright believed “his own [transcendental] principles related to...all religions.”¹⁸ Rabbi Cohen’s recontextualization of Jewish experience and religion within the broader American culture provided Wright a point of intellectual access for the project and appealed to the universal elements of spirituality that he embraced. It is not surprising that Wright subsequently used his unbuilt “Steel Cathedral” project from 1926, envisioned as housing a multitude of (Christian) faiths, as the point of departure for the design of Beth Sholom Synagogue.¹⁹

¹³ Mortimer J. Cohen (MJC) to Frank Lloyd Wright (FLW), November 16, 1953, Beth Sholom Correspondence Binders (hereafter BSB), vol. 1, BSCA.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ George M. Goodwin, “Wright’s Beth Sholom Synagogue,” *American Jewish History* 86, no. 3 (1998): 325. Goodwin also notes that Dankmar Adler—partner in the firm of Adler & [Louis] Sullivan (the office in which Wright worked early in his career)—was Jewish and had a substantial Jewish clientele.

¹⁷ Speech given by Frank Lloyd Wright, June 3, 1954, typescript in BSB, vol. 2, BSCA.

¹⁸ Robert McCarter, *Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Phaidon, 1997), 291.

¹⁹ A reference to the Beth Sholom commission and this unbuilt schema can be found in Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., “Frank Lloyd Wright: 3 New Churches,” *Art in America* 45 (Fall 1957): 22-23. The Beth Sholom Congregation archives also record that

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Wrightian Abstraction, Jewish Use and Meaning

Although providing a solid foundation, the collaboration between Frank Lloyd Wright and Rabbi Mortimer Cohen by necessity moved beyond this initial conceptual understanding into design and construction of the project. Rabbi Cohen's first letter established another important facet of the working relationship between the clergyman and the architect—specifically, that the rabbi would take the lead in explaining and interpreting Jewish practices and beliefs as Wright proceeded with the building's design. Enclosed with that letter were lengthy notes that explained relevant aspects of Jewish liturgy and philosophy as well as the congregation's needs and programmatic desiderata. These and later communications not only concerned appropriate conformance to Jewish religious practice, but also extended to an articulate commentary on spiritual and metaphorical meanings imbued on the forms envisioned by Wright. Cohen was able to verbally ground the abstract features of Wright's design, and infer religious meanings that were both specific to Judaism and more generally to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In March 1954, the dialogue between Wright and Cohen expanded to include the first completed set of perspective and plan sketches. Their understanding for the building that stressed a broad, American spirituality characterized Cohen's March 19 response to the drawings. He stated: "if my interpretation of your remarkable design for Beth Sholom varies from what you have intended, I could claim the divine right of every individual to the evoked idea of his own spirit (and I know I would be respected by you for this emphasis upon the divine right of the individual)."²⁰

Wright seems to have been contented with the nature of his collaboration with Rabbi Cohen, which was strongly suggested in newspaper announcements about the commission and anticipated synagogue. Articles published in the *Sunday Bulletin* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on May 23, 1954, provide vivid explication of the building's symbolic meanings. The two most enduring of these—the understanding of the building as a "traveling Mount Sinai" and metaphor for the hands of God holding the people of Israel—were included in these early publications.²¹ As part of public relations and fundraising efforts, Cohen compiled commentary for the congregation along the general lines of his March 19 response letter to Wright about the initial drawings.²² The two had likely discussed and formulated some of the ideas about the building's physical and symbolic presence during their first meeting in New York in December 1953, but no detailed record of this conversation exists.

For the duration of the project, Wright and Cohen together worked out the design and its various meanings, a relationship made possible by their complementary personalities, Wright's vision, and his relative ignorance in the details of Judaism. In the learned, articulate, and ambitious rabbi, Wright found more than an informative client simply supplying him with explanations of the Jewish faith and its practice. He also discovered a partner dedicated to the creation of a deeply meaningful religious building. Wright acknowledged Cohen's dedication

Rabbi Cohen had to justify the choice of the gentile Wright as the architect of the new synagogue building. This was done on the basis of King Solomon's choice of the non-Jewish Bezalel for the architect of the Temple.

²⁰ MJC to FLW, 19 Mar. 1954, BSB, vol. 1, BSCA

²¹ BSCA. Rabbi Cohen referred to it as a "replica of Mount Sinai" in 1954. See "Frank Lloyd Wright has designed his first synagogue. . .," *Architectural Record* 116 (July 1954): 20. Wright is also quoted as describing the general experience of the visitor to the building itself as being like: "resting in the very hands of God." See "Frank Lloyd Wright: A Selection of Current Work, A Synagogue," *Architectural Record* 108 (May 1958): 178. A photograph taken by Philadelphia commercial photographer Jacob Stehlman published in several locations superimposed Wright's initial plan on Rabbi Cohen's hands shown together and palm up, with thumbs slightly outstretched. This photograph is now in the collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

²² MJC, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Synagogue," BSCA.

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to that end in the letter that accompanied the first set of drawings completed in March 1954, which presented the design as “a coherent statement of worship.”²³ The interpretive process launched by Rabbi Cohen is one of the salient features of Beth Sholom’s significance.²⁴ This process continues to this day and the building has thus been, from the beginning, an analogue to a sacred text.

A clear demonstration of their cooperative design can be traced in the formulation of the geometry of the building’s plan. In his first letter to Wright, Rabbi Cohen had supplied a sketch plan for the building in the shape of an elongated octagon.²⁵ On February 2, 1954, Wright telegraphed Rabbi Cohen asking, “any objection to fundamental hexagon or triangle instead of octagon,” to which Rabbi Cohen deferred to the architect, “no objection...leave entirely to you.”²⁶ The fundamental geometric order for the design was established in this exchange. This ordering is hardly unique to the Beth Sholom project—it is a hallmark of Wright’s mature work. Wright used triangular or hexagonal forms and motifs in several late-career ecclesiastical projects, including the Anne Pfeiffer Chapel at Florida Southern College, Lakeland, Florida (1940), and the First Unitarian Society Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin (1950). He had previously experimented with hexagons, most notably with the Paul R. Hanna “Honeycomb” House in Palo Alto, California (1936), which is also among the seventeen works identified by the AIA and National Trust as being exceptional in his career.²⁷ The irregular hexagon plan is unusual, however, in Wright’s work, and probably rose out of Cohen’s initial concept.

Another instance of Wright and Cohen’s relationship with this commission regards Cohen’s directive about the entrance canopy sheltering the building’s main entrance. In response to Wright’s initial scheme for a comparably modest canopy, the rabbi wrote:

As I understand it at present, it seems to be purely functional. It serves the purpose of covering the people, if it rains. It is also ornamental, yet not obtrusively so. I would like to make it symbolic in the spirit of the whole design. I would like to see the covering, in stylized form of course, represent the hands of the ancient priests, outstretched in blessing. The priests, in Biblical days, used to send the people away, and also greet them, with what we call ‘the priestly benediction.’

‘May the Lord Bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face to shine upon...etc.’

Numbers 6.24

My thought is this: Imagine your two hands together in prayer. Then, pivoting them on the thumb and first (index) fingers, revolve them up until both hands are in one plane. This will give you the triangular effect of the present covering. Now, I would so shape the copper and the other material in the covering as to make suggestively – and not too obviously – the hands of the priests.

²³ FLW to MJC, 14 Mar. 1954, BSB, vol. 1, BSCA.

²⁴ The relationship between Cohen and Wright was explicitly and implicitly noted in period press. In particular, see “Promised Hosanna,” *Time* May 31, 1954, 54, and “Glass-towered Synagogue, Frank Lloyd Wright’s First,” *Architectural Forum* 100 (June 1954): 145.

²⁵ A copy of this sketch is included in MJC to FLW, November 16, 1953, BSB, vol. 1, BSCA.

²⁶ Telegram, FLW to MJC, February 2, 1954, BSB, vol. 1, BSCA.

²⁷ In this case, Wright apparently decided to use a hexagonal module as an effort to create an earthquake resistant building. See “A Frank Lloyd Wright House at Palo Alto, California Designed to Resist Earthquakes,” *Architect and Engineer* 130 (August 1937): 3.

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I attach herewith – with due apologies – my horrible sketch.²⁸

Wright changed the design, resulting in the canopy still welcoming visitors today.

Construction and Reception

With the completion of the initial drawings, fundraising began in June 1954 followed by a groundbreaking ceremony on November 14, 1954.²⁹ Wright and his staff completed working drawings for bidding purposes early in 1955. Haskell Culwell, builder of the Harold C. Price Company Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma (1956), completed a three-dimensional model of the Beth Sholom design in April 1956. After the failure to find a satisfactory local contractor, Beth Sholom hired Culwell to build the new synagogue.³⁰ The delays incumbent in fundraising slowed the project, whose budget kept climbing, and design of the interior details continued early into 1957, well past the planned start of construction in the summer of 1956. The project struggled toward completion in 1957-58; Wright visited the site for the last time in January 1959. He died four months later, never seeing the completed building, which was officially opened on September 20, 1959.³¹ Except for the almost predictable problems with leaks, Beth Sholom Synagogue as envisioned by Frank Lloyd Wright and Rabbi Mortimer Cohen has been used continually for worship services and has survived essentially unaltered, since 1959.

Time magazine introduced the project to its readers in 1954 by observing, “The Jewish people have built their places of worship all over the world, but never have they produced architectural monuments to rival those of other faiths,” with Wright’s design, “U.S. Judaism was hoping to close the gap.”³² The completed building did indeed “close the gap” and it became a tangible and evocative symbol of the future of American Judaism and stands among Wright’s most important buildings. In 1957, before it was even consecrated, Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., whose father commissioned Fallingwater, remarked that the design is “a prism of light, a rock of strength, joyous and austere at once, this synagogue Wright has designed is original in every architectural detail yet clearly it proclaims the authority of ancient tradition.”³³ The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the American Institute of Architects recognized the design as one of Wright’s most significant contributions to, and reflections of, a national culture in 1959. Three years later, it was one of the illustrations in a *New York Times* article entitled “Suburban Synagogue Designs Linked to New Patterns of Life,” which discussed recent commissions as central to Jewish suburban life and reflecting an historic Jewish tendency to “adapt local building styles to their own use.”³⁴ Beth Sholom was a noted mid-twentieth-century, wholly American example within this continuum. As a building and, more particularly, as a place of worship, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Beth Sholom Synagogue is an architectural statement whose strength and clear success was recognized by contemporaries, if not fully, by later scholars.

²⁸ MJC to FLW, April 8, 1954, BSB, vol. 1, BSCA.

²⁹ “Wright Starts Synagogue Work” *New York Times* November 15, 1954, 16, for groundbreaking.

³⁰ Correspondence with Culwell is preserved in the BSCA. See also “Skies Clearing for Wright’s Ramp Museum, Synagogue,” *Architectural Forum* 104 (February 1956): 9; Goodwin, 340-42; and Patricia Talbot Davis, *Together They Built a Mountain* (Lititz, PA: Sutter House, 1974).

³¹ “Wright’s Temple to be Dedicated,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1959, 16.

³² “Promised Hosanna,” *Time*, May 31, 1954, 54.

³³ Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., “Frank Lloyd Wright: 3 New Churches,” *Art in America* 45 (Fall 1957): 23.

³⁴ “Suburban Synagogue Designs Linked to New Patterns of Life,” *New York Times*, July 29, 1962, sec. 8: 1. It also helped to illustrate Ada Louise Huxtable, “Triple Legacy of Mr. Wright,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 15, 1959, 18-19.

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George Goodwin notes the building has been under-represented in the scholarly literature on Wright when compared to other significant commissions, particularly ecclesiastical ones.³⁵ Rather than a comment on the building's value, this relative lack of attention is more symptomatic of the place of synagogues within the scholarly literature on American architectural history. Compared with research conducted on Christian churches and other religious building types, synagogues have received little attention from architectural historians. Serious scholarship on synagogues has been principally pursued through other disciplines, particularly by specialists in Jewish history.³⁶ Some of this lack has been relieved by such works as Robert McCarter's monograph, *Frank Lloyd Wright Architect* (1997), which followed one of the most thorough discussions of the building in Brendan Gill's *Many Masks, a Life of Frank Lloyd Wright* (1988).³⁷

Brendan Gill's *Many Masks* not only offers the most eloquent analysis of Beth Sholom Synagogue, but also a satisfying explanation for the relative lack of attention given to the commission. Gill positions Beth Sholom as "one of the most important events in Wright's career."³⁸ He accounts for the project's low profile in period and later literature by remarking that "it was under construction at the same time as the Guggenheim Museum and it remained in the Guggenheim's shadow then as it does today."³⁹ Gill also cites its geographic location and related social contexts as a substantial cause for this lack of attention, stating:

Wright had been working on the plans for the Guggenheim over a period of many years and had gained much publicity both for the museum and for himself . . . the Guggenheim was being built on Fifth Avenue, in the heart of the most publicity-conscious city on earth; the synagogue was being built in the near-anonymity of Elkins Park, a wealthy, predominantly Jewish suburb of Philadelphia. For decades, Philadelphia had been a rival of Brooklyn as the butt of wisecracks The shadow cast by the Guggenheim was also in part of Wright's making.⁴⁰

Gill's argument fortunately advances beyond being merely advocating for an overshadowed, even spurned building by providing a coherent assessment of Beth Sholom as a work of art and architecture relative to the Guggenheim. He notes that:

Beth Sholom is nothing like as photogenic as the voluptuously roly-poly Guggenheim. Its aggressively angular shape, both inside and outside, is sufficiently difficult to comprehend in three dimensions, as the human eye confronts it, and all but impossible to reproduce it photographically, in two dimensions . . . the synagogue is the male counterpart of the female Guggenheim. It is awesome but not winsome. We earn our delight in it by stages, while in the Guggenheim delight is instantaneously bestowed upon us.⁴¹

Perhaps most significantly, Gill has captured most articulately Wright's success in creating what the architect characterized as a "coherent statement of worship." While the building may not have been "ingratiating," that was certainly never its purpose: it was intended to inspire awe and a sense of the divine through a building that provokes an experience of the sublime in the Burkean sense. No other of Wright's religious buildings is discussed in the literature as Gill does here, again comparing Beth Sholom to the Guggenheim:

³⁵ Goodwin, "Wright's Beth Sholom Synagogue," 326.

³⁶ Among these might be noted Wertheimer, op. cit., as well as Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976). It should also be noted that an issue of *American Jewish History* 90:1 (2002) was devoted to a reappraisal of Jick's work.

³⁷ McCarter, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 297-301.

³⁸ Gill, *Many Masks*, 461.

³⁹ Ibid., 461-62

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

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Standing in the Guggenheim, one is conscious of the formidable ego of the designer, present at every turn of the ramp. Standing in Beth Sholom, one senses that the ego of the designer has been subsumed into the work, which in Wright's case amounts to a near-miracle. Even to visitors who, like me, hold no formal religious beliefs whatever, the structure conveys the sense of an immanent collective sacredness, purged of individuality. Wright had promised the congregation of Beth Sholom that their temple would be a 'Mount Sinai cupped in the hands of God,' and for once his outrageous rhetoric amounted to the truth.⁴²

Beth Sholom Synagogue is nationally significant as one of the most important works by renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright. In satisfying Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen's desire for an "American" synagogue, the high-style, high-profile design both extended from, and is a legacy of, mid-century trends affecting the translation of Jewish identity from city to suburb. The building's ultimate success in melding modernity and novelty with traditional meaning and iconography stemmed from an uncommon degree of collaboration between Wright and Cohen. Their ability to work together resulted in a unique building for the United States, whose spaces enhance its religious purpose among regular users and present larger audiences with an unparalleled architectural experience.

⁴² Ibid.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ Previously Listed in the National Register.
- ☒ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- ☐ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- ☒ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # PA-6033
- ☐ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☒ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other (Specify Repository): Beth Sholom Archives, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 3.850 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	18	489216	4436896

Verbal Boundary Description:

The property includes the entirety of parcel number 31-00-30211-50-2 in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary is the entire property conveyed by Leo and Vera Posel to the Beth Sholom Congregation on June 9, 1949, as found in Montgomery County Deed Book 2001, page 287. The property includes the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed synagogue and all associated non-contributing buildings.

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

March 29, 2007

Beth Sholom Congregation
Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
Photograph Log

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Photo Number	Description	Date	Photographer
1	Beth Sholom Synagogue, west elevation from Old York Road, looking northeast	June 2005	Alexis Flack
2	Beth Sholom Synagogue, west elevation from Old York Road, looking northeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
3	Beth Sholom Synagogue, west elevation from Foxcroft Road, looking southeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
4	Beth Sholom Synagogue, west and southeast congregations, looking northeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
5	Scheerr Religious School, west elevation from Old York Road, looking east	April 2005	Alexis Flack
6	Samuel and Anna Cross Annex, east elevation, looking northeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
7	Beth Sholom Synagogue, southeast elevation, looking northwest	April 2005	Alexis Flack
8	Beth Sholom Synagogue, south menorah, west elevation, looking southeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
9	Beth Sholom Synagogue, main entrance, west elevation, looking northeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
10	Beth Sholom Synagogue, door handle detail, southeast elevation	April 2005	Alexis Flack
11	Beth Sholom Synagogue, torch detail on exterior beams, west elevation, looking southeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
12	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Harold L. Neuman Memorial Foyer, looking east	April 2005	Alexis Flack
13	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen Foyer, looking southeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
14	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Men's Room Entrance, looking south	April 2005	Alexis Flack
15	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Women's Room Entrance, looking south	April 2005	Alexis Flack
16	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Sisterhood Sanctuary, looking east from entrance	April 2005	Alexis Flack
17	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Sisterhood Sanctuary, looking east	April 2005	Alexis Flack
18	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Sisterhood Sanctuary, <i>ner tamid</i> lamp	April 2005	Alexis Flack
19	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Sisterhood Sanctuary, detail showing recessed light fixture	April 2005	Alexis Flack
20	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Sisterhood Sanctuary, detail showing light fixtures and seating, looking northwest	April 2005	Alexis Flack

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Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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23	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Presidents Lounge, looking east	April 2005	Alexis Flack
24	Beth Sholom Synagogue, Presidents Lounge, looking south	April 2005	Alexis Flack
25	Beth Sholom Synagogue, south stair into main sanctuary	April 2005	Alexis Flack
26	Beth Sholom Synagogue, view of main sanctuary tower and chandelier	April 2005	Alexis Flack
27	Beth Sholom Synagogue, view in main sanctuary, looking northeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
28	Beth Sholom Synagogue, view in main sanctuary, looking east	April 2005	Alexis Flack
29	Beth Sholom Synagogue, view in main sanctuary, looking southwest	April 2005	Alexis Flack
30	Beth Sholom Synagogue, main sanctuary detail, looking southeast	April 2005	Alexis Flack
31	Beth Sholom Synagogue, main sanctuary chandelier from below	April 2005	Alexis Flack



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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Neil Sida
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7:00 PM
For Info & Tickets Call: 215-497-1342

Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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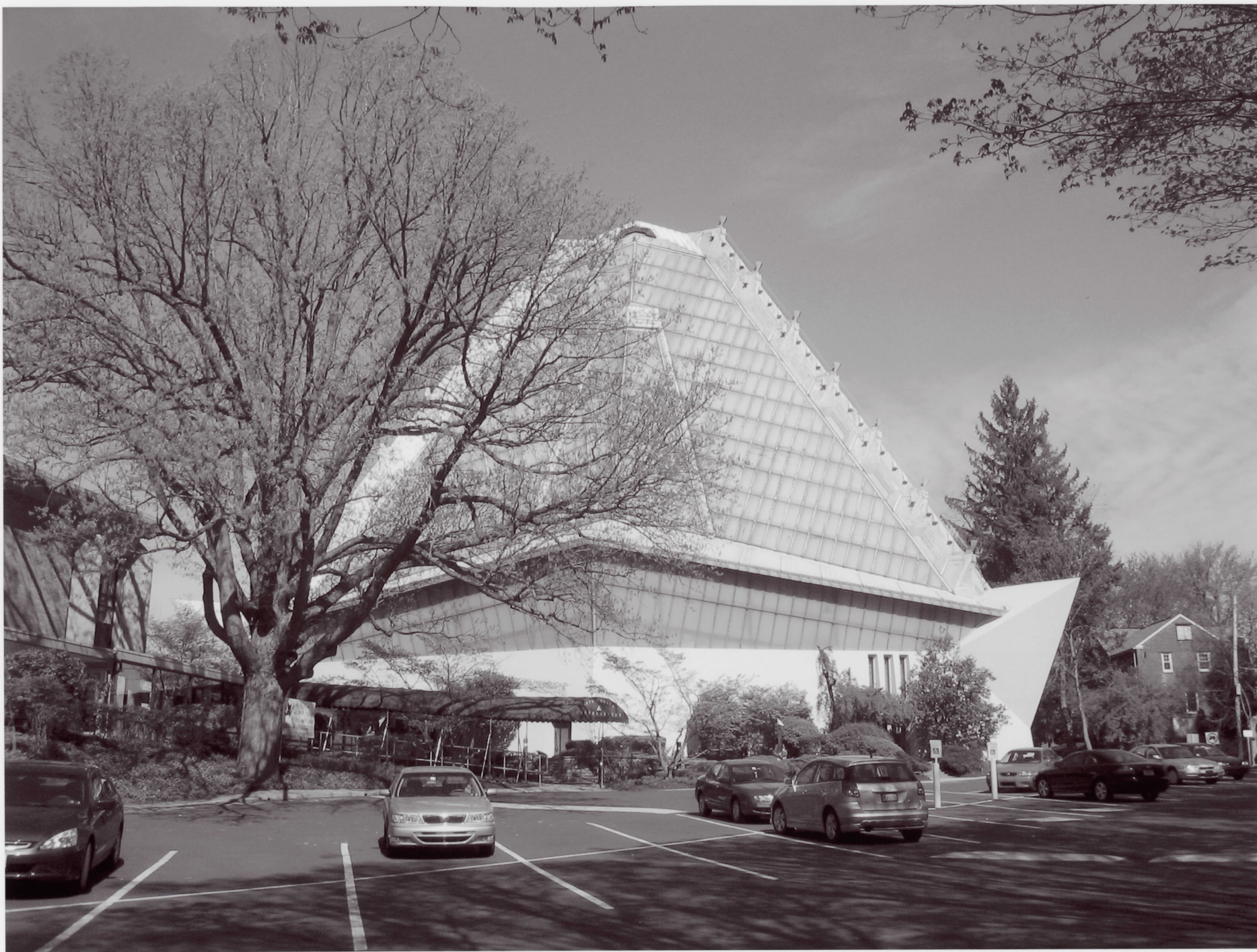




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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation

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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation

Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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Beth Shalom Congregation

Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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Beth Shalom Congregation
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

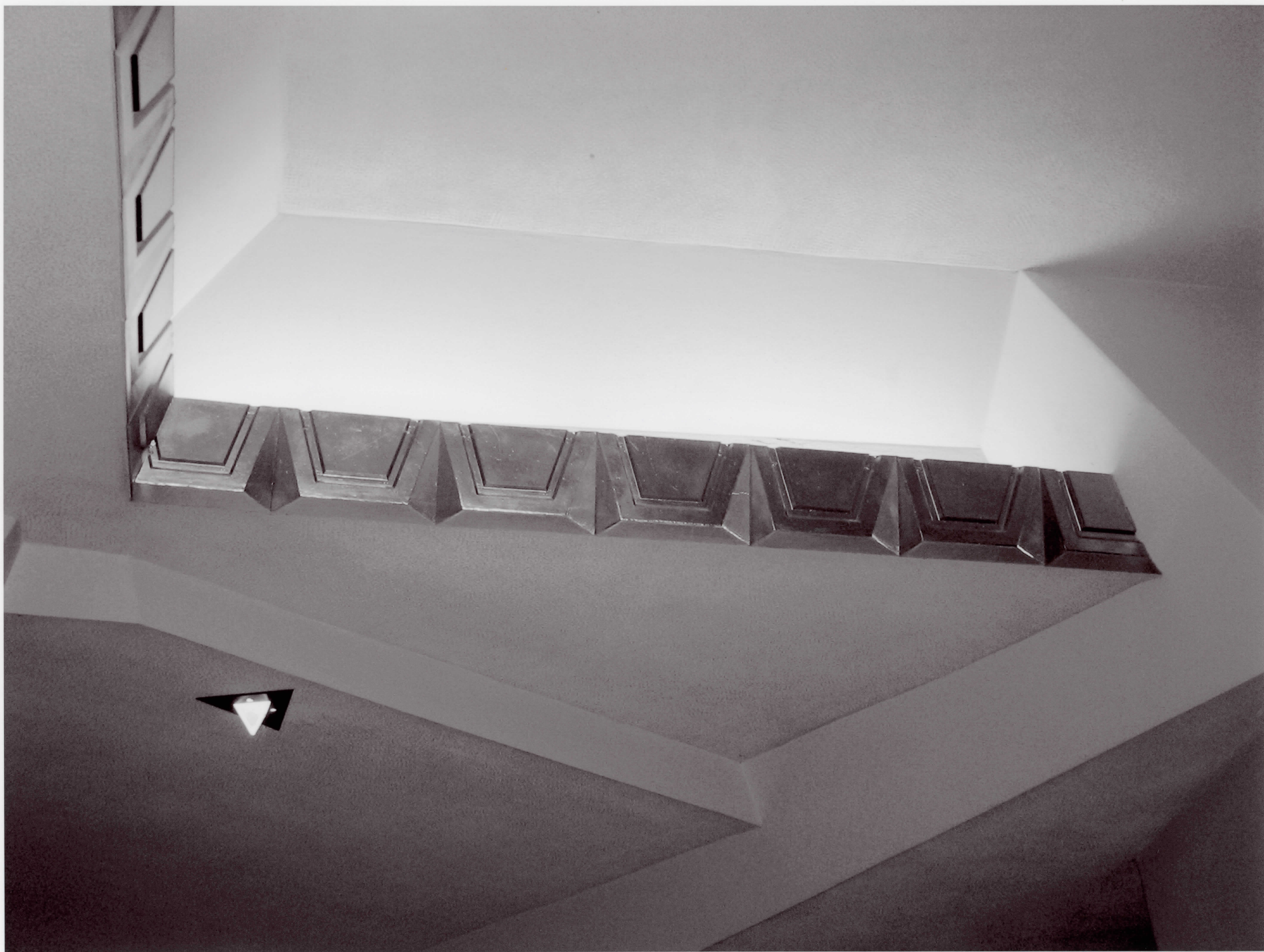
Photo 16 of 31



Beth Shalom Congregation
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
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Beth Shalom Congregation
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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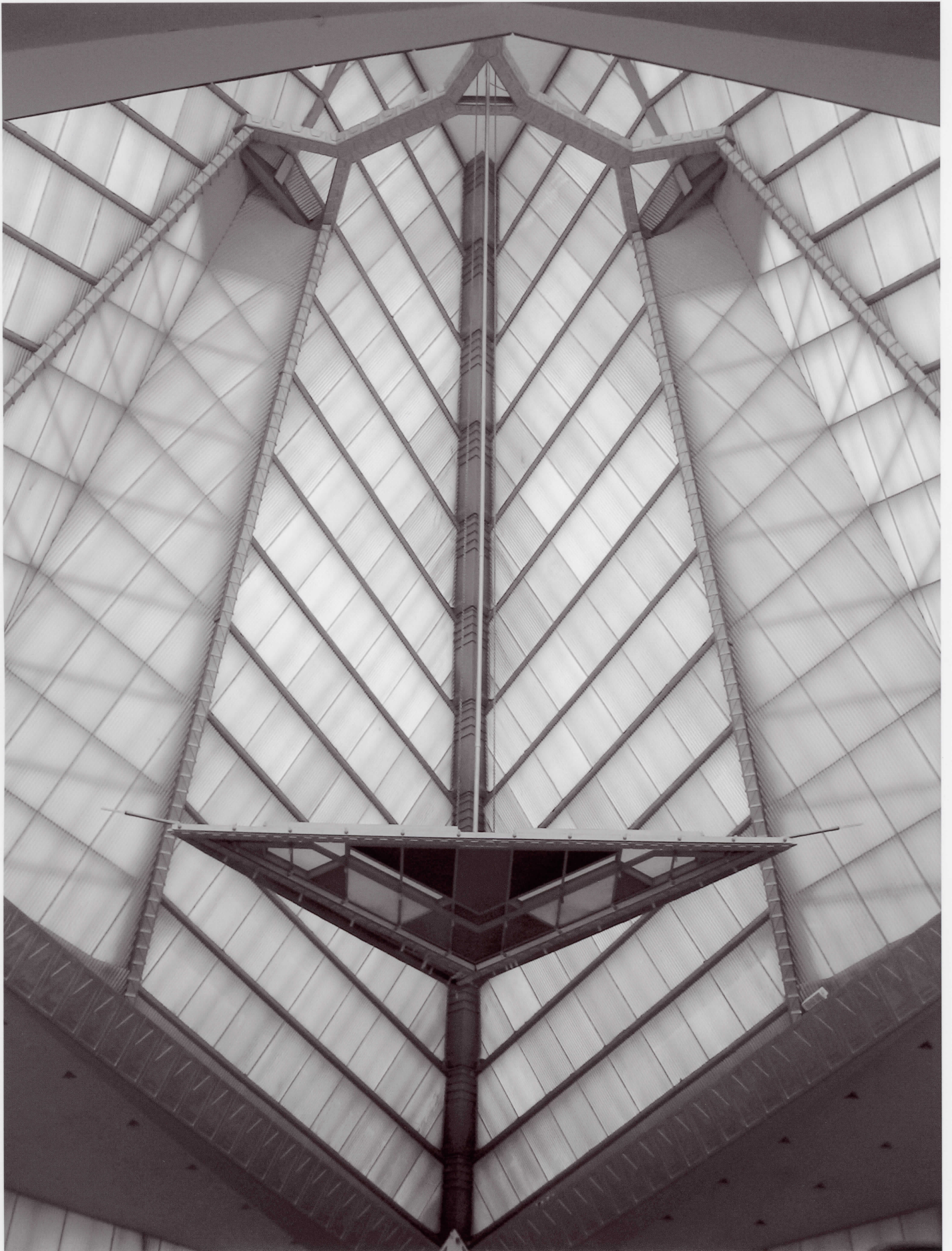


Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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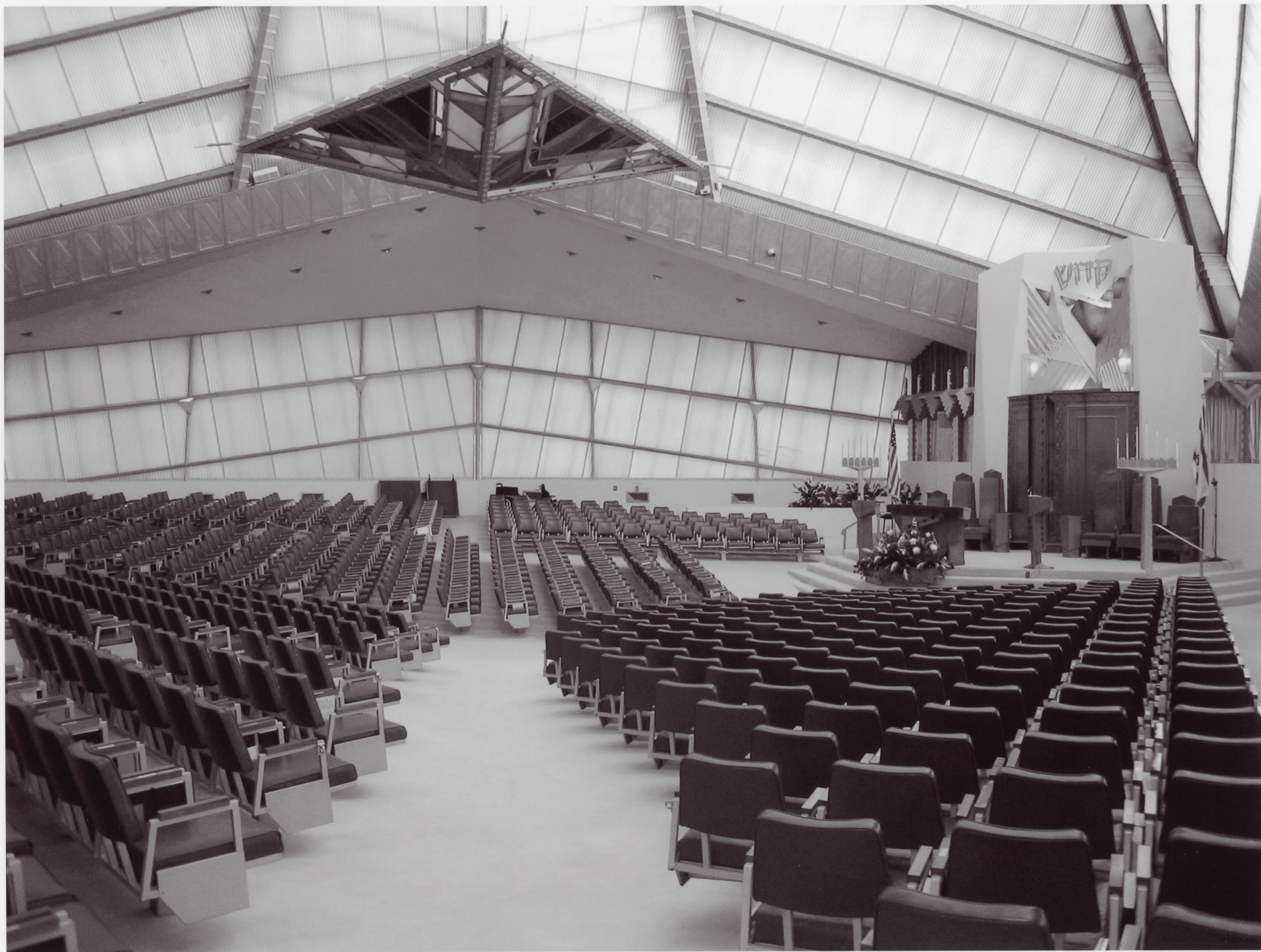
Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Penn

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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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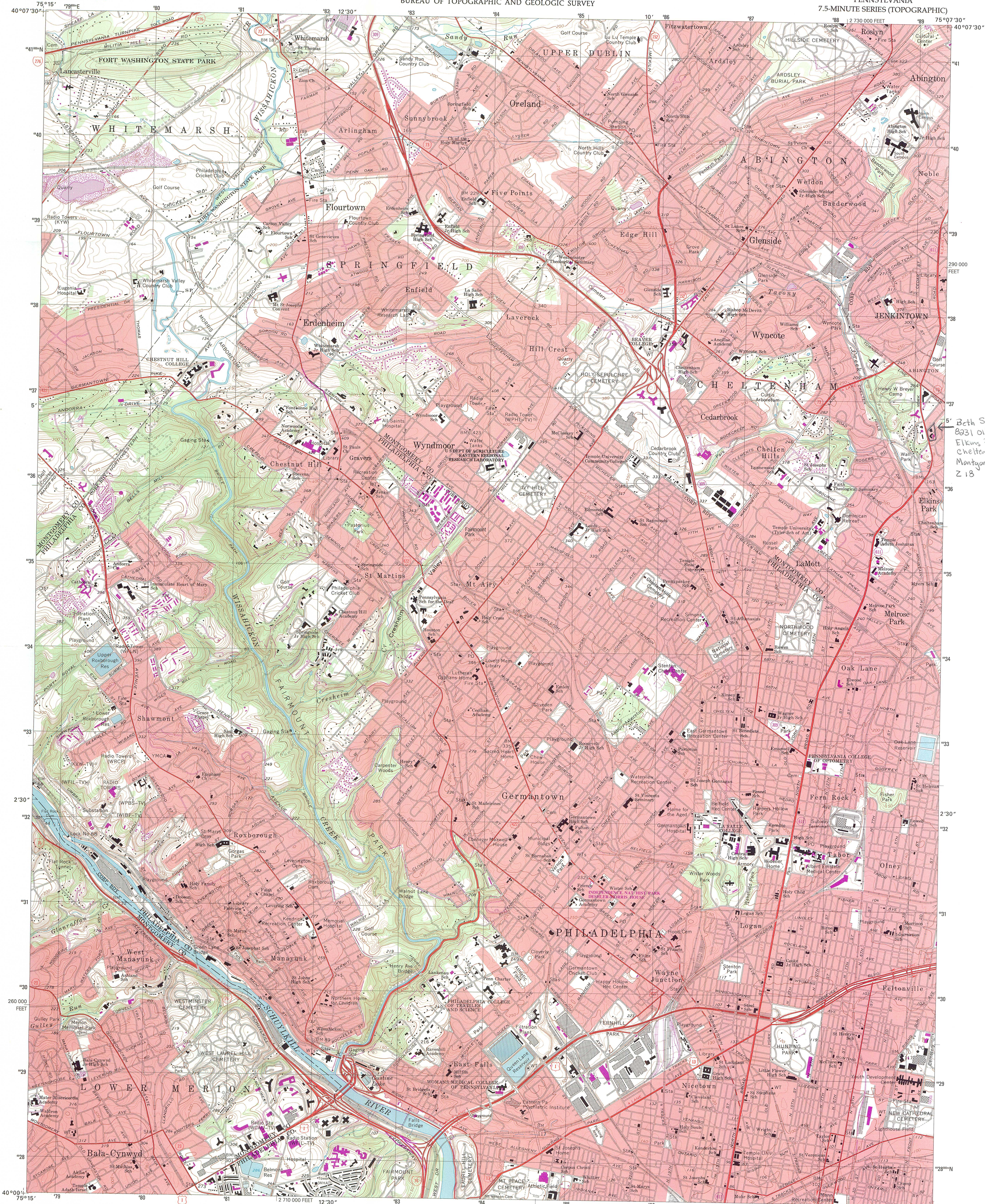
Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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Beth Shalom Congregation
Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
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5' Beth Shalom Congregation
8931 Old York Road
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania
Cheltenham Township
Montgomery County
Z 18 E 489216
N 4436896

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
in cooperation with Pennsylvania Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources, Bureau of Topographic and Geologic Survey

Topography compiled 1950. Planimetry derived from imagery taken
1981. Photorevised using imagery dated 1997; no major culture
or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1967
boundaries, other than corporate, revised 1998

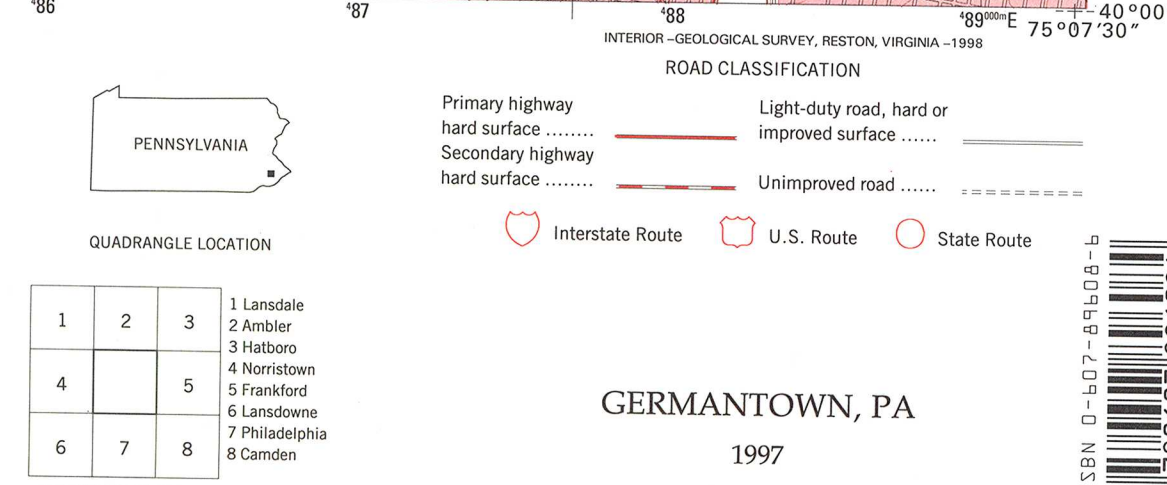
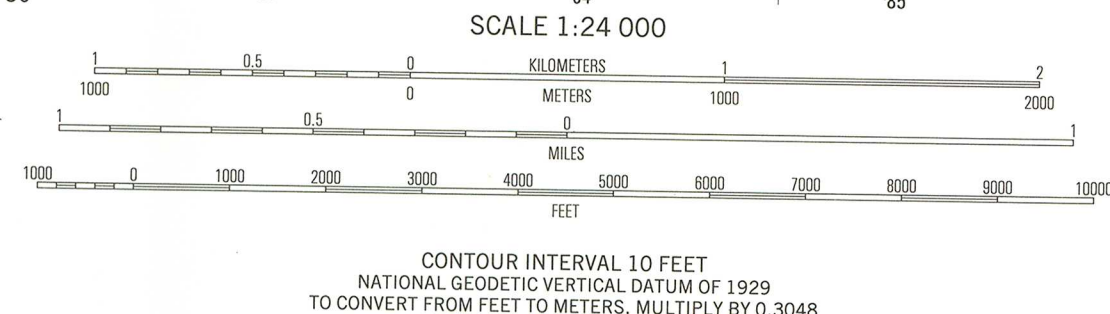
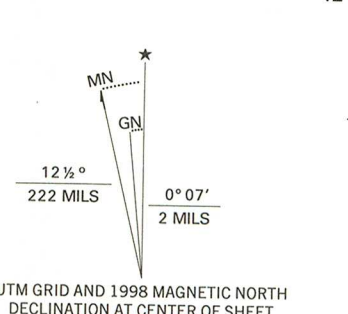
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and
10 000-foot ticks: Pennsylvania coordinate system, south zone
(Lambert conformal conic)

1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 18

North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed
corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83
for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic
Survey NADCON software

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
the National or State reservations shown on this map

Information shown in purple may not meet USGS content standards
and may conflict with previously mapped contours



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1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Beth Sholom Congregation

Other Names/Site Number: Beth Sholom Synagogue; Temple Beth Sholom

The Congregation refers to the people - est. 1999
I think Synagogue

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 8231 Old York Road

Not For Publication: N/A

City/Town: Elkins Park (Cheltenham Township)

Vicinity: N/A

State: PA County: Montgomery Code: 091

Zip Code: 19027-1595

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ☒

Public-local: ☐

Public-State: ☐

Public-Federal: ☐

Category of Property

Building(s): ☒

District: ☐

Site: ☐

Structure: ☐

Object: ☐

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

1 buildings

 sites

 structures

 objects

1 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ____ Entered in the National Register
____ Determined eligible for the National Register
____ Determined not eligible for the National Register
____ Removed from the National Register
____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Religion

Sub: Religious facility, church school

Current: Religion

Sub: Religious facility, church school

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Modern Movement (Wrightian)

Materials (~~Enter categories from instructions~~)

Foundation: Reinforced concrete

Roof: metal (Steel, aluminum)

Walls: concrete, metal, glass, ~~Plexiglas~~ synthetic

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Site and Location

- OK.
The Beth Sholom Congregation property sits at the crest of, and commands a south-facing ridge near the top of a dramatically steep rise on Old York Road in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, a community in the inner ring suburbs just beyond the Philadelphia city limits ^{northern} on the north in Montgomery County. It is located in Cheltenham Township. Wright sited the synagogue building to take advantage of its location, and it is visible from a distance, particularly at night when lit. It ^{thus} sits as a beacon of faith within, and above its surroundings, ^{MC} it is a dramatic presence in its immediate area, standing out from those surroundings and above most of the buildings in its immediate viewshed. The area in which it was built was first settled in the colonial period as an agricultural district in the general region of the city of Philadelphia, ^{well north of the} but well to the north of its initial boundaries. By the mid-nineteenth century, the area surrounding Beth Sholom had been established as a region of elite country estates. With the expansion of the city's boundaries in 1854, Philadelphia became adjacent to what would come to be known as Elkins Park, in honor of traction magnate William L. Elkins, whose large estate was nearby. *repetitive*

middle-class suburban
The predominant character of the area surrounding the Beth Sholom property ~~as a middle-class suburb~~ was established during the post-World War II era in which the synagogue was constructed, and was a key reason for locating the new building in this area. Old York Road is the site of a number of other Jewish congregations that, like Beth Sholom, moved north out of Philadelphia in this period. Off of Old York Road, the suburban streets surrounding the Beth Sholom property are relatively small in scale and are characterized by moderate-size, single houses on tree-lined streets.

The Beth Sholom Congregation property sits on the eastern side of Old York Road, which in this area is a four-lane state road (Route 611) running predominantly north-south. The property, which is just under four acres in size, slopes from the highest point on the northwest, where the Wright synagogue building is sited, toward the south and east along the side of the ridge. The lot is bounded on the north by Foxcroft Road and on the south and east by other properties. The Wright-designed synagogue building is moderately set back from Old York Road, and is fronted by a grass lawn and low, reinforced concrete, Wright-designed fountain on the west on axis with the main door on the west elevation (Photo 2). The fountain structure consists of a lozenge-shaped, shallow pool with low-level jets. An access drive, also part of the original Wright scheme, fronts the building on the west and provides access to this main elevation from Foxcroft Road, although it is rarely used (Photos 3, 4). To the south of the main synagogue building is the non-contributing administrative and educational building, which consists of the Sheerr Religious School and the Samuel and Anna Cross Annex built in 1951 and 1969, respectively (Photos 5, 6).

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0 The east, or rear of property is taken up primarily by a paved parking lot that serves these buildings, and which is accessed by entrances on both Old York Road to the south of the non-contributing building and on the north from Foxcroft Road to the east, or rear of the Wright synagogue building. The buildings are connected by a covered walkway which was not part of Wright's scheme (Photo 7, shown at left). Garden areas have been established between the buildings and around the non-contributing building.

Synagogue Building

Exterior

SYNAGOGUE designed by FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT
Overall, the Beth Sholom Congregation, Frank Lloyd Wright-designed synagogue building is in excellent condition, with virtually no alteration since its construction. There have been no substantial repair or replacement campaigns since its completion, *and* regular maintenance has *to* consisted of repainting the exterior, selected repair of some of the exterior glazing panels, and *other surfaces* maintenance. *of other surfaces*

It
The synagogue building is composed in a single, complex volume (Photo 2). The building consists *overall* of a broad, three-sided, *faceted* pyramidal glazed tower which rises from a *base of* reinforced concrete, steel, and glazed *base*. [This is formed on an irregular, yet bilaterally symmetrical hexagonal plan oriented on a west-east axis] The main, or entrance elevation, faces west toward Old York Road, while the southeast and northeast elevations come to a point facing east. This axis orients the worshipers to *face* the arks placed near this eastern point of the building, *and east* toward Jerusalem. This eastern orientation reflects a convention of Conservative Jewish synagogue planning practice in the mid-twentieth century.

Compare
The building is fundamentally organized as a reinforced concrete hexagonal base supporting an elaborated, tripod, metal and glazed superstructure that both shelters and expresses the main sanctuary space within. Overall, the impression of the building is of both a broad and tall, massive yet airy structure. This duality corresponds to the two dominant metaphors voiced from the beginning of the project by Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen (1894-1972), Wright's collaborator: *that of* a tent and *that of* a mountain (see Section 8 for a discussion of the symbolism associated with the building at the time of construction and after). Both the exterior and interior are organized on repeating motifs of triangular and hexagonal forms, *in the* in both two and three dimensions *used as* both fundamental structure and as decorative overlay.

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The lower, hexagonal-plan level of the building is composed in two horizontal, interlocking layers of different materials. The lower of these is sand-colored, painted, reinforced concrete base which is raked slightly inward on all sides as it rises. On the rear, eastern portion, this part of the base is higher where the building follows the falling contour of the slope of the site on the southeast. At the corners of the building (northwest, southwest, and east, respectively) which support the steel tripod above, pyramidal, prismatic, diamond-section forms project at an angle, accentuating this point of upward departure and support (Photos 2, 4, 7). On the west, or entrance elevation, these projecting points are embellished with lamps that resemble menorahs (Photo 8). On this elevation, the concrete base is pierced by the centrally-placed main entrance. The building is fronted on this elevation by a concrete platform with five steps of shallow rise, painted red according to the original scheme. Flush, triangular light fixtures in frosted glass articulate the point where the platform and the building base meet. The entrance itself is sheltered by a projecting, triangular canopy decorated with a variation on the triangular theme and finished in aluminum coating. It is roofed by rectangular metal panels which step up like reverse ceiling coffers (Photo 2). The canopy is both connected to the glass entrance pavilion and visually supported by two pilotis, painted black. The glass entrance pavilion, embellished with bronze-finish metal, projects forward from the façade, echoing the canopy form above. The door handle detail is repeated at each entrance to the building.

The openings on both the southeast and northeast elevations are symmetrically disposed along the east-west axis of the building. On the southeast elevation (Photo 7), which faces the parking lot, the concrete base is pierced by secondary entrances to the interior lounges and former kitchen spaces, and by vertical strip windows near the eastern corner of the building. The southwestern of these is accessed from the glass-covered walkway noted above, and is the primary means of accessing the building from this side. On the northeast elevation, the openings appear in mirror image to the southeast elevation.

On the tower and on the entrance canopy, the steel is finished with aluminum paint. The glazing throughout the tower exterior consists of a double layer of corrugated, sand-blasted glass reinforced with chicken wire, which superficially resemble the fiberglass and acrylic panels common in the period.¹ This scheme is a very complex variation – in scale, geometry, and

¹ One of the persistent confusions about the exterior glazing of the Beth Sholom building is that low-flying military

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materials—on a conventional nineteenth-century greenhouse construction technique in which lapped glass panes set in either iron or wood frames served as both roofing and glazing material. In the case of Beth Sholom, the raked courses of glazing panels are set on and in a metal frame consisting of both large vertical and smaller horizontal members.

The second layer of the building's base forms a transition from the concrete below to the faceted glazed pyramid above (Photos 2-4, 7). While this layer is hexagonal in plan, it is of the same metal and glazed materials as the pyramid above. As in the pyramid, the glazing panels are arranged in raked courses, supported by a steel framework. Above this, this portion of the building is roofed in rectangular metal panels like those of the entrance canopy on the main elevation. Like the canopy, these transition forms rise toward the middle.

The pyramidal tower is arguably the most memorable feature of the building's exterior (Photos 2-4, 7). The glazing is suspended like the sides of a tent from the three main structural tripod members. The glazing courses are raked and follow the rooflines of the transition form of the base below. On each elevation, a central bevel projects slightly from the glazing sections. These bevels, which in the early versions of Wright's design were intended to hold stained glass panels, are articulated by vertical metal beams and by a metal panel at the top. The structural metal tripod legs are articulated by seven lamps which project out at regularly spaced intervals, and by the rectilinear motifs found throughout (Photo 11). The upper portion of the building is topped by an aluminum finish cap which continues the decorative rectilinear motif of the other metal portions of the exterior (Photo 2).

Base (2)

jets from nearby Willow Grove Air Force, breaking the sound barrier caused the failure and subsequent replacement of the exterior panels with acrylic. Examination of the glazing as part of the writing of this nomination reveals that the double-layer, corrugated reinforced glass system survives, although there has been some small number of failures of selected panels since construction. The corrugated form of the glass panels, which resembles acrylic panels of the period, along with a certain yellowing on the exterior, is likely to blame for this confusion, along with some correspondence during the construction in which a layer of plastic was considered for the interior glazing layer. The discussion between Wright and several of the members of the Congregation related to the glazing can be found in the Beth Sholom Correspondence Binders (BSB) Volume 4, Beth Sholom Congregation Archives.

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Interior

As on the exterior, the building can be divided horizontally into two main portions: the upper, main sanctuary in the glazed, tripod tower and the lower base which houses a smaller chapel and social and service spaces. Also as on the exterior, the interior is bilaterally symmetrical along the east-west axis, and again, virtually all of the original details of Wright's design survive unaltered, from the plan of the spaces to the details of their finishes, including light fixtures, furniture, colors, flooring, and trim throughout the public spaces.

Entering the building from the main elevation on the west, one comes into the Harold L. Neuman Memorial Foyer, a typically Wrightian compressed space enclosed by glass and plain plaster walls (Photo 12). On axis with the exterior door is another set of doors, which like the exterior doors and the rest of the doors within the building, are characterized by simple bronze-finish frames surrounding clear glass panels, with the signature door handles of the building (Photo 9). Passing through these secondary doors, one enters the Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen Foyer, descending a set of steps (Photo 13). These two entry spaces are articulated by Cherokee red linoleum floors, off-white, rough-finish and smooth plaster walls, recessed triangular lighting fixtures at the base of walls (like those at the base on the main elevation), small, triangular pyramid lighting fixtures on the ceiling, aluminum finish hand rails, and decorative planters in walnut with rectilinear bas relief decoration like that on the exterior. Flanking this foyer on the left and right are men's and women's lounges (Photos 14, 15). On axis with the entrance, from this space one enters the chapel – the Sisterhood Sanctuary, used when a smaller space for worship is desired. The auditorium seating, in copper leather upholstery, is angled toward the reader's platform from which worship services are conducted – the *bimah* – at the eastern end of the diamond-plan space. The floor drops toward the *bimah* and a *ner tamid* (eternal light) lamp hangs above the *bimah*, which features Wright-designed furniture and lectern. In addition to the *ner tamid*, the room is lit by recessed lights at the eastern end decorated with aluminum-finish panels and triangular fixtures found in other locations on the lower level (Photos 16-20).

The Sisterhood Sanctuary is flanked by two mirror-image public spaces: the Robin Lounge on the north and the Presidents' Lounge on the south (Photos 21-24). These are both accessed by sets of descending steps and feature Cherokee red linoleum flooring as well as corner fireplaces. They differ slightly in furnishing. The President's Lounge also gives access on the east to a former small service kitchen from which the main cooking equipment has been removed and which is now primarily used for storage.

The upper level of the interior is devoted to the remarkable main sanctuary. From the Neuman Foyer, which is formed by a continuation of the entrance canopy from the outside, one passes through one of two symmetrical sets of glass doors topped by a glass panel on the north and

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south flanking the doors into the Cohen Foyer (Photo 25). From these doors two sets of shallow-riser, carpeted stairs lead up through cheek walls toward the sanctuary. The visitor does not perceive the sanctuary space in its entirety until he or she arrives at the top of the steps. The perception of the main sanctuary space, which opens up to the full height of the glazed tripod tower, is a remarkably dramatic moment in the experience of Beth Sholom, and part of the intended effect of awe of the building upon the worshiper (Photo 26). From the top of the stairs, the space opens up to the translucent tower above and below, as the carpeted floor slopes inward toward the center (Photo 27). The *bimah* platform rises at the eastern end of the space, placing the rabbi and the other officiates at the height of the middle of the seated congregation, a crucial point of the design (Photo 28).

The space is embellished with original Wright decorative elements which are concentrated at certain points in the room for effect and meaning as well as for more practical purposes of religious practice. At the northwest and southwest corners of the room, where the tripod legs meet the concrete base of the building, a pyramidal concrete form rises upward, echoing the projecting pyramidal form on the exterior at the corners of the building (Photo 29). This form holds memorial plaques and features flame-like walnut panels of Wright design. The flame motif is repeated in several places throughout the room, most notably in the bright seraphim-wing lamp which rises above the ark, the doors of which are also walnut. This motif enframes a key point of focus: the word "*kadosh*" (holy) in Hebrew letters. The *bimah* includes a number of pieces of Wright-designed furniture, including chairs for the rabbi, cantor, and others, as well as two lecterns and two menorahs that flank the ark and stand at the edge of the *bimah* platform. Behind the ark is a half-height wall topped with a screen, behind which are housed the organ and the original rabbi's study. This screen features a saw-tooth motif in reinforced concrete with pillars lit by bare translucent bulbs (Photo 30).

One of the most significant features of Wright's design in the main sanctuary is the large chandelier which is suspended from the center of the cap of the building and which hangs down into the middle of the space. This large, stained glass chandelier is triangular in plan, with one point directed eastward toward the *bimah* (Photo 31). The lamp is suspended above the point where the aisles between the seats come together.

The treatment of the interior of the tower itself is similar to that on the exterior. The translucent, inner layer of glazing panels are clearly visible. The rectilinear, low-relief decoration in aluminum finish is particularly concentrated on the inner edge of the roof of the transition portion of the base. The top of the exterior beveled panels are linked on the interior by a truss-like steel structure which comes together at the center to form a triangle. The wires from which the chandelier is suspended pass through this triangle.

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Overall, the original Wright synagogue building survives with a remarkable degree of historic integrity in all of its relevant aspects. There have been no major changes in materials from the original design to the present

Non-contributing building

To the south of the Wright-designed synagogue building is the administrative building and education building (the Sheerr Religious School Building and the Samuel and Anna Cross Annex, Photos 5, 6), which was not part of the Wright project. Since Wright's design is the basis of the they synagogue's national significance, this building is therefore non-contributing. The earlier section, the Sheerr Religious School Building, on the northwest, was completed ~~from~~  plans by Philadelphia architect Israel Demchick two years before Wright's involvement with the Congregation, and was the first building constructed on the property after the congregation's purchase of the lot in 1949. This portion of the building is of reinforced concrete structure, constructed in two-stories on an L-plan, and is clad on the exterior in yellow brick, with reinforced concrete details, metal strip windows, and a flat roof. The original entrance, now rarely used, is on the western side and is fronted by a flat-roofed portico supported on a single reinforced concrete column. The second portion of the building, on the southeast, is also L-shaped in plan, creating a central courtyard enclosed by the two phases. This portion of the building was completed in 1969 from plans by Philadelphia architects Thalheimer and Weitz, and is similar in detail to the Demchick portion, with flat-roofed, tan-brick volumes.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National

Register Criteria

A ___ B ___ C X D ___

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions):

A X B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G X

NHL Criteria:

4

NHL Criteria Exception:

1

NHL Theme(s):

III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. Architecture, landscape architecture and urban design

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Significant Person: N/A

Period of Significance: 1954-1959

Significant Dates:

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Wright, Frank Lloyd

Historic Contexts: XVI. Architecture
S. Wrightian

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Beth Sholom Congregation is nationally significant as one of the most important late works of the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and merits recognition as a National Historic Landmark as much as do such important Wright public buildings as the First Unitarian Society Meeting House of Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin; the Administration Building and Research Tower of the S. C. Johnson Company, and as such important late works of Wright's long career as the J. N. and Bernadine Hagan House. Beth Sholom is one of the seventeen Wright buildings singled out by the national American Institute of Architects for their contribution to American culture. Brendan Gill, who among the well-known authors on Wright is perhaps most eloquent on Beth Sholom and its significance, described the designing of this synagogue as "one of the most important events in Wright's career."²

In addition to this significance, Beth Sholom is unique among his projects as his only synagogue, and thus his only non-Christian ecclesiastical design. It therefore has added importance within the already rarified group of his religious buildings. Finally, Beth Sholom is significant within Wright's work for the unusually collaborative relationship that led to its creation, in which Wright worked closely with Beth Sholom's rabbi, Mortimer J. Cohen (1894-1972), to complete the design of this remarkable project.

A group of Philadelphia in the Logan neighborhood founded BSC in 1919, during a period when Conservative Jewish congregations were being founded and growing at a rapid rate in urban contexts throughout the United States.³ Its first building, designed by the relatively minor Philadelphia architect Jacob Feldstein, was constructed at the intersection of Broad Street, the principal north-south thoroughfare of the city from the mid-nineteenth century on, and Courtland Street, in the heart of an area of the city that was developed into a dense residential and industrial zone between the Civil War and World War I. While much of the development in this period and area was characterized by factory buildings and row

² Brendan Gill, *Many Masks, a Life of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), p. 461.

³ Jack Wertheimer, "The Conservative Synagogue," in Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): pp. 116-123.

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houses, religious institutions, commercial development and larger residences were centered on the major streets, of which Broad was the most prominent.

Just as Beth Sholom's initial founding corresponds to the pattern of expansion of Conservative Judaism in the United States before the Depression, so did the decision to move to the suburbs reflect the trends of the post-World War II period, one of "synagogue boom." As Jack Wertheimer has noted, this period marked a substantial demographic shift among a cohort of members of these "mushrooming" Conservative Jewish congregations, many of whom were the children of immigrants, and who, coming "of age in the post-war era . . . moved to suburbia after World War II [like] the larger population of Americans." In other words, the younger members of Beth Sholom were now becoming more integrated into the demographic patterns of the general American population than had their forbears who lived in "densely populated Jewish enclaves."⁴

Rabbi Cohen (who had been with the synagogue since its founding) and the Beth Sholom Congregation board first began contemplating the move that would lead to Wright's commission in the late 1940s. The property in Elkins Park was purchased in January, 1949 under the pretext of building a new school building for the congregation on the lot, rather than a new synagogue itself since there was some resistance among members.⁵ The new building, soon dubbed the "Beth Sholom Annex" was completed in the fall of 1951 from designs by Philadelphia architect Israel Demchick (1890-1980), who specialized in the synagogue design and who was a member of the congregation.⁶ The leaders of the congregation had noted the post-war tendency of their younger members "when they marry, to move northward," from Philadelphia into suburban lower Montgomery County, including the area around Elkins Park. The leadership, spurred by Rabbi Cohen, wished to compete and "keep Beth Sholom a young and strong Congregation" by following the trend of other congregations in moving out of the city to the Elkins Park vicinity. In 1953, having made progress in the diplomatic effort to persuade the congregants to re-locate

⁴ Wertheimer, 125.

⁵ Leo and Vera Posel to Beth Sholom Congregation, 6 July 1949, Montgomery County Deed Book 2001, page 287 et seq., Office of the Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds, Norristown, Pennsylvania.

⁶ See Emily T. Cooperman and Sandra Tatman, "Demchick, Israel," Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project, http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/22676, accessed 4/1/05

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their temple, the rabbi learned of an impending possible merger of two other Jewish congregations, and their planned relocation to a nearby location. He asserted to the synagogue board that he felt “that time is in our favor and that if we work fast we could be The Synagogue in this area and find that we meet the needs of sufficient members to maintain a fine and growing institution in an area which is fast becoming populated with Jewish families.”⁷

Wright’s involvement with Beth Sholom began with a suggestion by sculptor Boris Blai (1890-1985), then dean of the nearby Tyler School of Art. Blai, who had formed a friendship with Wright while Blai was teaching at Florida Southern College suggested that Wright might provide a means of creating “The Synagogue” Rabbi Cohen sought. In November 1953, Rabbi Cohen wrote to introduce himself to Wright. This crucial first contact established the foundation of their subsequent working relationship in several respects. From the beginning of his letter, Rabbi Cohen couched his idea for the new temple building in terms that related to the greater social “mainstreaming” of the synagogue’s younger congregants, placing the temple’s design within the larger American cultural context. After introducing himself and the concept of a new synagogue, Rabbi Cohen went straight to this point –

There is a dream and hope in my heart and in [Dean Blai's] of erecting a Synagogue . . . (in simple, modern design) that will be an inspiration for generations to come, so that people will come from all over the country to see it and find here a 'new thing' – the American spirit wedded to the ancient spirit of Israel.⁸

Rabbi Cohen enclosed with his letter lengthy explanatory notes that elaborated key Jewish liturgical and philosophical points as well as programmatic needs and desiderata. His key opening point was that “Judaism has been and is a democratic religion whose leaders are not set apart from the congregations, but lead and guide from the very midst.” He elaborated this by asserting that

⁷ Board of Directors’ Meeting 14 September 1953, Beth Sholom Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes 1949 ff.

⁸ Mortimer J. Cohen (hereafter MJC) to Frank Lloyd Wright (FLW), 16 November 1953, Beth Sholom Correspondence Binders (BSB) Volume 1, Beth Sholom Congregation Archives.

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In spirit, Judaism is so close to the American democratic spirit that we need a new type of Synagogue to express this remarkable spiritual fact. Our churches, too, once they become fully democratized will recognize this marriage of Christianity and Americanism by building a new type of building to embody this conception. Judaism has already, through the ages, created that type of democratic building in the traditional synagogue . . .⁹

Not mentioned before now.

It was undoubtedly this democratic, ecumenical argument that persuaded Wright to accept a commission for a building type he had heretofore eschewed. As Goodwin has also noted, Jewish clients hold a significant and substantial place in Wright's career, and it cannot be said of Wright that he was anti-Semitic.¹⁰ However, as Wright remarked in a speech at an initial fund-raising dinner for the Beth Sholom project held in Philadelphia in June, 1954 after he had accepted the commission, he had "been asked to design a Jewish synagogue once or twice before . . . and I have always declined. I said I would design an American Synagogue for Jews in America, but I would not design a Jewish Synagogue." It was Rabbi Cohen's recontextualization of Jewish experience and religion within American culture more generally (which paralleled the demographic changes in Conservative Judaism more generally) that expanded the project intellectually for Wright and placed it within the realm of his own experience. As Robert McCarter has noted, Wright believed that "his own [transcendentalist] principles related to . . . all religions."¹¹ Rabbi Cohen's presentation of his desired building appealed to the universal elements of spirituality that Wright embraced. It is therefore not surprising that Wright would use his unbuilt Steel Cathedral design of 1926, which had been envisioned as housing a multitude of faiths (albeit Christian), as the point of departure for his design for Beth Sholom.¹²

Clearly, Wright and Rabbi Cohen had a meeting of the minds beyond this single point, however crucial it may have been. In addition to this key point, the rabbi's initial letter established

⁹ Typescript, Frank Lloyd Wright Speech, 3 June 1954, BSB Volume 2, Beth Sholom Congregation Archives.

¹⁰ George M. Goodwin "Wright's Beth Sholom Synagogue," *American Jewish History* 86.3 (1998): 325. Goodwin also notes that Dankmar Adler, the lesser-known partner in the firm of Adler and Sullivan, the office in which Wright worked in his early career, was Jewish and had a substantial Jewish clientele.

¹¹ Robert McCarter, *Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Phaidon, 1997), 291.

¹² The Beth Sholom archives also make it clear that Rabbi Cohen had to justify the choice of the gentile Wright for the architect of the new synagogue building. This was done on the basis of King Solomon's choice of the non-Jewish Bezalel for the architect of the Temple.

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another important facet of the working relationship between the clergyman and the architect. Specifically, that the rabbi would take the interpretive and design lead in the project regarding the embodiment of Jewish practice and belief in Wright's Beth Sholom building. In this, Rabbi Cohen not only directed many of the details of the design as it developed so that it would conform appropriately to Jewish practice, but also provided an articulate commentary on the spiritual, metaphoric meaning for the forms Wright created. In other words, Cohen verbally grounded the visual, abstract features of Wright's design, inferring religious meanings that were both specific to Judaism and more general to the Judeo-Christian tradition. While it may have begun with Wright's response to Cohen's initial letter, this process was first articulated by Rabbi Cohen himself upon his receipt of the first perspective and plan sketches from Wright in March, 1954. Cohen characterized his impulse to interpret within the context of the American ideology he had previously voiced to Wright, and added an element of the religious, saying in a letter to Wright of 19 March, that "if my interpretation of your remarkable design for Beth Sholom varies from what you have intended, I could claim the divine right of every individual to the evoked idea of his own spirit (and I know I would be respected by you for this emphasis upon the divine right of the individual)."¹³

The audience for this commentary from the beginning was both internal and external to the congregation, and Wright seemed content with this collaboration of form and meaning with the rabbi. For example, metaphoric meanings for the building arise in articles announcing the commission published in the *Sunday Bulletin* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on 23 May 1954. The two most enduring of these, the understanding of the building as a "traveling Mount Sinai" and as a metaphor for the hands of God holding the people of Israel, were included in these early publications.¹⁴ Some of the most extensive commentary, much of which arose out of Cohen's letter of 19 March 1954, was compiled to distribute to congregation members and others as a fund-raising and public-relations effort for the project.¹⁵ Clearly, many of these may have first

¹³ MJC to FLW, 19 March 1954, BSB, Volume 1.

¹⁴ Beth Sholom Archives. Wright is also quoted as describing the general experience of the visitor to the building itself as being like "resting in the very hands of God." *Architectural Record* 108 (May 1958): 177. A photograph taken by Philadelphia commercial photographer Jacob Stehman published in several locations superimposed Wright's initial plan on Rabbi Cohen's hands shown together and palm up, with thumbs slightly outstretched. This photograph is now in the collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

¹⁵ MJC, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Synagogue," Beth Sholom Archives.

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been discussed at Wright and Cohen's first meeting in December 1953 in New York, but there is no detailed record of such content in this conversation.

Thus, Wright and Cohen collaborated over the course of the project not only on the details of the design but on their meaning. This collaboration was made possible by the complementary aspects of the personalities of the learned, articulate and ambitious rabbi and the visionary architect, and by Wright's relative ignorance in the details of Judaism. In Rabbi Cohen, Wright found more than an informative client who simply supplied him with the details of Jewish practice. He found a partner in creating a remarkably meaningful religious building, what Wright characterized in his letter accompanying his first drawings sent to Cohen in the spring of 1954 as "a coherent statement of worship."¹⁶ It is one of the salient features of Beth Sholom's significance that the interpretive process begun by Rabbi Cohen has continued in most commentators to the present. The building has thus been, from the beginning, an analogue to a sacred text.

A clear instance of the character of this collaboration can be found in Cohen's directive regarding the entrance canopy that shelters the main entrance of the building. In responding to Wright's initial scheme for the relatively minimal cover of the door, the rabbi wrote:

As I understand it at present, it seems to be purely functional. It serves the purpose of covering the people, if it rains. It is also ornamental, yet not obtrusively so. I would like to make it symbolic in the spirit of the whole design. I would like to see the covering, in stylized form of course, represent the hands of the ancient priests, outstretched in blessing. The priests, in Biblical days, used to send the people away, and also greet them, with what we call 'the priestly benediction.'

'May the Lord Bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face to shine upon . . . etc.'

Numbers 6.24

My thought is this: Imagine your two hands together in prayer. Then, pivoting them on the thumb and first (index) fingers, revolve them up until both hands are in one plane. This will give you the triangular effect of the present covering. Now, I would so shape the copper and the other material in the covering as to make suggestively – and not too

¹⁶ FLW to MJC, 14 March 1954, BSB, Volume 1.

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obviously – the hands of the priests.

I attach herewith – with due apologies – my horrible sketch.¹⁷

The final projecting canopy was the result.

Another collaborative instance can be traced in the plan of the building. In his introductory letter to Wright, Rabbi Cohen had supplied a sketch plan for the building of an elongated octagon.¹⁸ On February 2nd, 1954, Wright telegrammed Rabbi Cohen asking “Any objection to fundamental hexagon or triangle instead of octagon,” to which Rabbi Cohen deferred to the architect, responding “no objection . . . leave entirely to you.”¹⁹ Thus ~~was~~ the fundamental geometric order of the project was established. This geometric ordering is hardly unique to the Beth Sholom project. In fact, it is a hallmark of Wright’s mature work. Wright used triangular forms and protruding points as projecting forms in several late career ecclesiastical projects, including the Anne Pfeiffer Chapel at Florida Southern College, Lakeland, Florida, ~~of~~ (1938) and in the First Unitarian Society Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin ~~of~~ (1949). The irregular hexagon plan is unusual, however, in Wright’s work, and probably arose out of Cohen’s initial concept of the plan.

After the initial presentation drawings and fund-raising dinner in June of 1954, a ground-breaking ceremony was held on November 14th, 1954.²⁰ Working drawings were complete for the purposes of bidding early in 1955. Haskell Culwell, the builder of the Harold C. Price Company Tower in Oklahoma City ~~of~~ (1952), Wright’s tallest building, built a model of the Beth Sholom design, completed in April, 1956. After the failure to find a satisfactory local contractor, Culwell became the builder for Beth Sholom as well.²¹ Fund-raising delayed the project, whose

¹⁷ MJC to FLW, 8 April 1954, BSB, Volume 1.

¹⁸ A copy of this sketch is included with Cohen’s letter of 16 November 1953, Beth Sholom Correspondence Binders, Volume 1.

¹⁹ BSB, Volume 1.

²⁰ The ceremony was documented in a brief notice in the *New York Times*: “Wright Starts Synagogue Work” 15 November 1954, p. 16.

²¹ Correspondence with Culwell is preserved in the Beth Sholom Archives. See also Goodwin: 341-342. A detailed account of the progress of the project can be found in Goodwin (340 ff.) and Patricia Talbot Davis, *Together They Built a Mountain* (Lititz, PA: Sutter House, 1974).

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budget kept climbing, and details of the interior design progressed through 1956 and early 1957 with construction having begun in the summer of 1956. During 1958, the project struggled toward completion. Wright visited the site for the last time in January 1959, and died four months later, never seeing the opening, which took place on the 20th of September, 1959. (This) was plagued by problems with water leaks (as are many of Wright's buildings). Since then, the Beth Sholom Congregation synagogue building has continued to be used continually for worship services as it had been envisioned by Wright and Rabbi Cohen and has survived essentially unaltered.

The opening was plagued with water problems

Despite the fact that Beth Sholom is one of the seventeen buildings of Wright's buildings singled out by the national AIA for their contribution to American culture, Beth Sholom is, as George Goodwin has noted, under-represented in the scholarly literature on Wright in comparison to many of his other significant commissions, particularly his ecclesiastical ones.²² This is, however, not an indication of the lack of significance of the project itself. Instead, it is symptomatic of the place of the American synagogue as a building type within the scholarly literature on American architectural history generally. Relative to other religious buildings, and particularly relative to Christian churches, synagogues have received little attention from architectural historians. Instead, the synagogue has principally been investigated through scholarship in other disciplines, particularly specialists in Jewish history.²³ Beth Sholom is, however, far from absent from the scholarly investigation of Wright's work. Considerable attention has been paid to Beth Sholom on the part both of Gill and of the recent monograph on Wright written by Robert McCarter.²⁴

Among the scholarly writing on Wright's Beth Sholom Congregation, Brendan Gill provides the most eloquent discussion of the significance of Beth Sholom as well as an explanation of the relative lack of attention to the commission. As noted above, Gill has characterized Beth Sholom as "one of the most important events in Wright's career." In addition to the sociological reasons

²² Goodwin, 326.

²³ Among these might be noted Wertheimer, op. cit., as well as Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1976). It should also be noted that an issue of *American Jewish History* (90.1: 2002) was devoted to a re-appraisal to Jick's work.

²⁴ McCarter, 297-301.

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cited by Goodwin, Gill accounts for its relatively low profile in the literature by the fact that “it was under construction at the same time as the Guggenheim Museum and it remained in the Guggenheim’s shadow then as it does today.” Further, Gill notes its geographic location and general social context as a substantial cause of this lack of attention, remarking that

Wright had been working on the plans for the Guggenheim over a period of many years and had gained much publicity both for the museum and for himself . . . the Guggenheim was being built on Fifth Avenue, in the heart of the most publicity-conscious city on earth; the synagogue was being built in the near-anonymity of Elkins Park, a wealthy, predominantly Jewish suburb of Philadelphia. For decades, Philadelphia had been a rival of Brooklyn as the butt of wisecracks. . . . The shadow cast by the Guggenheim was also in part of Wright’s making. . . .²⁵

Gill goes on to note that “nevertheless, [Beth Sholom] is certainly the Guggenheim’s equal as a work of art and far surpasses it as a work of architecture.” Crucially, Gill also characterizes why Beth Sholom’s design itself is less ingratiating to the general viewer than the contemporary museum building:

Beth Sholom is nothing like as photogenic as the voluptuously roly-ploy Guggenheim. Its aggressively angular shape, both inside and outside, is sufficiently difficult to comprehend in three dimensions, as the human eye confronts it, and all but impossible to reproduce it photographically, in two dimensions. Wright said of the rounded Johnson Wax building that it was a female counterpart to the brusque maleness of the Larkin building; in something like the same fashion, the synagogue is the male counterpart of the female Guggenheim. It is awesome but not winsome. We earn our delight in it by stages, while in the Guggenheim delight is instantaneously bestowed upon us.²⁶

Perhaps most significantly, Gill has captured most articulately Wright’s success in creating what the architect characterized as a “coherent statement of worship.” While the building may not have been “ingratiating,” that was certainly never its purpose: it was intended to inspire awe and a sense of the divine through a building that provokes an experience of the sublime in the

²⁵ Gill, 461-462.

²⁶ Gill, op. cit.

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Burkean sense. No other of Wright's religious buildings is discussed in the literature as Gill does here, again comparing Beth Sholom to the Guggenheim:

Standing in the Guggenheim, one is conscious of the formidable ego of the designer, present at every turn of the ramp. Standing in Beth Sholom, one senses that the ego of the designer has been subsumed into the work, which in Wright's case amounts to a near-miracle. Even to visitors who, like me, hold no formal religious beliefs whatever, the structure conveys the sense of an immanent collective sacredness, purged of individuality.

Wright had promised the congregation of Beth Sholom that their temple would be a 'Mount Sinai cupped in the hands of God,' and for once his outrageous rhetoric amounted to the truth.²⁷

Beth Sholom Congregation is thus nationally significant not only as one of the most important of the late works of the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Its significance within Wright's work also rests on the unusually (within Wright's projects) high degree of collaboration with his client. Finally, and perhaps most important, it is particularly significant as what is arguably his most successful religious design, one that has continued to inspire that sense of religious experience not only in its regular users but also in much larger audiences.

²⁷ Gill, op. cit.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS)

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☒ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☒ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # PA-6033

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☒ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☒ Other

Name of repository: Beth Sholom Archives

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 3.850 acres

UTM References

Zone	Easting	Northing
18	489216	4436896

Verbal Boundary Description:

The property includes the entirety of parcel number 31-00-30211-50-2 in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary is the entire property conveyed by Leo and Vera Posel to the Beth Sholom Congregation on 9 June 1949 as found in Montgomery County Deed Book 2001, page 287. The property includes ~~the~~ includes the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed synagogue and all associated non-contributing buildings.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

name/title: Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D., Director of Historic Preservation
organization: Cultural Resource Consulting Group date: April 10, 2006
street & number: 1500 Walnut Street, Suite 702 telephone: (215) 985-0995
city or town: Philadelphia state: PA zip code: 19102

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1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Beth Sholom Synagogue

Other Names/Site Number: Temple Beth Sholom

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 8231 Old York Road

Not For Publication: N/A

City/Town: Elkins Park (Cheltenham Township)

Vicinity: N/A

State: PA County: Montgomery Code: 091

Zip Code: 19027-1595

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ☒

Public-local: ☐

Public-State: ☐

Public-Federal: ☐

Category of Property

Building(s): ☒

District: ☐

Site: ☐

Structure: ☐

Object: ☐

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

Noncontributing

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register:

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

____ Entered in the National Register

____ Determined eligible for the National Register

____ Determined not eligible for the National Register

____ Removed from the National Register

____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Religion

Sub: Religious facility, church school

Current: Religion

Sub: Religious facility, church school

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Modern Movement (Wrightian)

Materials

Foundation: Reinforced concrete

Roof: Metal (steel, aluminum)

Walls: Concrete, metal, glass, synthetic

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Site and Location

The Beth Shalom Congregation property sits at the crest of, and commands a south-facing ridge near the top of a dramatically steep rise on Old York Road in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. Elkins Park is a community in the inner ring suburbs just beyond the Philadelphia's northern city limits in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County. Wright sited the synagogue building to take advantage of this location, and it is visible from a distance, particularly at night when lit. Beth Shalom Synagogue stands out from the surroundings and buildings in its immediate viewshed and its dramatic presence acts as a beacon of faith, both during the daytime and at night. The area was first settled during the colonial period as an agricultural district located well to the north of the city of Philadelphia's initial boundaries. By the mid-nineteenth century, the area surrounding Beth Shalom had been established as a region of elite country estates. With the expansion of the city's boundaries through consolidation in 1854, Philadelphia became adjacent to what would come to be known as Elkins Park, in honor of traction magnate William L. Elkins, whose large estate stood in the vicinity.

The area within which the Beth Shalom property sits attained a suburban, middle-class character in the decades following World War II. The adjacent residential development was a key reason for the synagogue's eventual construction in that locale. Old York Road is the axis along which a number of other Jewish congregations relocated from Philadelphia neighborhoods during the postwar period. The suburban lanes branching off of Old York Road near the Beth Shalom property have a relatively modest scale and are lined with medium-sized, detached single-family houses on treed lots.

The Beth Shalom Congregation property sits on the east side of Old York Road, which in this area is a four-lane state road (Route 611) that runs essentially north-south. Foxcroft Road forms the northern border of the lot, which backs up to other properties on its southern and eastern sides. Containing just under four acres, the property slopes downward to the south and east from its highest point located in the northwest quadrant—the site of the Wright-designed synagogue building. The synagogue building sits back slightly from Old York Road, and is fronted by a grass lawn and low, reinforced concrete fountain of Wright's design on axis with the main door on the building's west elevation (Photo 2). The fountain consists of a shallow, lozenge-shaped pool with low-level jets. An access drive—also part of the original Wright scheme—curves around the fountain in front of the building from Old York Road to Foxcroft; it is currently not in frequent use (Photos 3, 4). To the south of the main synagogue building is the non-contributing administrative and educational building, which consists of the Sheerr Religious School and the Samuel and Anna Cross Annex built in 1951 and 1969, respectively (Photos 5, 6). The east, or

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rear of property consists primarily of a paved parking lot that serves the complex and can be accessed from either an entrance on Old York Road positioned to the south of the administrative-education building or from Foxcroft Road to the east (rear) of the synagogue building. A covered walkway—not part of Wright’s scheme—connects the two structures (Photo 7, shown at left). Garden areas have been established between the buildings and around the non-contributing building.

Synagogue Building

Exterior

The synagogue that Frank Lloyd Wright designed for the Beth Sholom Congregation remains in excellent condition, with virtually no alterations since its construction. There have been no substantial repair or replacement campaigns since its completion, and regular maintenance has consisted of: repainting the exterior, selected repair of some of the exterior glazing panels, and maintenance of other surfaces.

The synagogue building is composed in a single, complex volume (Photo 2). It consists of a glazed, pyramidal tower, broad in form and made up of three sides, and a base of reinforced concrete, steel, and glass. These components rise from an irregular, yet bilaterally symmetrical, hexagonal plan in which the main (west) elevation faces Old York Road with the southeast and northeast elevations come to a point opposite, facing east. This axis orients the worshipers to the arks placed near the building’s eastern point of the building, facing in the direction of Jerusalem, an orientation that reflects a planning convention used in many Conservative Jewish synagogues built in the mid-twentieth century.

The pyramidal structure both shelters and expresses the main sanctuary space on the interior through its massive, yet simultaneously airy presence. This duality corresponds to two dominant metaphors voiced from the beginning of the project by Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen (1894-1972), Wright’s collaborator: that of a tent and that of a mountain (see Section 8 for a discussion of the symbolism associated with the building at the time of construction and after). Both the exterior and interior are organized on repeating motifs of triangular and hexagonal forms realized in both two and three dimensions both in the fundamental structure and as decorative overlay.

Below the glazed pyramid, two horizontal, interlocking layers of distinct materials comprise its base. The lower layer is reinforced concrete painted in a sand color and rakes slightly inward on all sides as it rises. On the rear (east) portion of the building, this part of the base is a larger portion of the whole because it drops further downward, responding to the falling contours of the sloping site. The corners of concrete base (facing northwest, southwest, and east) are prismatic and diamond-like in form and project at an angle that visually accentuates the upward lift of the

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pyramid's steel tripod above (Photos 2, 4, 7). Lamps resembling menorahs embellish the west sides of the northwest and southwest projections, which flank the main entrance piercing the center of the base's west side (Photo 8). A concrete platform reached by five low stairs painted red in the manner of the original scheme extends across this elevation and provides access to the doors. Triangular, frosted-glass light fixtures are inset into the base and articulate the point of intersection between the platform and the wall. A one-story glass-and-bronzed metal entrance pavilion juts outward from the center of the facade, which is sheltered by a broad, triangular canopy that extends outward from the top of the concrete portion of the base (Photo 9). The front of the canopy is decorated with repeating, aluminum coated metal panels designed on a variation of the building's triangular theme, echoed again in the handles of the two sets of glazed doors. Two slender posts rise upward from the forward portion of the entrance pavilion for added structural support.

The second layer of the building's base provides transition between the concrete below and the glazed pyramid above (Photos 2-4, 7). This layer is also hexagonal in plan, but extends upward and outward from the concrete base, using the same materials, metal and glass, used in the pyramid above. The lower half of this layer, immediately above the concrete, is sheathed in raked courses of glazing panels, and the upper portion, comprising the roof of the base, is covered in rectangular metal panels edged with the same repeating motif as used on the entrance canopy.

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The pyramidal tower is the most memorable feature of the building's exterior (Photos 2-4, 7). On the whole, the scheme is a very complex variation – in scale, geometry, and materials—on nineteenth-century construction techniques commonly used in greenhouses in which lapped glass panes set in either iron or wood frames served both as roofing and glazing material. With Beth Sholom, the raked courses of panels are set on and in a metal frame consisting of both large vertical and smaller horizontal members. The three structural-metal legs of the tripod are articulated by seven lamps set at regular intervals and by the familiar geometric decorative motifs. (Photo 11). The glazing appears to hang from the tripod, not unlike the sides of a tent from its poles. The courses of glazed panels follow the angle of the lines in the transitional layer of the base. The exterior panels themselves consist of a double layer of corrugated, sand-blasted glass reinforced with chicken wire, all of which superficially resembles the fiberglass and acrylic panels common to the period.¹ On each of the pyramid's three sides, a central bevel projects

¹ One persistent misconception about Beth Sholom Synagogue's exterior glazing is that low-flying military jets from nearby Willow Grove Air Force breaking the sound barrier have caused the failure and subsequent replacement of the exterior panels with ones crafted from acrylic. Fieldwork conducted as part of research for this nomination revealed that the double-layer, corrugated reinforced glass system survives, with only a small number of failures in random panels over the decades. The corrugated structure of the glass panels, which resembles acrylic panels of the period, coupled with a degree of yellowing on the exterior is likely to blame for this confusion, compounded by construction correspondence discussing the possibility of using plastic for an *interior* glazing layer. The dialogue between Wright and several of the members of the congregation related to the glazing can be found in the Beth Sholom Correspondence Binders (BSB) Volume 4, Beth Sholom Congregation Archives, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania.

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slightly from the other glazed sections. These bevels, which in the early versions of Wright's design were intended to hold stained glass panels, are articulated by metal vertical members topped by a decorative metal panel. The upper portion of the building is topped by an aluminum finish cap which continues the decorative rectilinear motif of the other metal portions of the exterior (Photo 2).

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Interior

The two-part arrangement of the exterior reflects a two-part arrangement of interior space: the upper, main sanctuary contained within in the glazed, tripod tower situated over a smaller sanctuary and social and service spaces on the ground floor of the base (Plan). As in elevation, the interior floor plan is bilaterally symmetrical along the east-west axis. Virtually all of the original, Wright-designed details survive unaltered, from the room divisions to finishes, including: light fixtures, furniture, colors, flooring, and trim. The main doors on the west elevation give onto the Harold L. Neuman Memorial Foyer, a typically Wrightian compressed entry area enclosed by glass and plain plaster walls and topped by an interior extension of the exterior entrance canopy (Photos 12 and 25). Beyond the second set of doors and a descending stair on the main entry access is the Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen Foyer (Photo 13). The doors are similar to others in the public areas and characterized by simple, bronze-finish metal frames surrounding single glass panels and opened by the building's signature door handles (Photo 9). Echoing the exterior entrance platform, the floors of the two entry foyers are covered with Cherokee red linoleum and feature the inset, floor-level triangular fixtures used outside. The walls are articulated in smooth- and rough-finished plaster. Handrails with an aluminum finish and decorative planters constructed of walnut and decorated with the repeated geometric decorative motif also contribute to a seamless interior-exterior composition. The doors to the men's and women's lounges are located to the right and left of the stair in the second foyer (Photos 14, 15).

Further along the entrance axis on the other side of this foyer, a second descending stair provides access to a smaller worship space known as the "Sisterhood Sanctuary." The auditorium seating, in copper-colored leather upholstery, is angled toward a reader's platform, the *bimah*, at the eastern end of the diamond-plan space from which worship services are conducted. The floor slopes toward the *bimah*, featuring Wright-designed furniture and aluminum-finish decorative panels, over which hangs a lamp of eternal light, the *ner tamid*. In addition to the *ner tamid*, the room is lit by recessed lights in a ceiling cove above the *bimah* and triangular ceiling fixtures found elsewhere on the lower level (Photos 16-20).

Two mirror-image public spaces flank the Sisterhood Sanctuary and interior foyer: the Robin Lounge on the north and the Presidents' Lounge on the south (Photos 21-24). These are both entered using stairs descending from the foyer and feature Cherokee red linoleum flooring and corner fireplaces, but differ slightly in their furnishings. The President's Lounge includes access to space once used as a service kitchen, but used primarily for storage.

The upper level of the interior is taken up almost entirely by the remarkable main sanctuary, reached by two generous staircases rising from the Neuman Foyer. Pairs of glazed doors to

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either side of the doors into the Cohen Foyer give access to the stairs (Photo 25). Only after arriving at the top of the stairs are visitors able to perceive the sanctuary space in its entirety. This dramatic introduction to the space, which extends upward for the full height of the glazed tripod tower, is a unique and powerful moment in experiencing Beth Sholom Synagogue. This perception was a planned contrast intended to have an awe-inspiring effect on the approaching worshippers (Photo 26). From the top of the stairs, the space not only opens upward, but also downward with a floor sloping toward the space's center (Photo 27). The *bimah* rises at the sanctuary's eastern end, placing the rabbi and the other officiates at approximately the same height as those people seated midway down the seating area for the congregation, a crucial point of the design (Photo 28).

Original Wright-designed decorative elements are concentrated at certain points in the room for both effect and meaning, as well as for the more practical aspects of religious practice. At the northwest and southwest corners of the room at the point where the tripod legs meet the concrete base of the building, a pyramidal concrete form rises upward and echoes similar forms projecting from the corners of the base on the exterior (Photo 29). These triangular features hold memorial plaques constructed of walnut and topped by panels bearing panels with an abstracted flame-like design. The flame motif is repeated in several places throughout the room, most notably in the bright seraphim-wing lamp rising above the ark, framing a key focal point: the word "*kadosh*" or "holy" in Hebrew letters. The *bimah* contains a number of pieces of Wright-designed furniture, including: chairs for the rabbi, cantor, and others, two lecterns, and two menorahs standing on either side at the edge of the platform. To either side of the ark, a half height wall is topped by a perforated screen that is visually enlivened by zigzag or saw-tooth pattern, which nods to the triangle theme used throughout the building. The area behind the screen houses the organ and what was originally the rabbi's study (Photo 30).

One of the most significant elements of Wright's scheme for the main sanctuary is the large chandelier hanging from the glazed tower's cap and suspended in the middle of the space. The form of the stained-glass chandelier is an inverted, three-sided pyramid; one of the corners points directly eastward toward the *bimah* (Photo 31). The materials and treatment of the tower's interior is similar to the exterior, with the structural members of the tripod finished with aluminum-finished panels bearing familiar geometric patterning. The translucent inner layer of glazing panels between the supports is clearly visible.

The plan, form, and detailing of the synagogue designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for the Beth Shalom Congregation survives in its entirety and maintains a high degree of physical and historical integrity. There have been no major changes or wholesale replacement of materials since the building was completed.

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Non-contributing building

Situated to the south of the Wright-designed synagogue, the Sheerr Religious School Building and the Samuel and Anna Cross Annex were not part of Wright's work for the Beth Shalom Congregation (Photos 5, 6). Since Wright's design is the basis of the synagogue's national significance, this administration-education building is a non-contributing structure. The L-shaped Sheerr Religious School Building, now comprising the building's northern and western sections, was completed on plans by Philadelphia architect Israel Demchick two years before Wright's involvement with the Congregation. It was the first building constructed after the congregation's purchase of the property in 1949. This portion of the reinforced concrete building contains two-stories on an L-shaped plan, and is faced in yellow brick with reinforced concrete details, metal strip windows, and a flat roof. The original entrance, oriented to Old York Road and now rarely used, is on the structure's western side and fronted by a flat-roofed portico supported on a single reinforced concrete column. The second portion of the building is also L-shaped and comprises the southern and eastern sections of what now is a building with a footprint in the shape of a square doughnut. This portion of the building was completed in 1969 on plans by Philadelphia architects Thalheimer and Weitz, and is similar in detail to the Demchick portion, with its flat roof and rectilinear volumes faced in tan brick.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National
Register Criteria

A ___ B ___ C X D ___

Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions):

A X B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G X

NHL Criteria:

4

NHL Criteria Exception:

1

NHL Theme(s):

III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. Architecture, landscape architecture and urban design

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Significant Person: N/A

Period of Significance:

1954-1959

Significant Dates:

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder:

Wright, Frank Lloyd

Historic Contexts:

XVI. Architecture
S. Wrightian

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Beth Sholom Synagogue is nationally significant as one of the most important late works of the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The structure possesses a level of significance equal to such other National Historic Landmarks as Wright's First Unitarian Society Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin (1950; NHL, 2004), and the Johnson Wax Company Administrative Offices and Research Laboratories in Racine, Wisconsin (1936-39, 1944-50; NHL, 1976), and such late works as the Marin County Civic Center in San Rafael, California (1962). Beth Sholom was one of the seventeen Wright buildings singled out in 1959 by the American Institute of Architects and the National Trust for Historic Preservation for their invaluable contribution to American culture. Brendan Gill, who ^{a noted authority on} ~~among the well-known Wright~~ authors speaks most eloquently on Beth Sholom and its importance, described the process of designing Beth Shalom Synagogue as "one of the most important events in Wright's career."²

As Wright's ^{the} only commission for a synagogue and his only non-Christian ecclesiastical design, Beth Shalom Synagogue possesses uniqueness among an already rarified group of Wright-conceived religious buildings. It also holds weight within Wright's long and distinguished for the unusually collaborative relationship that led to the building's creation, in which Wright

² Brendan Gill, *Many Masks, a Life of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), p. 461.

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worked closely with Beth Sholom's rabbi, Mortimer J. Cohen (1894–1972) to see this remarkable project through to completion.

Beth Sholom Congregation

A group of Philadelphians in the Logan neighborhood founded Beth Sholom Congregation in 1919 at a time of rapid expansion for Conservative Jewish congregations in American cities.³ Beth Sholom constructed its first building on plans by local Philadelphia architect Jacob Feldstein. It was located at the intersection of Broad Street, the city's principal north-south thoroughfare, and Courtland Street, on the border of a dense area of residential and industrial blocks mainly built between the Civil War and World War I. Factory buildings and row houses characterized much of this development, with religious institutions, commercial structures, and larger residences centered on major thoroughfares of which Broad was among the most prominent.

Just as Beth Sholom's founding corresponded to the pre-Depression pattern of expansion for Conservative Judaism in the United States, their decision to move to the metropolitan periphery after World War II reflected the postwar "synagogue boom" in the American suburbs. As noted by historian Jack Wertheimer, this boom stemmed from a substantial demographic shift within Conservative Jewish congregations, with the children of immigrants joining their non-

³ Jack Wertheimer, "The Conservative Synagogue," in Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): pp. 116-123.

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Jewish counterparts in the postwar middle-class exodus from cities.⁴ The younger members of the Beth Sholom Congregation were becoming more integrated into general American culture than their parents and grandparents who had lived in “densely populated Jewish enclaves.”⁵

Rabbi Mortimer Cohen, who had been with the congregation since its founding, and Beth Sholom’s board began contemplating the move that would lead to Wright’s commission in the late 1940s. They purchased the Elkins Park property in January, 1949, under the pretext of building a new school for the congregation rather building than a new synagogue since there was resistance among some members on the issue.⁶ They hired Philadelphia architect Israel Demchick (1890–1980), a member of the congregation who also specialized in synagogue design.⁷ The building was completed in the fall of 1951 and soon dubbed the “Beth Sholom Annex.” The leaders of the congregation noted that “when they marry,” their younger members “move northward” from Philadelphia into lower Montgomery County, including the area around Elkins Park.⁸ Spurred by Rabbi Cohen, the leadership wished to “keep Beth Sholom a young and strong Congregation” by moving the temple to Elkins Park and spent the next couple of years

⁴ Ibid, 125.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Leo and Vera Posel to Beth Sholom Congregation, 6 July 1949, Montgomery County Deed Book 2001, page 287 et seq., Office of the Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds, Norristown, Pennsylvania.

⁷ See Emily T. Cooperman and Sandra Tatman, “Demchick, Israel,” Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project, http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/22676, accessed 4/1/05.

⁸

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diplomatically persuading congregants to back the cause.⁹ In 1953, the Rabbi Cohen learned of a possible merger between two other Jewish congregations who planned to relocate to a location near Beth Sholom's lot in Elkins Park. In a presentation to the board of directors, he maintained:

that time is in our favor and that if we work fast we could be The Synagogue in this area and find that we meet the needs of sufficient members to maintain a fine and growing institution in an area which is fast becoming populated with Jewish families.¹⁰

The board accepted Rabbi Cohen's opinion on the matter and ^{plans to} a full move to Elkins Park began in earnest.

Frank Lloyd Wright, Rabbi Mortimer Cohen, and an "American Synagogue" Concept

Frank Lloyd Wright's appearance in the story began with a suggestion made by sculptor Boris Blai (1890–1985), then dean of the nearby Tyler School of Art. Blai became friends with Wright while teaching at Florida Southern College and suggested that Wright might provide a means for creating "The Synagogue" that Rabbi Cohen sought.¹¹ In November 1953, Rabbi Cohen wrote to Wright and introduced himself; this crucial first contact established the foundation of their

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¹⁰ Board of Directors' Meeting 14 September 1953, Beth Sholom Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes 1949 ff.

¹¹

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working relationship in several respects. Rabbi Cohen couched his idea for the new building relative to the greater social “mainstreaming” of the synagogue’s younger congregants, placing the its design within a broader American cultural context.¹² He straightforwardly stated:

There is a dream and hope in my heart and in [Dean Blai's] of erecting a Synagogue...(in simple, modern design) that will be an inspiration for generations to come, so that people will come from all over the country to see it and find here a 'new thing'—the American spirit wedded to the ancient spirit of Israel.¹³

Rabbi Cohen further elaborated on the inherent similarities between Judaism and American democracy, observing:

Judaism has been and is a democratic religion whose leaders are not set apart from the congregations, but lead and guide from the very midst...In spirit, Judaism is so close to the American democratic spirit that we need a new type of Synagogue to express this remarkable spiritual fact. Our churches, too, once they become fully democratized will recognize this marriage of Christianity and Americanism by building a new type of

¹² Mortimer J. Cohen (hereafter MJC) to Frank Lloyd Wright (FLW), 16 November 1953, Beth Sholom Correspondence Binders (BSB) Volume 1, Beth Sholom Congregation Archives, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania.

¹³ Ibid.

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building to embody this conception. Judaism has already, through the ages, created that type of democratic building in the traditional synagogue.¹⁴

It was undoubtedly Cohen's democratic, ecumenical argument that persuaded Wright to accept a commission for a building type he had heretofore eschewed. George Goodwin has noted that Jewish clients were a significant and substantial presence in Wright's career, and Wright was not an anti-Semite.¹⁵ However, in a speech at an initial fund-raising dinner for the Beth Sholom project in June 1954, Wright admitted that he had "been asked to design a Jewish synagogue once or twice before...and I have always declined. I said I would design an American Synagogue for Jews in America, but I would not design a Jewish Synagogue."¹⁶ Robert McCarter has noted that Wright believed "his own [transcendental] principles related to...all religions."¹⁷ Rabbi Cohen's recontextualization of Jewish experience and religion within American culture provided Wright a point of intellectual access for the project and appealed to the universal elements of spirituality that he embraced. It is not surprising that Wright subsequently used his unbuilt "Steel Cathedral" project from 1926, envisioned as housing a multitude of (Christian) faiths, as the

¹⁴ Typescript, Frank Lloyd Wright Speech, 3 June 1954, BSB Volume 2, Beth Sholom Congregation Archives.

¹⁵ George M. Goodwin "Wright's Beth Sholom Synagogue," *American Jewish History* 86.3 (1998): 325. Goodwin also notes that Dankmar Adler, the lesser-known partner in the firm of Adler and Sullivan, the office in which Wright worked in his early career, was Jewish and had a substantial Jewish clientele.

¹⁶

¹⁷ Robert McCarter, *Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Phaidon, 1997), 291.

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point of departure for the design of Beth Sholom Synagogue.¹⁸

appropriate to Rabbi?

Wrightian Visual Abstraction, Jewish Use and Meaning

Although providing a solid foundation, the collaboration between Frank Lloyd Wright and Rabbi Mortimer Cohen by necessity moved beyond conceptual harmony to actual design and construction. Rabbi Cohen's initial letter established another important facet of the working relationship between the clergyman and the architect—specifically, how he would take the lead in explaining and interpreting Jewish practices and beliefs as Wright proceeded with the building's design. Enclosed with the letter were lengthy notes that explained relevant aspects of Jewish liturgy and philosophy as well as the congregation's needs and programmatic desiderata. These and later communications not only concerned appropriate conformance to Jewish religious practice, but also extended to an articulate commentary on spiritual and metaphorical meanings imbued on the forms envisioned by Wright. Cohen was able to verbally ground the abstract features of Wright's design, and infer religious meanings that were both specific to Judaism and more generally to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In March 1954, the verbal and written dialogue between Wright and Cohen expanded to include the first completed set of perspective and plan sketches. Their previously understood ideology

WC?

¹⁸ The Beth Sholom archives also make it clear that Rabbi Cohen had to justify the choice of the gentile Wright for the architect of the new synagogue building. This was done on the basis of King Solomon's choice of the non-Jewish Bezalel for the architect of the Temple.

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^{me}
for the building that stressed a universal American spirituality, characterized Cohen's March 19 response to the drawings. He stated: "if my interpretation of your remarkable design for Beth Sholom varies from what you have intended, I could claim the divine right of every individual to the evoked idea of his own spirit (and I know I would be respected by you for this emphasis upon the divine right of the individual)." ¹⁹

Wright seems to have been contented ^g with the nature of his collaboration with Rabbi Cohen, which in some ways was declared publicly with newspaper announcements about the commission and anticipated synagogue. Articles published in the *Sunday Bulletin* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on May 23, 1954, provide vivid explication of the building's symbolic meanings. The two most enduring of these—the understanding of the building as a "traveling Mount Sinai" and metaphor for the hands of God holding the people of Israel—were included in these early publications. ²⁰ As part of public relations and fundraising efforts, Cohen compiled commentary for the congregation along the general lines of his March 19 response letter to Wright about the initial drawings. ²¹ ^{me} Two had likely discussed and formulated some of the ideas

¹⁹ MJC to FLW, 19 March 1954, BSB, Volume 1.

²⁰ Beth Sholom Archives. Wright is also quoted as describing the general experience of the visitor to the building itself as being like "resting in the very hands of God." *Architectural Record* 108 (May 1958): 177. A photograph taken by Philadelphia commercial photography Jacob Stehman published in several locations superimposed Wright's initial plan on Rabbi Cohen's hands shown together and palm up, with thumbs slightly outstretched. This photograph is now in the collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

²¹ MJC, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Synagogue," Beth Sholom Archives.

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about the building's physical and symbolic presence during their first meeting in New York in December 1953 in New York, but no detailed record of this conversation exists.

For the duration of the project, Wright and Cohen together worked out the design and its various meanings, a relationship made possible by their complementary personalities, and Wright's vision and his relative ignorance in the details of Judaism. In the learned, articulate, and ambitious rabbi, Wright found more than an informative client simply supplying him with explanations of the Jewish faith and its practice. He also discovered a partner dedicated to the creation of a deeply meaningful religious building. Wright acknowledged Cohen's dedication to that end in the letter that accompanied the first set of drawings completed in March 1954, which presented the design as "a coherent statement of worship."²² The interpretive process launched by Rabbi Cohen is one of the salient features of Beth Sholom's significance. This process continues to this day and the building has thus been, from the beginning, an analogue to a sacred text.

A clear demonstration of their cooperative design can be traced in ideas about the building's plan. In his first letter to Wright, Rabbi Cohen had supplied a sketch plan for the building in the shape of an elongated octagon.²³ On February 2, 1954, Wright telegrammed Rabbi Cohen

²² FLW to MJC, 14 March 1954, BSB, Volume 1.

²³ A copy of this sketch is included with Cohen's letter of 16 November 1953, Beth Sholom Correspondence Binders, Volume 1.

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asking, "any objection to fundamental hexagon or triangle instead of octagon," to which Rabbi Cohen deferred to the architect, "no objection...leave entirely to you."²⁴ *conversion* This ~~deferment thus~~ established the fundamental geometric order for the design. *be that* This ordering is hardly unique to the Beth Sholom project ~~it~~ is a hallmark of Wright's mature work. Wright used triangular or hexagonal forms and motifs in several late-career ecclesiastical projects, including the Anne Pfeiffer Chapel at Florida Southern College, Lakeland, Florida (1940), and the First Unitarian Society Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin (1950). He had previously experimented with hexagons, most notably with the Paul R. Hanna "Honeycomb" House in Palo Alto, California (1936), which is also among the seventeen works identified by the AIA and National Trust as being exceptional in his career.²⁵

for the proof *no Unitarian can be found in* Another instance of Wright and Cohen's relationship with this commission regards Cohen's directive about the entrance canopy sheltering the building's main entrance. In response to Wright's initial scheme for a comparably modest canopy, the rabbi wrote:

As I understand it at present, it seems to be purely functional. It serves the purpose of covering the people, if it rains. It is also ornamental, yet not obtrusively so. I would like

²⁴ BSB, Volume 1.

²⁵ In this case, Wright apparently decided to use a hexagonal module as an effort to create an earthquake resistant building. See: "A Frank Lloyd Wright House at Palo Alto, California Designed to Resist Earthquakes," *Architect and Engineer* 130 (Aug. 1937): 3.

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to make it symbolic in the spirit of the whole design. I would like to see the covering, in stylized form of course, represent the hands of the ancient priests, outstretched in blessing. The priests, in Biblical days, used to send the people away, and also greet them, with what we call 'the priestly benediction.'

'May the Lord Bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face to shine upon . . . etc.'

Numbers 6.24

My thought is this: Imagine your two hands together in prayer. Then, pivoting them on the thumb and first (index) fingers, revolve them up until both hands are in one plane. This will give you the triangular effect of the present covering. Now, I would so shape the copper and the other material in the covering as to make suggestively – and not too obviously – the hands of the priests.

I attach herewith – with due apologies – my horrible sketch.²⁶

Wright changed the design, resulting in the canopy still welcoming congregants today.

Construction and Reception

With the completion of the initial drawings, fundraising began in June 1954 followed by a ground-breaking ceremony on November 14, 1954.²⁷ Wright and his staff completed working

²⁶ MJC to FLW, 8 April 1954, BSB, Volume 1.

²⁷ The ceremony was documented in a brief notice in the *New York Times*: "Wright Starts Synagogue Work" 15 November 1954, p. 16.

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drawings for bidding purposes early in 1955. Haskell Culwell, builder of the Harold C. Price Company Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma (1956), completed a three-dimensional model of the Beth Sholom design in April 1956. After the failure to find a satisfactory local contractor, Beth Sholom hired Culwell to build their new synagogue.²⁸ Sluggish fundraising delayed the project, whose budget kept climbing, and design of the interior details continued early 1957, well past the planned start of construction in the summer of 1956. The project struggled toward completion in 1957-58; Wright visited the site for the last time in January 1959. He died four months later, never seeing the completed building, which was officially opened on September 20, 1959. Except for the almost predictable problems with leaks, Beth Sholom Synagogue as envisioned by Frank Lloyd Wright and Rabbi Mortimer Cohen has been used continually for worship services and has survived essentially unaltered since 1959.

In 1959, the AIA and National Trust for Historic Preservation singled-out Beth Sholom Synagogue as one of Wright's seventeen most important to American culture; however, George Goodwin notes that the building has been under-represented in the scholarly literature on Wright when compared the other significant commissions, particularly ecclesiastical ones.²⁹ Rather than a comment on the building's value, this shortfall is more symptomatic of the place of synagogues

with his

²⁸ Correspondence with Culwell is preserved in the Beth Sholom Archives. See also Goodwin: 341-342. A detailed account of the progress of the project can be found in Goodwin (340 ff.) and Patricia Talbot Davis, *Together They Built a Mountain* (Lititz, PA: Sutter House, 1974).

²⁹ Goodwin, 326.

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resources
within the scholarly canon of American architectural history. Compared with research conducted on Christian churches and other religious types, synagogues have received little attention from architectural historians. Serious scholarship on synagogues has been principally pursued through other disciplines, particularly specialists in Jewish history.³⁰ A movement to ~~relieve this deficit~~ ^{more thoroughly explore Wright's synagogues} seems to be ~~progressing~~ ^{underway}, with such works at Robert McCarter's monograph, *Frank Lloyd Wright Architect* (1997), which followed one of the most thorough discussions of the structure, Brendan Gill's *Many Masks, a Life of Frank Lloyd Wright* (1988).³¹

~~Brendan~~ ^{presents} Gill's *Many Masks* not only offers the most eloquent analysis of Beth Sholom Synagogue, but also a satisfying explanation for the relative lack of attention given to the commission. Gill positions Beth Sholom as "one of the most important events in Wright's career," in large part for its sociological weight.³² He accounts for the project's low profile in period and later literature because "it was under construction at the same time as the Guggenheim Museum and it remained in the Guggenheim's shadow then as it does today."³³ Gill also cites its geographic location and related social contexts as a substantial cause of this lack of attention,

³⁰ Among these might be noted Wertheimer, op. cit., as well as Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1976). It should also be noted that an issue of *American Jewish History* (90.1: 2002) was devoted to a re-appraisal to Jick's work.

³¹ McCarter, 297-301.

³²

³³

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remarking:

Wright had been working on the plans for the Guggenheim over a period of many years and had gained much publicity both for the museum and for himself . . . the Guggenheim was being built on Fifth Avenue, in the heart of the most publicity-conscious city on earth; the synagogue was being built in the near-anonymity of Elkins Park, a wealthy, predominantly Jewish suburb of Philadelphia. For decades, Philadelphia had been a rival of Brooklyn as the butt of wisecracks...The shadow cast by the Guggenheim was also in part of Wright's making.³⁴

goes further than simply
Gill's argument ~~fortunately advances beyond being merely an~~ *advocate* for an overshadowed, even spurned building ~~by providing~~ *it provides* a coherent assessment of Beth Sholom as a work of art and architecture relative to the Guggenheim, stating:

Beth Sholom is nothing like as photogenic as the voluptuously roly-ploy Guggenheim. Its aggressively angular shape, both inside and outside, is sufficiently difficult to comprehend in three dimensions, as the human eye confronts it, and all but impossible to reproduce it photographically, in two dimensions....the synagogue is the male counterpart of the female Guggenheim. It is awesome but not winsome. We earn our delight in it by stages, while in the Guggenheim delight is instantaneously bestowed upon us.³⁵

³⁴ Gill, 461-462.

³⁵ Gill, op. cit.

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Insert period information here, if possible.

Perhaps most significantly, Gill has captured most articulately Wright's success in creating what the architect characterized as a "coherent statement of worship." While the building may not have been "ingratiating," that was certainly never its purpose: it was intended to inspire awe and a sense of the divine through a building that provokes an experience of the sublime in the Burkean sense. No other of Wright's religious buildings is discussed in the literature as Gill does here, again comparing Beth Sholom to the Guggenheim:

Standing in the Guggenheim, one is conscious of the formidable ego of the designer, present at every turn of the ramp. Standing in Beth Sholom, one senses that the ego of the designer has been subsumed into the work, which in Wright's case amounts to a near-miracle. Even to visitors who, like me, hold no formal religious beliefs whatever, the structure conveys the sense of an immanent collective sacredness, purged of individuality.

Wright had promised the congregation of Beth Sholom that their temple would be a 'Mount Sinai cupped in the hands of God,' and for once his outrageous rhetoric amounted to the truth.³⁶

³⁶ Gill, op. cit.

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Beth Sholom Congregation is thus nationally significant not only as one of the most important of the late works of the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Its significance within Wright's work also rests on the unusually (within Wright's projects) high degree of collaboration with his client. Finally, and perhaps most important, it is particularly significant as what is arguably his most successful religious design, one that has continued to inspire that sense of religious experience not only in its regular users but also in much larger audiences.

Other than the
Gill, Quote
this seems
unsubstantiated

Perhaps a few examples of
how little he collaborated
w/ other diets would
strengthen the assertion

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Primary sources:

Correspondence Volumes, Beth Sholom Congregation, Collection Beth Sholom Congregation

Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes, Beth Sholom Congregation, Collection Beth Sholom Congregation

Beth Sholom Congregation Archives, Collection Beth Sholom Congregation.

Published Sources:

Blake, Peter. *The Master Builders*. New York and London, 1996.

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Friedman, Murray, ed. *Philadelphia Jewish Life: 1940-1985*. Ardmore, PA: Seth Press, 1986.

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Jick, Leon. *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976.

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Stoltzman, Henry & Daniel. *Synagogue Architecture in America, Faith, Spirit & Identity*. Victoria: Images Publishing Group, Ltd., 2004

Wertheimer, Jack, ed. *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

"Wright Starts Synagogue Work." *New York Times*, 15 November 1954. P. 16.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS)

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☒ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☒ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # PA-6033

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☒ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☒ Other

Name of repository: Beth Sholom Archives

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 3.850 acres

UTM References

Zone	Easting	Northing
18	489216	4436896

Verbal Boundary Description:

The property includes the entirety of parcel number 31-00-30211-50-2 in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary is the entire property conveyed by Leo and Vera Posel to the Beth Sholom Congregation on 9 June 1949 as found in Montgomery County Deed Book 2001, page 287. The property includes the includes the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed synagogue and all associated non-contributing buildings.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

name/title: Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D., Director of Historic Preservation

organization: Cultural Resource Consulting Group date: April 10, 2006

street & number: 1500 Walnut Street, Suite 702 telephone: (215) 985-0995

city or town: Philadelphia state: PA zip code: 19102

BETH SHOLOM CONGREGATION

"An American Synagogue"

Fischman Memorial Auditorium

8231 Old York Road, Elkins Park, PA 19027-1595

(215) 887-1342 Fax (215) 887-6605

Fred Kazan, *Rabbi*

Aaron Lande, *Rabbi Emeritus*

David F. Tilman, *Hazzan*

Shalom Zachmy, *Ritual Director*

Yaacov Lieberman, *Ritual Director Emeritus*

* Mortimer J. Cohen, *Rabbi*

Herbert Sachs
President

Wendy Cohen

Fred Wolfson

Barry Yaches

Vice Presidents

Jeffrey Thomas

Treasurer

Arthur Frankel

Assistant Treasurer

Samuel Liebman

Secretary

Steven Shapiro

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*Charles E. Goldman

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*Joseph A. Krasnov

*Leo DuBois

Lewis Heicklen

*Sol Spiegel

Edward Taxis

Leonard Cantor

Myron B. Sloane

Samuel Spielman

Nell Gorchow

Bernard Cross

*Morris Yoffe

Lionel Schlank

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Mark S. Blaskey

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*Don Weisberg

*Sidney Cozen

*Ben Kleinbard

*David Shapiro

*Albert Friedman

Samuel Gordesky

Bernard Granor

Irae Weber

*Theodore Domskey

**deceased*

June 23, 2004

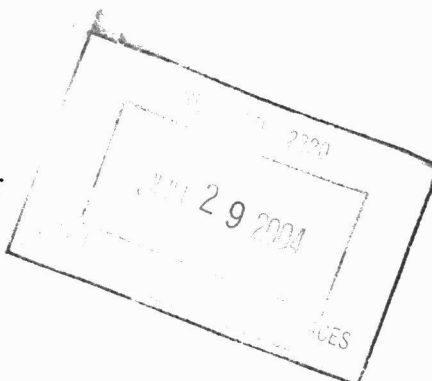
Carol D. Shull

Keeper of the National Register

National Park Service

8th Floor, 1201 Eye Street NW

Washington DC, 20005



Dear Ms. Shull:

This letter is submitted to you to express the intent of Beth Sholom Synagogue to pursue National Historic Landmark status for our historic synagogue. Beth Sholom is located at 8231 Old York Rd in Elkins Park, Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. It was designed in the mid 1950s and the cornerstone was laid in 1957.

Our congregation commissioned the building from Frank Lloyd Wright, and has maintained continuous ownership. Although we consider the building to be our home, we also know that many Wright scholars and enthusiasts consider Beth Sholom to be among his landmarks. Indeed, monographs of Wright's masterworks consistently include Beth Sholom Synagogue among his most important buildings. The building is also one of seventeen buildings designated by the American Institute of Architects as an example of his architectural contribution to American culture. As the building celebrates its 50th anniversary, it is time for this recognition to become official.

In 1998, a preliminary evaluation of Wright's architecture by the National Historic Landmarks Survey identified Beth Sholom Synagogue as a potential National Historic Landmark. The congregation has retained a team consisting of Campbell Thomas & Co. Architects and Lori Salganicoff with Dr. David G. DeLong to undertake the research and survey necessary to create the nomination.

We intend to nominate the building for Landmark status under National Landmark Criteria 4 with Exception 1, and considering National Register Criteria C with Exception A. We propose to use NHL Theme III. Expressing Cultural Values, 5. Architecture, landscape architecture and urban design, with a period of significance of 1954-55. The Historic Context would be XVI. Architecture, S. Wrightian.



School & Youth Offices:
(215) 887-3625

Philip Nordlinger
Acting Educational Director

Gail S. Cohen
Preschool Director

Judi Shapiro
High School Director

www.bethsholomcongregation.org

National Landmark Criteria 4

A property that embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style or method of construction, or that represent a significant, distinctive and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

Exception 1

A religious property deriving its primary national significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance.

A brief description of the building's significance follows, touching upon the exceptional importance of the building in the context of Wright's continuum of work, the remarkable collaboration of Rabbi and architect, the building's influence on and place in the history of synagogue architecture, and the architecturally distinct form and decorative elements of the building. These themes will be the subject of additional research and will be further described in the Landmark nomination.

Brief Description

Beth Sholom Synagogue was built in 1954-55 for a fast-growing congregation in the northern suburbs of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Wright's only public building in the area, Beth Sholom Synagogue was erected adjacent to a social and educational center that had been built by Beth Sholom and was being used temporarily for worship.

It was Wright's contention that, prior to the erection of Beth Sholom, European notions of church architecture had primarily influenced the design of synagogue architecture. In fact, the form and function of synagogue architecture was at this time being widely examined and discussed in the Jewish community, in response to the upsurge in synagogue membership and subsequent new construction.

Working closely with Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen, Beth Sholom's dynamic leader and a Talmudic scholar, Wright designed what he described as the first American Synagogue, with architectural references to elements from the Jewish Bible and built of materials native to America. He was inspired by the vision of Rabbi Cohen, expressed in his 1953 letter seeking to attract the famous and boldly original architect:

"There is a dream and a hope in my heart of erecting a synagogue...that will be an inspiration for generations to come, so that people will come from all over the country to see it and find here a 'new thing' – the American spirit wedded to the ancient spirit of Israel."

Despite many requests, Wright had never accepted a commission to design a synagogue before Rabbi Cohen's compelling appeal. He had, however, designed and built churches, including the unbuilt "Steel Cathedral" designed in 1926 and the Unitarian Church built in Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin in 1947. Beth Sholom Synagogue is a unique, shining moment with further developed elements of these and other Wright designs.

Using the basic form and idea of the "Steel Cathedral," Wright designed a metal and glass pyramid of light rising from a modified hexagonal concrete base. The Sherwood Hills Unitarian Church, designed in 1947 but completed the same year that Wright received the letter from the Rabbi, features a triangular roof that he described as an "expression of reverence without recourse to the steeple," and as representing hands held together in prayer. The Church features no façade, steeple, or other references to historic church architecture. The design sought to inspire a feeling of elemental and personal reverence that Wright, when he later addressed the Church, described finding in beauty and subjective prayer. He later described that in creating Beth Sholom Synagogue, he wanted to "create a kind of building that people, on entering it, will feel as if they were resting in the very hands of God."

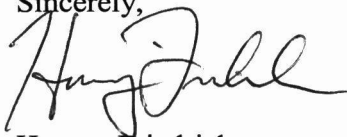
Beth Sholom Synagogue is among buildings such as the Price Tower and the Marin County Civic Center that demonstrate the architect's innovative approach to structural engineering in his designs. The most evident of these innovations is the Synagogue's pyramidal roof of glass, which creates a soaring structure of light and translucence rather than a solid mass with windows. These sloped corrugated glass and plastic screens rise from a concrete base and are held between steel beams. These ridges are decorated with stamped-aluminum ornamented with seven lighted lamps, a reference to the Hebrew Menorah.

Many references to the Torah and to historic religious practices were brought to this building through the unique collaboration of architect and Rabbi. Together they created what Rabbi Cohen described as "Mount Sinai wrought in modern materials," referring to the mountain, ablaze with lightening and fire, upon which God revealed Himself to Moses.

We at Beth Sholom Congregation are proud stewards of this great building. We look forward to receiving your acknowledgement of our efforts to nominate this building as a National Historic Landmark.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact Robert Thomas at 215.985.4354 (rthomas@campbellthomas.com), or Lori Salganicoff at 215.236.5070 (LPS@PreservationPlanners.com). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Harvey Friedrich
Executive Director

H:\Bet-Hist\Log\Nomination Letter - Beth Sholom w-corrections 06-22-04.doc

cc: Carolyn Pitts, National Park Service
Bill Bolger, National Park Service
Zeph Parmenter, PA Historical and Museum Commission
Robert P. Thomas, AIA, Campbell Thomas & Co.
David G. DeLong
Lori Salganicoff, Historic Preservation & Planning

PH 9/8/04
JS 9/8/04

H34(2280)

SEP 10 2004

Mr. Harvey Friedrich
Executive Director
Beth Sholom Congregation
8231 Old York Road
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania 19027-1595

Dear Mr. Friedrich:

Thank you for your letter of June 23, 2004, inquiring about the potential for the Beth Sholom Synagogue to be considered as a National Historic Landmark. After reviewing the available evidence, we highly recommend the preparation of a draft Landmark nomination for the Beth Sholom Synagogue.

As you note in your letter, the Synagogue was identified as being worthy of Landmark designation in the 1998 report on Frank Lloyd Wright's accomplishments prepared for the National Historic Landmarks Survey. In addition, in 1959 the American Institute of Architects recommended that seventeen of the buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright were "important landmarks in American architectural history, which ought to be preserved in their original form." The Beth Sholom Synagogue was named as one of those seventeen. The National Historic Landmarks Survey has been working to recognize and honor the outstanding works of Frank Lloyd Wright, and we are very pleased the congregation will support the preparation of a National Historic Landmark nomination for this important property.

Our regulations and program guidance require that each nomination for Landmark designation be able to stand on its own merits. Therefore, your nomination will need to include discussion about the Synagogue's significance and the role of Frank Lloyd Wright in 20th century American architecture. A comparison to Wright's other later works would also be warranted.

Completed National Historic Landmark nominations are reviewed by the National Park System Advisory Board. Because of the administrative tasks involved in placing a National Historic Landmark nomination on the Advisory Board's agenda, in order to be considered for the Spring 2005 agenda, we will need to receive a completed nomination by Thanksgiving. If you were considering the Fall 2005 agenda, the deadline would be May 1, 2005. We understand that Ms. Lori Salganicoff has been in contact with the National Historic Landmark Survey's architectural

historian in Philadelphia, and we will be happy to provide Ms. Salganicoff with guidance as the project progresses.

We appreciate your interest in the National Historic Landmarks Program, and if you or Ms. Salganicoff have further questions about the program, or the preparation of your nomination, please contact Ms. Patty Henry at 202-354-2216 or by e-mail at <patty_henry@nps.gov>.

Sincerely,

Carol D. Shull
Chief, National Historic Landmarks Survey
Keeper, National Register of Historic Places

cc: Ms. Barbara Franco
Bureau for Historic Preservation
Commonwealth Keystone Building, 2nd Floor
400 North Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120-0093

bcc: NE Region (B. Bolger; C. Pitts)
2280 Shull; Sprinkle; Andrus; Henry
2280 BETH SHOLOM SYNAGOGUE (NHL Pending)

FPN:PHenry:bparker:09/08/04:202-354-2212

F:\nr-nhl\nominations pending\Beth Sholom\Friedrich1.ltr



CRCG

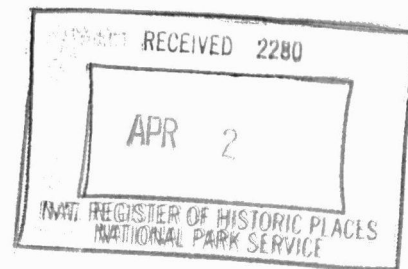
CULTURAL RESOURCE
CONSULTING GROUP

Historic Preservation & Archaeology

April 10, 2006

www.crcg.net

John Roberts
National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW (Org. 2280)
Washington, D.C. 20240



**RE: Beth Sholom Congregation
National Historic Landmark Nomination
CRCG #04-289-01**

Dear Mr. Roberts:

It is my pleasure to submit to you the National Historic Landmark Nomination for the Beth Sholom Congregation in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. This striking synagogue is among the most significant late works of Frank Lloyd Wright and is the only non-Christian ecclesiastical building by the iconic American architect. The building has been a symbol of the pride, identity, and rejuvenation of the congregation since its original design in 1954. The congregation, myself, and all others involved in this project anxiously await the designation of this building as a National Historic Landmark.

Enclosed please find the nomination text, archival photographs and accompanying CD of digital images, CD containing digital images and Powerpoint for Advisory Committee presentation, and all maps and additional documentation. I trust that you will find the materials to be satisfactory and encourage you to contact me at (215) 985-0995 or ecooperman@crcg.net should you require any additional information.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding the next steps in the designation process.

Sincerely,

Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D.
Director of Historic Preservation

Enclosures

cc: Herbert Sachs, Beth Sholom Congregation
Bill Bolger, NPS
Peter Primavera, CRCG

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T. 212.807.1606
F. 917.320.6405



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20240

*Notice of a Study to Determine Potential for Designation
as a
National Historic Landmark*

JUL 05 2006

The National Park Service is pleased to announce that a study is being conducted on the following property to determine its potential for designation as a National Historic Landmark:

**Beth Sholom Synagogue
Elkins Park, PA**

National Historic Landmarks are nationally significant places that illustrate important themes, persons, or events in American history. The National Historic Landmarks Program recognizes properties of exceptional national significance in the Nation's history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture. Once reviewed by the National Park System Advisory Board and designated by the Secretary of the Interior, each landmark may request an official bronze plaque from the National Park Service that recognizes this high distinction.

When the study is completed and scheduled for review by the National Park System Advisory Board, you will receive a copy of the nomination and have 60 days to comment in writing, if you so desire. After the 60-day period, the nomination and any comments received will be submitted to the National Park System Advisory Board.

For your information, we have enclosed a brochure that describes the National Historic Landmarks Program and a fact sheet that describes the effects of designation.

For further information on the National Historic Landmarks program, including the designation process, and questions on this specific study please contact: Dr. John W. Roberts, Acting Chief, National Historic Landmarks Survey, National Register, History and Education (2280), 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240, or call 202/354-2009.

Additional information on the National Historic Landmarks Program is available at:
www.cr.nps.gov/nhl.

Herbert Sachs, President
Beth Shalom Congregation
8231 Old York Road
Elkins Parks, PA 19027-1595

Representative Chaka Fattah
2301 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Barbara Franco, SHPO
Bureau for Historic Preservation
Commonwealth Keystone Building, 2nd Fl.
400 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093

The Honorable Arlen Specter
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Thomas Jay Ellis, Chairman
Montgomery County Brd of Commissioners
Montgomery County Courthouse
One Montgomery Plaza, Suite 800
P.O. Box 311
Norristown, PA 19404-0311

Northeast Regional Office
Attn: Bonnie Halda

The Honorable Rick Santorum
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Cheltenham Township Board of
Commissioners
Morton J. Simon, Jr., Chairman
8230 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027-1589

-----Original Message-----

From: James_Jacobs@nps.gov [mailto:James_Jacobs@nps.gov]
Sent: Monday, August 07, 2006 10:23 AM
To: Emily Cooperman
Subject: Beth Sholom

Hi Emily,

I hope that your summer has been pleasant, if rather hot and humid.

This

Friday, 11 August is the deadline for the nominations. It would be great

if you could provide me with the requested information by COB Wednesday, 9

August. Before the end of the week, I will need to incorporate that information as well as address some changes and additions suggested by Toni

Lee, Assistant Associate Director, Historical Documentation Programs.

If you want to discuss any of this by phone or email, I am in the office all week.

Thanks you,
Jamie

James A. Jacobs, Ph.D.
Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
National Historic Landmarks Program
202 354 2184



SOS Beth Sholom.etc edits.doc



"Emily Cooperman"
<ecooperman@crcg.net>
>

To: <James_Jacobs@nps.gov>
cc: <Bill_Bolger@nps.gov>
Subject: RE: Beth Sholom

08/08/2006 03:30 PM
AST

Hi Jamie - attached is my edited version of the section 8 version you sent to me earlier. I've taken a quick peek at the "final" draft of the whole thing you just sent - thanks.

Re. the questions about the drive and walkway in section 7: Aerials from 1959 and 1965 indicate that some kind of covered walkway between the buildings existed as early as 1959, although not in exactly the same alignment as the present, and it was obviously never FLW's design. The drive did apparently continue originally around the south of the synagogue building and back into the parking lot as Wright intended in 1959, but was changed after 1965.

I've added the missing footnote refs.

I am enormously grateful for all your hard work on the nomination, including streamlining my prose, your added bibliographic references, and the introduction of the thematic subtitles. In a few places, though, your changes in Section 8 - unintentionally I'm sure - led to some factual errors which I have corrected in the attached. And I have to admit that I'm an unreconstructed pedant about certain grammar points - something can't "possess a level of uniqueness" since uniqueness is an absolute condition and therefore has no levels. So, saying that BS is unique among his religious buildings is accurate and sufficient.

I would be happy to integrate my small changes into the draft you sent today - whatever is easiest and quickest and least likely to impede progress.

I would very much like to present the nomination. I'm assuming some folks from the congregation would also like to be there.

Thanks.

Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D.
Director of Historic Preservation
Cultural Resource Consulting Group
Philadelphia office: (215) 985-0995
New Jersey office: (732) 247-8880

-----Original Message-----

From: James_Jacobs@nps.gov [mailto:James_Jacobs@nps.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, August 08, 2006 1:46 PM
To: Emily Cooperman
Cc: Bill_Bolger@nps.gov
Subject: RE: Beth Sholom

Hi Emily,

Thanks for your reply. Because we have three FLW nominations on October's agenda (two that are exactly contemporary--BS and the Price Tower), the major change/addition related to evening out the information about

Wright's career and BS's place in it. The other big things were Committee requests: a summary of the significance added to the beginning of Section 7 and a simple reiteration of the basic points at the end of Section 8.

I have attached the nomination as it stands now. If you need/want any changes, just let me know.

Also, would you be interested in presenting the nomination to the Committee at the October meeting? It is scheduled for the 10-11 October--I don't yet know which day the architecture nominations will fall, but will keep you posted.

Thanks,
Jamie

(See attached file: Beth Sholom Nomination New.doc)

James A. Jacobs, Ph.D.
Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
National Historic Landmarks Program
202 354 2184

"Emily Cooperman"

<James_Jacobs@nps.gov> <ecooperman@crcg. To:

<Bill_Bolger@nps.gov> net> cc:

Subject: RE: Beth Sholom

08/08/2006 10:13

AM AST

Hi Jamie - no problem. Should have it to you at the end of the day. Can you please forward the suggested changes to me? As the nomination's author, I would like to know what they are. Thanks.

Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D.
Director of Historic Preservation
Cultural Resource Consulting Group
Philadelphia office: (215) 985-0995
New Jersey office: (732) 247-8880

H34(2280)

SEP 15 2006

Mr. Herbert Sachs
President
Beth Sholom Congregation
8231 Old York Road
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania 19027-1595

Dear Mr. Sachs:

The National Park Service has completed the study of the Beth Sholom Synagogue in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, for the purpose of nominating it for designation as a National Historic Landmark. We enclose a copy of the nomination.

The Landmarks Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board will consider the nomination during its next meeting, at the time and place indicated on one of the enclosures. This enclosure also specifies how you may comment on the proposed nomination if you so choose. The Landmarks Committee will report on this nomination to the Advisory Board, which in turn will make a recommendation concerning this nomination to the Secretary of the Interior, based upon the criteria of the National Historic Landmarks Program.

If you wish to comment on the nomination, please do so within 60 days of the date of this letter. After the 60-day period, we will submit the nomination and all comments we have received to the Landmarks Committee.

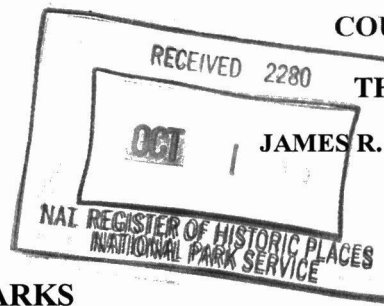
To assist you in considering this matter, we have enclosed a copy of the regulations governing the National Historic Landmarks Program. They describe the criteria for designation (Sec. 65.4) and include other information on the Program. We are also enclosing a fact sheet that outlines the effects of designation.

Sincerely,

Signed

John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places
and National Historic Landmarks Program

Enclosures



COUNTY OF MONTGOMERY

COMMISSIONERS

THOMAS JAY ELLIS, ESQ.

CHAIRMAN

JAMES R. MATTHEWS RUTH S. DAMSKER

RONALD H. AHLBRANDT

DIRECTOR

TEL: 610-278-3555

FAX: 610-278-3556

TDD: 610-631-1211

E-mail: rahlbran@mail.montcopa.org

**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS
AND HERITAGE SERVICES**

HUMAN SERVICES CENTER

P.O. BOX 311

NORRISTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA 19404-0311

September 21, 2006

**Mr. John W. Roberts,
Acting Chief
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240**

**Re: Beth Sholom Snyagogue
Elkins Park, PA**

Dear Mr. Roberts:

We are in receipt of your letter dated August 11, 2006 about the nomination of the Beth Sholom Snyagogue in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, for the purpose of designation as a National Historic Landmark.

The Montgomery County Commissioners and the Department of Parks and Heritage Services are in unanimous agreement that the above property meets the criteria required to be placed on the National Historic Landmark list.

Since the property is not owned by Montgomery County, we recommend you contact Cheltenham Township and the Cheltenham Township Historical Commission. I've enclosed copies of their addresses and telephone numbers.

Our best wishes to you and the Board in favorably acting on the nomination of the Beth Sholom Synagogue.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ronald H. Ahlbrandt".

Ronald H. Ahlbrandt

RHA/pe

BETH SHOLOM CONGREGATION

"An American Synagogue"

Fischman Memorial Auditorium

8231 Old York Road, Elkins Park, PA 19027-1595

(215) 887-1342 Fax (215) 887-6605

David Glanzberg-Krainin, Senior Rabbi ✓
Andrea L. Merow, Rabbi
Aaron Landes, Rabbi Emeritus
David F. Tilman, Hazzan
Shalom Zachmy, Ritual Director
Yaacov Lieberman, Ritual Director Emeritus
* Mortimer J. Cohen, Rabbi

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* Sidney Cozen
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* David Shapiro
* Albert Friedman
Samuel Gordesky
Bernard Granor
Israel Weber
* Theodore Domskey
* deceased

September 28, 2006

John W. Roberts, Acting Chief,
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW, 8th floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Fax (202) 371-6447

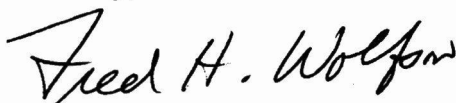
Dear Mr. Roberts:

I am writing on behalf of Beth Sholom Congregation to tell you how much excitement and enthusiasm have been generated within the Congregation by our nomination to become a National Historic Landmark. A number of us will be present when the application is reviewed on October 11, 2006.

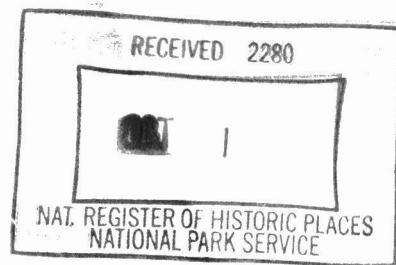
Our Congregation is quite proud to be housed in the only synagogue designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. We see the building as a sacred trust to be maintained for future generations to enjoy. Our volunteer Tour Guides take great pride in sharing this wonderful building with the many visitors each year, and our community takes pride in its presence.

As a religious community, we most heartily endorse this nomination. As citizens we are proud to share this unique, majestic building with the nation and the world and look forward to the anticipated "Landmark Status."

Sincerely,



Fred H. Wolfson
President



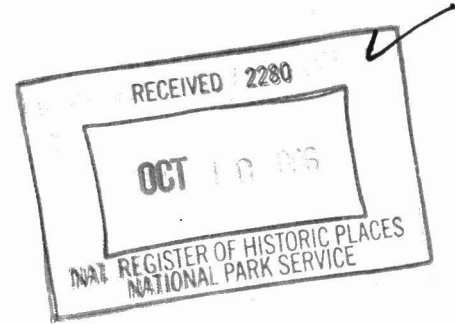
School & Youth Offices:
(215) 887-3625

Philip Nordlinger
Educational Director

Gail S. Cohen
Preschool Director

www.bethsholomcongregation.org

GABRIEL F. BASCH
1832 Old Welsh Road
Abington, PA 19001-1309
215-659-7476
Gbrlbsch@msn.com



September 28, 2006

Mr. John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmark Program
1849 C Street NW, 8th floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Sir:

I write these lines with the experience of being the Director of Tours for Beth Sholom Synagogue in Elkins Park, PA for the past ten years.

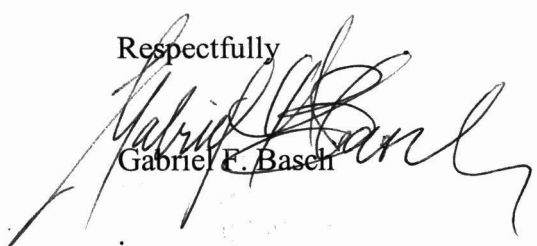
During these years our tour guides and I had the pleasure of showing the details of all the symbolism created in the design of the building to endless number of visitors as the truly American Synagogue.

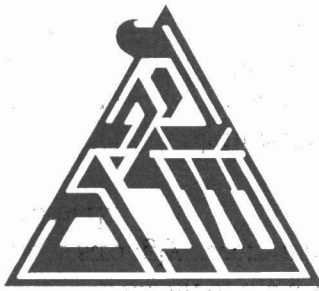
Our visitors express awe when reaching the Main Sanctuary, as they see a totally unobstructed view of the inside, the rising roof (identified as a symbolic Mount Sinai) or perhaps as some suggest, an Indian Tepee. We have had major tours with as many as 100 or so people at a time and single visitors, walk-in folks who were especially interested in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Telephone calls arranging tour times come from points as far away as New Zealand or Japan as well as points all over the United States. The American Institute of Architects noted in 1960 that this building was to be retained as one of the architect's finest work. In 1964 the same organization declared the building as a "National Landmark".

I urge you to consider and evaluate positively the nomination to declare Beth Sholom Synagogue a federally recognized National Landmark.

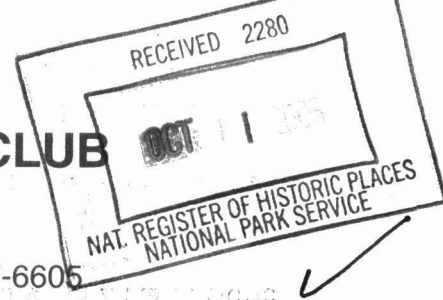
Respectfully


Gabriel F. Basch



BETH SHOLOM MEN'S CLUB

8231 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027-1595
(215) 887-1342 ▲ Fax: (215) 887-6605



September 29, 2006

John W. Roberts
Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark Program
1849 C Street, NW, 8th Floor (2280)
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Nomination of Beth Sholom Synagogue, Elkins Park, PA

Dear Mr. Roberts:

On behalf of the Men's Club of Beth Sholom Congregation, as association of more than 400 men, I strongly recommend that Beth Sholom Synagogue be designated as a National Historic Landmark.

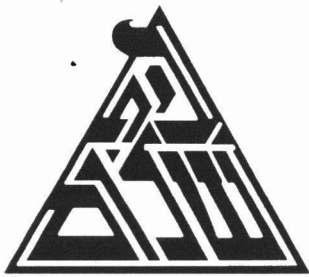
Beth Sholom Synagogue, designed and built by one of the most prominent architects of American History, is a building of national significance, based upon its unique interior and exterior architectural style. The structure embodies the distinctive characteristics of Frank Lloyd Wright and is exceptionally valuable for the study of his style and his contribution to American culture. Beth Sholom Synagogue is a great testament to Judaic history, which merges American spirit with ancient Jewish spirit.

Based upon its nationally significant historic impact, our group enthusiastically supports the inclusion of Beth Sholom Synagogue as a National Historic Landmark.

Very truly yours,

Arthur Lashin
Men's Club President





BETH SHOLOM SISTERHOOD

8231 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027-1595
(215) 887-1342 ▲ Fax (215) 887-6605



September 29, 2006

Mr. John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW, 8th Floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Roberts,

The Sisterhood of Beth Sholom Congregation, Elkins Park, PA, an organization of 500 women, heartily endorses the prospect of having our synagogue designated as a National Historical Landmark. We look forward to seeing this happen in the very near future. Since we are considered an American Synagogue designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, our Gift Shop carries merchandise from the Frank Lloyd Wright collections, and we are enthusiastic about this happening.

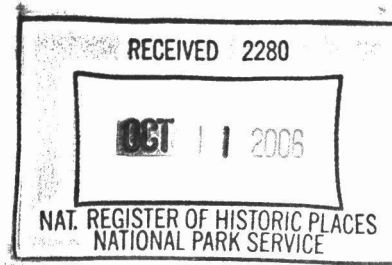
Sincerely yours,

Elinor W. Kamen
Sisterhood President

Cc: Rabbi David Glanzberg-Krainin
Rabbi Andrea L. Merow
Fred Wolfson, President
Herbert Sachs, Immediate Past-President
Harvey Friedrich, Execkutive Director

KORMAN

COMMERCIAL
PROPERTIES



Facsimile: (202) 371-6447

September 29, 2006

Mr. John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C. Street, NW, 8th Floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

RE: Beth Sholom Congregation
Elkins Park, Pa.

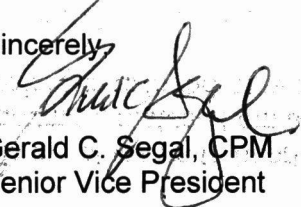
Dear Mr. Roberts:

It is my pleasure to heartily endorse Beth Sholom Synagogue's nomination to Historic Landmark status. I am a member of Beth Sholom Congregation. I am also a professional in the area of commercial real estate.

In both of those roles, it has long been my privilege to spend time in a facility with the significance of Beth Sholom. My family and I have traveled to see many other structures of importance, both here and abroad, including Frank Lloyd Wright works in western Pennsylvania, Chicago and Arizona. However, I am continually struck with the unusual presence of our own Beth Sholom. It is already a landmark to our local community as well as to members of the community at large, many of whom come to see our treasured building.

I believe that the formal acknowledgement of Beth Sholom as a National Historic Landmark is both fitting and appropriate. It is the formal confirmation of it's representation of historic design and presence. Once again, I endorse this nomination in the strongest personal and professional terms.

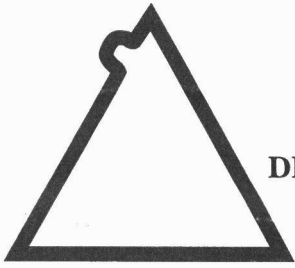
Sincerely,


Gerald C. Segal, CPM
Senior Vice President

GCS/scg

Korman Commercial Properties, Inc.

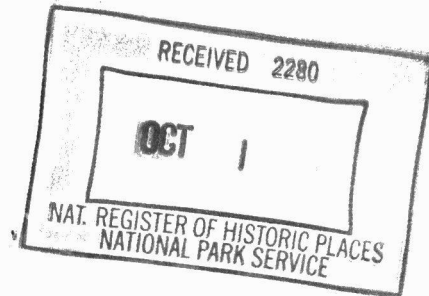
Suite 305 • Two Neshaminy Interplex • Trevose, PA 19053 • Voice: 215.244.5100 • Fax: 215.245.6243
www.KormanCommercial.com



DR. AARON LANDES

Rabbi Emeritus of Beth Sholom Congregation

8231 OLD YORK ROAD
ELKINS PARK, PA 19027
215-887-1342
FAX 215-887-6605



September 29, 2006

John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW, 8th Floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Roberts,

It is my pleasure to support the application of Beth Sholom Synagogue of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania for designation as a National Historic Landmark. From 1964 to 2000 I served as Senior Rabbi of the Congregation. It was my privilege to succeed Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen, who had worked with Frank Lloyd Wright. I am also an Admiral in the Chaplain Corps of the United States Navy, having served in the naval reserve for 34-1/2 years. Over the years I have become an authority on houses of worship of all denominations.

Beth Sholom Synagogue, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is one of the most remarkable architectural achievements in the United States of America, and in my opinion is his greatest architectural achievement. The main sanctuary, with its mountain of plexiglass, facilitates the building's interaction with its surroundings. On a sunny day, the worshippers might use sunglasses. If a cloud crosses the sun, the cloud's shadow passes through the synagogue. If a bird crosses the sun, its shadow goes through the synagogue. On a Yom Kippur, full day worship, the congregants follow the sun as it makes a full turn from East to West. On a cloudy day the sanctuary is cloudy.

The upper sanctuary seats a 1040. The lower sanctuary seats 225. The lower sanctuary has no windows and is dependent on artificial light, but that is an oversimplification. The front entrance of the synagogue has glass doors. There are two sets of short stairways leading to the lower sanctuary. The lower sanctuary has glass doors. On a sunny day, the setting sun blindingly shines on the ark and the pulpit of the lower sanctuary.

DR. AARON LANDES, *Rabbi of Beth Sholom Congregation*

Frank Lloyd Wright's greatest achievement in organic architecture is Beth Sholom Synagogue. It is certainly deserving of being designated as a "National Historic Landmark".

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Aaron Landes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "A" and "L".

Rabbi Aaron Landes

Rear Admiral, Chaplain Corps, United States Naval Reserve

Cc: Fred Wolfson, President
Beth Sholom Congregation



Department of the History of Art
Elliot and Roslyn Jaffe History of Art Building
3405 Woodland Walk
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6208
Tel 215.898.3834 Fax 215.573.2210
dbrownle@sas.upenn.edu

David B. Brownlee
*Frances Shapiro-Weltzenhoffer Professor
of Nineteenth-century European Art*

1 October 2006

John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places
and National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW
8th floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

by fax to 202 371 6447

RE: NHL nomination for Beth Sholom

Dear Mr. Roberts:

I write to support the official designation of a great building, Beth Sholom synagogue, as a National Historic Landmark. Beth Sholom is already a landmark for all those—expert and layman alike—who know it and its hilltop site, and as an architectural historian I can affirm its very great historical importance. It is both one of the most significant works by America's greatest architect and an important piece of American social history.

More than once during his long career, Frank Lloyd Wright fooled the skeptics who predicted his demise (and in some cases seem to have imagined it). In the 1950s, he reinvented himself once again as America's most famous modern architect, and, almost uniquely among modern architects, he created buildings, especially single-family houses and public buildings, that were actually popular models for postwar society. Beth Sholom and the Guggenheim Museum in New York are the most important examples of the work of this most important architect during one of the most important phases of his career.

Even at this late time in his artistic odyssey, Wright could rethink his art. While he still chose to address nature through architecture (as he had throughout his career), he now did so much more directly. Fallingwater and both Taliesins had been metaphors for the natural world that they inhabited, but the Guggenheim IS a spiral seashell, and Beth Sholom IS a mountain peak.

Important, too, is the cultural history of this building, one of the most celebrated examples of the boom in suburban church and synagogue building that was created by the urban emigrants of the 1950s. At Beth Sholom, Wright was joined on the stage of history by the charismatic Mortimer Cohen, the leader of the congregation, and Boris Blai, Dean of the Tyler School of Art (Temple University) and the congregation's artistic adviser.

Great art and great social forces converged on this hilltop north of Philadelphia, and the resulting building fully deserves this recognition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David B. Brownlee".

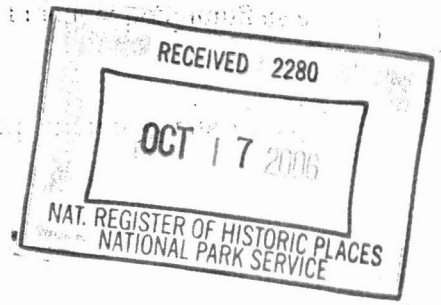
David B. Brownlee



IRRADIATED

School of Design
Graduate Program in Historic Preservation
115 Meyerson Hall
210 South 34th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6311
Tel 215.898.3169 Fax 215.573.6326
ddelong@design.upenn.edu

David G. De Long
Professor Emeritus



October 4, 2006

John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW, 8th Floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Fax: 202-371-6447

Dear Mr. Roberts:

I write in strong support of the National Historic Landmark nomination of Frank Lloyd Wright's Beth Sholom Synagogue.

My opinion is based on nearly 40 years of historic preservation practice, beginning as a restoration architect for a Harvard project and continuing with my teaching in (and chairing) historic preservation programs at Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania. I have also lectured and published frequently on Wright and am a past Director of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy.

Beth Sholom stands as one of Wright's most important buildings from his late career, a period that has now been revealed as of particular significance to the history of architecture. It is a major landmark of synagogue design and has influenced such architects as Louis I. Kahn. It is also a remarkable demonstration of collaboration between architect and client—so much so that Wright himself authorized recognition of this fact in a special plaque affixed to the building, a very rare event in Wright's career.

The congregation has maintained the building with remarkable dedication and been unfailingly generous in allowing visitors to appreciate their great work of art. It is truly a national landmark and deserves the official listing that only you can provide.

With my thanks for your consideration of this important building, I remain,

Yours sincerely,


David G. De Long

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

Township of Cheltenham

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Board of Commissioners

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Michael J. Swavola, Vice President
Robert C. Gerhard, Jr.
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Jeffrey A. Muldawer
Harvey Portner

Township Manager

David G. Kraynik



Administration Building

8230 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027-1589

Phone: 215 887-1000
FAX: 215 887-1561
Website: cheltenhamtownship.org

October 5, 2006



(via FAX & Mail)

Mr. John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW - 8th Floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Beth Sholom Congregation
Request for Nomination as a National Historic Landmark

Dear Mr. Roberts:

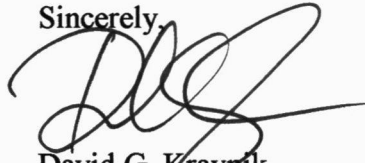
Cheltenham Township wishes to offer its support to the request made by Beth Sholom Congregation, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, to the National Park Service for nomination as a National Historic Landmark.

The Congregation, which was founded in Philadelphia in 1919, moved to Elkins Park in the early 1950's. This synagogue is not only a religious sanctuary but also provides many services to the community such as daycare, education and youth activities. Additionally, the synagogue draws numerous visitors, both national and international, to enjoy and study its history and architecture, which is a masterpiece of world-renowned American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. This edifice should enjoy the merits and recognition as a National Historic Landmark as do other great works of Frank Lloyd Wright, and it is one of several of his buildings that has been designated by the American Institute of Architects for its contribution to American culture, and it is the only synagogue that he designed.

Letter to John W. Roberts
October 5, 2006
Page Two

The Township urges the National Park Service to approve Beth Sholom as a National Historic Landmark, and thanks you for your consideration. We feel that this recognition would have only a positive impact on the congregation and the community as a whole. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



David G. Kraymk
Township Manager

DGK:amf

cc: Board of Commissioners

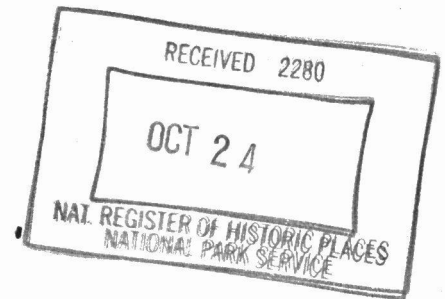
Bryan T. Havir, Assistant Township Manager

Harvey Friedrich, Executive Director, Beth Sholom Congregation

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3802
specter.senate.gov

October 5, 2006



John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW, 8th Floor (2280)
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Acting Chief Roberts:

I am writing to you on behalf of Beth Sholom Congregation of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. It is my understanding that Beth Sholom Congregation has submitted an application to the National Historic Landmarks Program to be considered for National Historic Landmarks status. Designation as such would aid in the preservation of Beth Sholom's synagogue as an important and historic asset to the Elkins Park community.

I am advised that Beth Sholom is the only synagogue designed by renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Furthermore, I am told that designating the Beth Sholom synagogue as a National Historic Landmark will increase the public's access to this unique and historic building, as well as facilitate the congregation's development of a visitor's center that will serve as a significant educational and cultural resource on Mr. Wright's development of the synagogue building.

As it appears that designating the Beth Sholom synagogue as a National Historic Landmark would preserve this unique building for residents and visitors of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, I urge you to give their application your full and fair consideration. Please direct your reply to my Director of Special Projects, Heather Blum, at 711 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510.

Sincerely,

Arlen Specter

AS/hb

ALLYSON Y. SCHWARTZ
13TH DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEES:
HIGHWAYS, TRANSIT, AND PIPELINES
WATER, RESOURCES, AND ENVIRONMENT
* COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3813

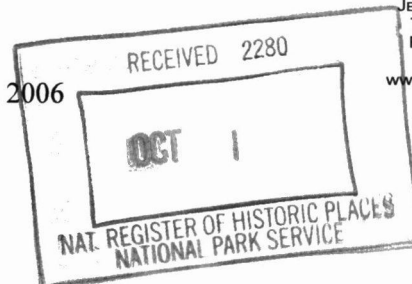
WASHINGTON OFFICE:
423 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
TEL: (202) 225-6111
FAX: (202) 226-0611

DISTRICT OFFICES:
7219 FRANKFORD AVENUE
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19135
TEL: (215) 335-3355
FAX: (215) 333-4508

706 WEST AVENUE
JENKINTOWN, PA 19046
TEL: (215) 517-6572
FAX: (215) 517-6575

www.house.gov/schwartz

October 6, 2006



John W. Roberts, Acting Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW, 8th floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

RE: Application of Beth Sholom Congregation for National Historic Landmark status

Dear Mr. Roberts:

Beth Sholom Congregation, located in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania is architecturally significant as the only synagogue designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. World renowned for its unique design, Beth Sholom Congregation draws visitors from every corner of the world.

Beth Sholom Congregation is seeking National Historic Landmark status. The benefit to the people of Greater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and our nation through the attainment of this status will be an increase in public recognition of and public access to this building, an expansion of tourism in Montgomery County, the facilitation of the congregation's development of a visitors' center as an educational and cultural resource, and the encouragement of the preservation of this truly significant community asset.

Again, I urge you to give Beth Sholom Congregation's application every appropriate consideration. To keep me apprised of the status of the application, please contact my District Director, Julie Slavet, at 215-517-6572 or julie.slavet@mail.house.gov. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and please do not hesitate to contact my office if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Allyson Y. Schwartz
Member of Congress

Cc Harvey Friedrich, Executive Director, Beth Sholom Congregation

CHAKA FATTAH
2ND DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA
WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2301 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4001

DISTRICT OFFICES:
4104 WALNUT STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19104
(215) 387-6404
6632 GERMANTOWN AVENUE
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19119
(215) 848-9386



✓
COMMITTEES:
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
VA-HUD SUBCOMMITTEE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SUBCOMMITTEE
RANKING MEMBER

Congress of the United States House of Representatives

October 10, 2006

John W. Roberts, Acting Chief,
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C Street, NW, 8th floor (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Beth Sholom National Historic Landmark Status

Dear Mr. Roberts:

I am writing in support of the grant application submitted by Beth Sholom for the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Program. As their extraordinary efforts have a significant impact in my district, I request that you strongly consider their request.

Beth Sholom is an outstanding and vital link to the community and beyond. The crucial work done by this synagogue makes them both community and human service resources, touching thousands of lives. The building itself is architecturally significant as it is the only synagogue designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It is world renowned for its unique design and draws visitors from every corner of the world. Thus, I ask that you support their efforts.

Please feel free to contact Cindy Bass from my office should you have any additional questions or comments. Thank you for your time and attention regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress

CF/cb



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

JAN 19 2007

MEMORANDUM

To: Secretary

Through: ^{Acting} Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks *Danny*

From: Director *Mary A. Bomar*

Subject: Designation of 12 Properties as National Historic Landmarks and the Acceptance of Additional Documentation for 1 Property: Director's Recommendations and Request for Secretarial Action

JAN 30 2007

At its meeting on December 15, 2006, the National Park System Advisory Board recommended designation of the following properties as National Historic Landmarks:

1. ALINE BARNSDALL COMPLEX (Hollyhock House), Los Angeles, CA
(Criterion 4)
2. PRICE TOWER, Bartlesville, OK
(Criterion 4)
3. BETH SHOLOM SYNAGOGUE, Elkins Park, PA
(Criterion 4, Exception 1)
4. NAUMKEAG, Stockbridge, MA
(Criterion 4)
5. SPRING GROVE CEMETERY, Cincinnati, OH
(Criterion 4, Exception 5)
6. VILLAGE OF MARIEMONT, Hamilton County, OH
(Criteria 1 and 4)
7. HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES HISTORIC DISTRICT, Salem, MA
(Criteria 1 and 4, Exception 2)
8. CENTRAL UTAH RELOCATION CENTER SITE (Topaz), Millard County, UT
(Criterion 1, Exception 3)
9. FIG ISLAND, Charleston County, SC
(Criteria 4 and 6)
10. FIELD HOUSE, St. Louis, MO
(Criterion 2)
11. WASHINGTON PLACE, Honolulu, HI
(Criteria 1 and 2)
12. HEGELER-CARUS MANSION, LaSalle, IL
(Criteria 1 and 4)

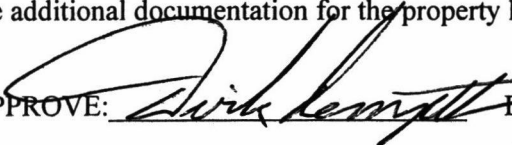
In addition, the Advisory Board recommended that additional documentation for the following already designated National Historic Landmark be accepted:

BEACON HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT, Boston, MA
(Revised documentation)

In accordance with National Historic Landmarks Program regulations, the Board reviewed the studies nominating these properties for Landmark status, and the additional documentation for the already designated National Historic Landmark, and found that the properties meet National Historic Landmarks Program criteria. The Board, therefore, voted to recommend that they be designated as National Historic Landmarks and that the additional documentation be accepted.

Per the National Historic Landmark Program regulations, I hereby certify that the procedural requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 65.5 have been met.

I recommend that you approve the Board's December 15, 2006, recommendation, and designate as National Historic Landmarks the properties listed above and the acceptance of the additional documentation for the property listed above.

APPROVE:  DISAPPROVE: _____

DATE: MAR 29 2007

Attachments



Toni Lee
04/09/2007 07:30 AM
EDT

To: WASO CR NR-NHL, Paul Loether/WASO/NPS@NPS, Sarah
Hopson/WASO/NPS@NPS
cc:
Subject: Fw: Historic Synagogue Earns Landmark Status

----- Forwarded by Toni Lee/WASO/NPS on 04/09/2007 07:29 AM -----



David Barna
04/08/2007 12:11 PM
EDT

To:
cc: (bcc: Toni Lee/WASO/NPS)
Subject: Fw: Historic Synagogue Earns Landmark Status

Bulletin (Philadelphia, PA)
Friday, April 6, 2007

Historic Synagogue Earns Landmark Status
By: Jenny DeHuff, The Bulletin

Photo by Jared Gruenwald / The Bulletin

Elkins Park - Beth Sholom synagogue, the modern and iconic architectural exploit by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, was designated one of 12 national historic landmarks Wednesday by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The synagogue, located just north of Philadelphia on Old York Road in Elkins Park, rests amid several other churches, temples and place of worship, but Beth Sholom stands out. The edifice, a glazed tower of glass, aluminum and stainless steel over a concrete base, reflects the metaphor of a mountain. Wright designed it under the impression of the Biblical Mount Sinai, where God chose to deliver the Ten Commandments to Moses for the people of Israel.

The national historic landmark designation is the highest recognition given by the U.S. to properties determined to be of exceptional value in representing or illustrating an important theme, event or person in the nation's history.

Harvey Friedrich, executive director of Beth Sholom, has overseen the synagogue for eight years. He said he is proud to be honored in this way.

"This synagogue is different than most because we are deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, but our building doesn't reflect the modern principle of 'form follows function'," Friedrich said.

The building, not quite 50 years old, reflects typical Wright design, with sharp edges, modern architecture and lofted ceilings. The notion of the building's shape is modeled after two hands cupped together to represent the hands of God, and Friedrich said it was a drastically contemporary design for the East Coast, at that time.

The sanctuary boasts 110 ft., from top to bottom, starting on a plush, cream-colored carpet, which is meant to exemplify the sands of the Sinai, to a Plexiglass- and glass-shingled ceiling and roof. The ceiling lets in sunlight, and changes the look of the sanctuary as the day progresses.

"This sanctuary can seat 1,028 people," Friedrich said. "It can house an 11-story building."

The seats are not arranged in audience-form, but rather they constitute a congregation, Friedrich said. Beth Sholom, meaning "house of peace," is the only building in which the artist shared credit. Wright and the congregation's original rabbi, Mortimer J. Cohen, collaborated on the project, with metaphors from Cohen and architectural design by Wright.

Built between 1954 and 1959, the structure is Wright's only synagogue. The congregation of Beth Sholom first organized in Philadelphia, at Broad and Courtland streets. They expanded and moved north in 1950 to the Elkins Park location.

Dominating the scene when people enter the sanctuary is a giant ark, or monolith, made of American black walnut, where Torahs are kept.

Much of the color inside the sanctuary is meant to represent favorite hues of Wright's, from the "Cherokee red" tile floors in the foyer to the "milk glass" panels in the overhead light fixture.

The light fixture is another major attribute in the sanctuary. Friedrich said people have said it looked something like a Klingon battle craft from "Star Trek," from its triangular shape and geometric design. The red, blue and purple glass panels mirror the colors of the covers on the Torahs inside the ark at the front of the sanctuary.

Friedrich said the room is at maximum capacity on special holy days of the year, and Saturday morning services are often held in the main sanctuary. On days with less activity, people meet in the Sisterhood Sanctuary, one floor down.

The smaller Sisterhood Sanctuary holds as many as 250 people. Choir practice, schooling, lectures and conferences are held here, as well as an alternative Sabbath service where more traditional rituals are held. It is a more intimate space, especially for Friday and midweek services. Adjacent to the main sanctuary is a small rabbi's study, fit with shorter ceilings designed for the first rabbi, a 5 ft., 4 in.-tall Cohen. More rooms off the side of the building house a swimming pool, gymnasium, classrooms and offices.

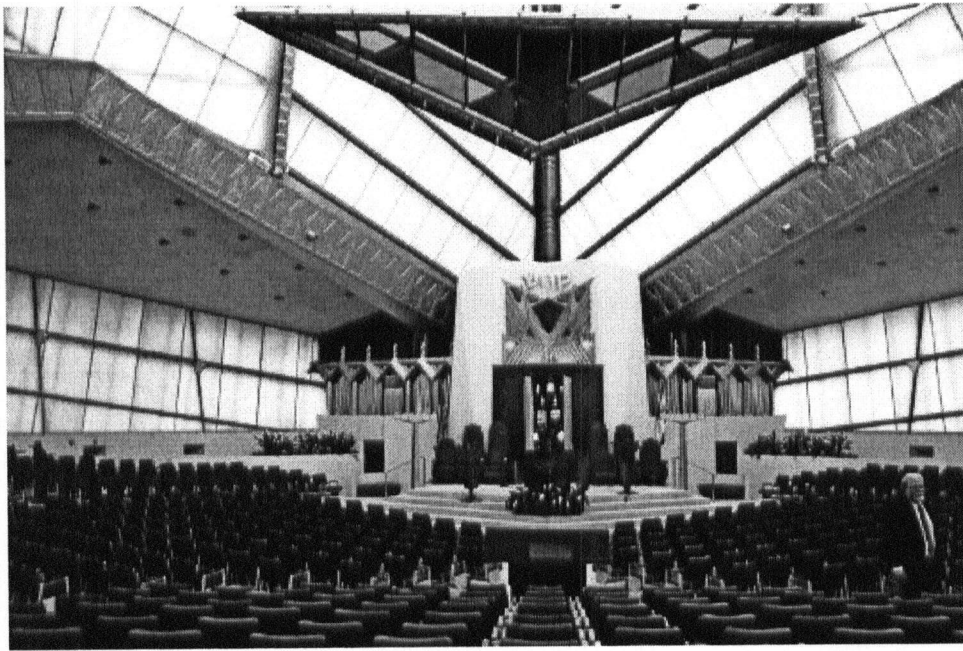
Outside the building, upon entering from the street, Wright designed a large reflecting pool, Friedrich said, to remind people they are entering a holy place. Called the "laver," from the words "to lave" or "to wash," it is made of copper, and signifies the place where worshippers could wash their hands before service.

Friedrich said the building's estimated cost was \$850,000, but the actual cost upon completion was \$1.5 million, paid for by the congregation.

Wright, architect of other major projects like New York's Guggenheim or the Price Tower in Oklahoma, was invited by Beth Sholom Congregation to design the new synagogue in the suburbs of Elkins Park.

Of the dozen new national historic landmarks in the U.S., the honor is shared by the states of Pennsylvania, Utah, Missouri, Hawaii, Illinois, Oklahoma, California, Massachusetts and Ohio.

Jenny DeHuff can be reached at jdehuff@thebulletin.us



H32(2280)

APR 24 2007

Mr. Herbert Sachs
President
Beth Shalom Congregation
8231 Old York Road
Elkins Parks, Pennsylvania 19027-1595

Dear Mr. Sachs:

I am pleased to inform you that the Secretary of the Interior, on March 29, 2007, designated the Beth Shalom Synagogue, in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, as a National Historic Landmark, in recognition of the property's national significance in the history of the United States.

The Historic Sites Act of 1935 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to identify and recognize nationally significant places that best represent the American experience. Landmark designation recognizes and encourages the preservation of places that have exceptional value for commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States, for the inspiration and benefit of all Americans.

The Secretary of the Interior designates National Historic Landmarks only after careful study by the National Park Service, extensive opportunities for public involvement, and review and recommendation by the National Park System Advisory Board, in accordance with National Historic Landmark criteria set forth in 36 CFR Part 65. National Historic Landmarks are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, making them eligible for the safeguards and benefits provided by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and other federal laws protecting historic properties.

I am enclosing a certificate that commemorates the designation of your property as a National Historic Landmark. In addition, each Landmark is eligible to receive one bronze plaque to commemorate the property's designation. You will be contacted shortly, if you have not already, by a National Historic Landmarks coordinator for your area about applying for the plaque. If you have any questions about the plaque or designation before that, please call Ms. Patty Henry of the National Historic Landmarks Program, on (202) 354-2216.

We are delighted to enroll the Beth Shalom Synagogue as a National Historic Landmark — a designation that reflects the preservation of this property as an irreplaceable part of our nation's heritage.

Sincerely,

J. Paul Loether

J. Paul Loether, Chief
National Register of Historic Places
and National Historic Landmarks Program

SIMILAR LETTER SENT TO:

OWNER: Mr. Herbert Sachs
President
Beth Shalom Congregation
8231 Old York Road
Elkins Parks, Pennsylvania 19027-1595

HEO: Mr. Thomas Jay Ellis
Chairman
Montgomery County Board of Commissioners
Montgomery County Courthouse
One Montgomery Plaza, Suite 800
Norristown, Pennsylvania 19404-0311

Mr. Morton J. Simon Jr.
Chairman
Cheltenham Township Board of Commissioners
8230 Old York Road
Elkins Parks, Pennsylvania 19027-1589

SHPO: Ms. Barbara Franco
SHPO
Bureau for Historic Preservation
Commonwealth Keystone Building, 2nd Floor
400 North Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120-0093

BCC: Ms. Bonnie Halda
NPS - Northsat Regional Office

H32(2280)

APR 24 2007

The Honorable Arlen Specter
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Specter:

I am pleased to inform you that the Secretary of the Interior, on March 29, 2007, designated the Beth Sholom Synagogue, in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, as a National Historic Landmark, in recognition of the property's national significance in the history of the United States.

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The Secretary of the Interior designates National Historic Landmarks only after careful study by the National Park Service, extensive opportunities for public involvement, and review and recommendation by the National Park System Advisory Board, in accordance with National Historic Landmark criteria set forth in 36 CFR Part 65. National Historic Landmarks are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, making them eligible for the safeguards and benefits provided by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and other federal laws protecting historic properties. If you have any questions about the designation, please call Ms. Patty Henry of the National Historic Landmarks Program, at (202) 354-2216.

We are delighted to enroll the Aline Barnsdall Complex (Hollyhock House) as a National Historic Landmark — a designation that reflects the preservation of this property as an irreplaceable part of our nation's heritage.

Sincerely,

Signed

Janet Snyder Matthews, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Cultural Resources

IDENTICAL LETTER SENT TO:

The Honorable Arlen Specter
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Casey, Jr.
United States Senate
383 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chaka Fattah
United States House of Representatives
2301 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515



Toni Lee/WASO/NPS
10/23/2009 08:19 AM

To WASO CR NHL
cc Jan Matthews/WASO/NPS@NPS, Paul
Loether/WASO/NPS@NPS, Lisa
Weissman/Contractor/NPS@NPS
bcc

Subject Fw: [SAH-LISTSERV] Visitor Center Dedication at Wright's
Beth Sholom 11/15

Congrats to everyone who worked on this NHL nomination. Toni

----- Forwarded by Toni Lee/WASO/NPS on 10/23/2009 08:18 AM -----



etcooperman@COMCAST.N
ET
Sent by: Society of
Architectural Historians List
<SAHLISTSERV@listserv.bro
wn.edu>

To SAHLISTSERV@listserv.brown.edu
cc
Subject [SAH-LISTSERV] Visitor Center Dedication at Wright's Beth
Sholom 11/15

10/23/2009 07:47 AM

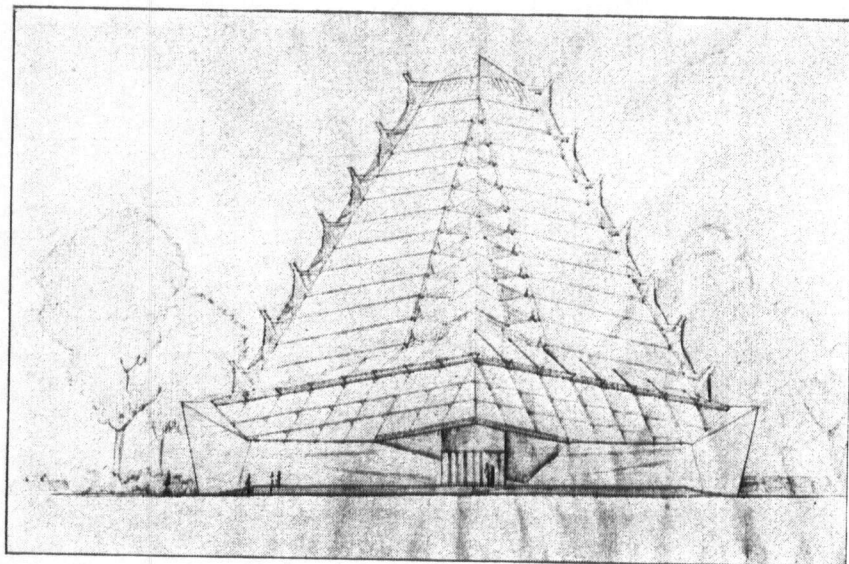
Beth Sholom Synagogue Preservation Foundation in Elkins Park, PA will dedicate its new Visitor Center with Paul Goldberger, the architecture critic for the New Yorker Magazine, who will speak about Beth Sholom Synagogue on the occasion of its 50 th Anniversary. Guests to the opening event will have an opportunity to see the newly created Visitor Center and to tour the National Historic Landmark building.

As the only synagogue designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Beth Sholom stands as a monument both to twentieth-century design and Jewish interests. The Visitor Center was created to give a greater understanding of the building to the public and to provide an exciting experience that will complement tours of the Wright structure. The Visitor Center interprets Beth Sholom in the contexts of Wright's life and work and American synagogue architecture. Included in the exhibition is an 18-minute film entitled: "An American Synagogue: Frank Lloyd Wright, Rabbi Mortimer Cohen and the Making of Beth Sholom," produced by exhibition designers Picture Projects of New York.

The dedication event is free and open to the public, and will begin at 2 p.m. on Sunday, November 15, 2009. The opening event is co-sponsored by Partnership for Sacred Spaces, the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. For more information about the event, please contact Beth Sholom at 215-887-1342 or www.bethsholomsynagogue.com

Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D., Principal
Architectural Research and Cultural History
217 E. Evergreen Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19118
o/f: (215) 247-0604
c: (267) 226-9145
etcooperman@comcast.net

ART



WRIGHT'S DESIGN FOR PHILADELPHIA SYNAGOGUE
For a supreme moment, beauty and reverence.

Promised Hosanna

The Jewish people have built their places of worship all over the world, but never have they produced architectural monuments to rival those of other faiths. This week, in the year commemorating the arrival of the first group of Jewish families in America 300 years ago,* the Beth Shalom Congregation in Philadelphia announced that U.S. Judaism was hoping to close the gap. It had commissioned Architect Frank Lloyd Wright to design a synagogue which would "wed the American spirit to the ancient spirit of Israel."

Wright's synagogue began as a gleam in the pastoral eye of Mortimer J. Cohen, rabbi of the Beth Shalom Congregation.

* When 23 Jews fled persecution in Brazil, came to Manhattan. The first U.S. synagogue went up in 1730 in lower Manhattan; the oldest still in existence is the Jeshuat Israel Synagogue in Newport, R.I., built in 1763.

Rabbi Cohen took his ideas on what a modern synagogue should be to Wright, asked him to design the temple. Wright, the son of a Unitarian minister, was intrigued with the challenge. After working out the design in his studio in Arizona, he delivered his plans to Rabbi Cohen.

Taking the theme of Mt. Sinai, where God gave Moses the two stone tables containing the Ten Commandments, Wright projected a huge (175 ft. wide by 100 ft. tall) pyramidal structure in the form of a distorted hexagon. The main auditorium will seat 1,200. Dominating the interior will be a 40-ft.-high ark of the covenant, faced with colored glass to symbolize the burning bush that was not consumed. The pulpit will be in the center, a return to the custom of ancient times, which emphasized what Rabbi Cohen calls "the democratic relationship between the religious leader and the congregation." The exterior will be double-walled—blue-tinted plastic under white-wired glass. A copper

cap covering the pyramid will proclaim in large Hebrew letters: "I am the Lord thy God." Rabbi Cohen hopes to break ground for the \$750,000 synagogue in Philadelphia's suburban Elkins Park next fall.

Transmitting his plans to the Philadelphia congregation, Wright wrote: "Here with the promised hosanna—a temple that is truly a religious tribute to the living God . . . Here you have a coherent statement of worship. I hope it pleases you and your people." Replied Rabbi Cohen: "You have taken the supreme moment of Jewish history and experience—the revelation of God to Israel through Moses at Mt. Sinai—and you have translated that moment with all it signifies into a design of beauty and reverence."

Whither Away

One sure way to start an argument in artistic circles is to try to define the course of contemporary American painting. Sometimes it seems headed for new heights, sometimes for dead-end crashes. It ranges between the two extremes of realism: 1) making paint look as much as possible like something else, and 2) letting it look like just paint. It makes some people mad and others glad, on alternate days. A good example of what the shouting is about can be seen this week at Manhattan's Guggenheim Museum, where Director James Johnson Sweeney has assembled an exhibition of 54 paintings entitled "Younger American Painters."

Director Sweeney, who toured the country to make his selections in person, favors abstract art, and the scattering of representational pictures in his exhibition looks almost as out of place as dogs at a flower show. But Sweeney carefully points out that the exhibition is not meant to be a cross section or to indicate a trend.

Jackstraws in the Sky. Sweeney does suggest that U.S. painters are less conscious of tradition than the European and are apt to experiment more. He finds a surprising degree of Oriental influence in American art and a lot of new life among the West Coast painters. A stand-out

PUBLIC FAVORITES (39)



COROT

JEAN-BAPTISTE CAMILLE COROT was one of the most puzzling painters of the 19th century. His studio pictures could be weak, dull and sickly sweet; his paintings direct from nature were often as pure and clear as a thrush's song. An example of Corot at his best is his *Blonde Gasconne* (opposite), the public favorite at the Smith College Museum of Art. In this simple picture the pearly atmosphere is conveyed as only Corot could, and the girl seems almost a condensation of the cool sea air. She is an unforgettable

presence, melancholy and mysterious as a peasant Mona Lisa. Corot started off strong. He was blessed with deep feeling for nature, instinctive taste and a large allowance from his family. At 29 he went to Italy and immediately started painting the best landscapes of his career. He outdid even his great

French predecessors in Rome—Poussin and Claude Lorrain—by redoing their favorite scenes in a less theatrical manner.

But after Corot's return to Paris, lesser men kept urging him to paint big, neo-classical scenes stuffed with the literary allusions then popular. Amiability was perhaps Corot's greatest fault as an artist. In time he gave in, gained critical success with such pictures, then proceeded to make a popular and financial success with watered-down studio versions of his landscapes. From his late 40s until his death at 78, Corot painted thousands of such cobwebby canvases to fill a vast and continuing demand. Only now and then, as with the *Blonde Gasconne*, did he rise again to the heights of his intransigent youth.

Corot gave a large part of his earnings to other artists. He generally thought his friends better painters than himself. His own work he described as "little music." The phrase is not simply humble; it has the distinction of accuracy. But when it flowed pure, Corot's "little music" surpassed that of his greatest contemporaries. Neither the lyre of Ingres nor the trumpet of Delacroix is so haunting as Corot's pastoral pipes.

while a lot more public housing could have been built.

The high court ruling made it seem likely that Negroes soon would blast their way into white housing projects in the South—via the courts. Three days after the court's school segregation decision, 18 Negroes asked a Savannah federal court to enjoin the Public Housing Administration and the Housing Authority of Savannah against denying them admission to Fred Wessels Homes, a new apartment project. They also asked \$90,000 damages. Their attorneys were led by NAACP's Thurgood Marshall of New York, the chief legal brain of the school segregation case.

School time bomb. If reaction to the court's public housing decision seemed violent, one reason was that its results could be immediate. The decision on school segregation, on the other hand, was a delayed-action bomb. By announcing that it will not formulate decrees to carry out integration until fall, the court allowed for a cooling-off period. Reaction was calmer.

The decision cast doubt over the future of some \$800 million of planned school construction in the 17 states where racial segregation is required by law.* Most drastic action was taken by Gov. James Byrnes of South Carolina. He cut off state money for new public school construction contracts pending further studies. The effect was to halt the state's huge school building program intended to equalize facilities for whites and Negroes. In three years, South Carolina had spent or earmarked close to \$100 million for some 400 school buildings—about two thirds of them for Negroes. Another \$76 million of school construction, much of it for Negroes, was planned.

In Georgia, however, Gov. Herman E. Tammage said the Supreme Court decision would not affect school building because the state needs the schools. The program totals some \$200 million for 1,036 grammar and high schools. Contracts have been let for about 600.

Architect Marcellus Wright Jr., AIA regional director for the middle Atlantic area, forecast: "The aggressive school building program for the benefit of both races, operative since the war, will grind to a standstill. . . ."

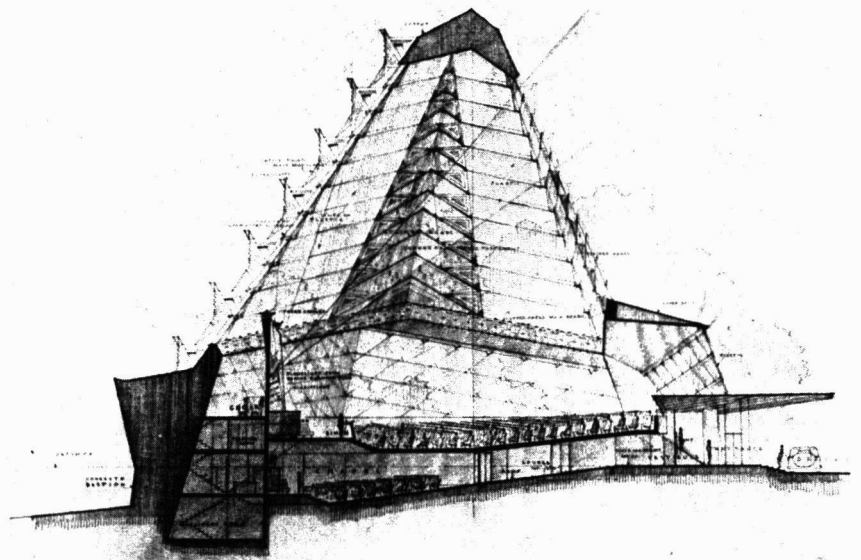
Evasion devices. In most other states, the chances were that school building would be slowed while devices to get around the court's ruling are explored thoroughly and fervently. One of the likeliest: gerrymandering of school districts, which would work in spots where there is effective residential segregation (but would not work in rural areas, or, for example, in Charleston, S.C., where whites and Negroes often live in different parts of the same block). Mississippi was

counting on a law enacted at the last session of the legislature, which says: "In making assignments of children to schools or attendance centers as provided by this act, the Board of Trustees shall take into consideration the emotional needs and welfare of the child involved, the welfare and best interests of the pupils attending the school or schools involved, health and moral factors at the school." It contains no mention of segregation, but gives trustees almost unlimited power to segregate just the same.

One leading school expert ventured the guess that while the decision would slow school building in the South, eventually almost all the schools planned will be built. Both white and Negro schools are overcrowded in many areas. Many Negro schools are obso-

lete, even unfit. On balance, the biggest foreseeable drop in southern school building looked like about 5%.

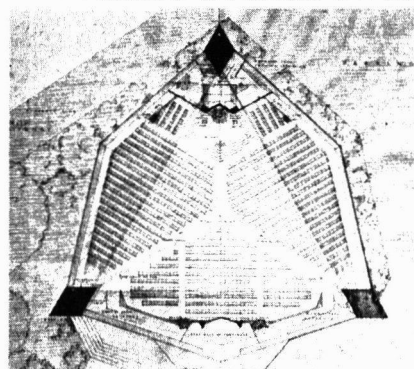
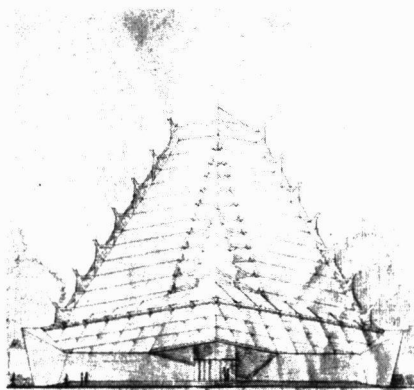
In Congress, the antisegregation decision put more steam behind demands for increased federal aid for school construction. In the past, the two most serious roadblocks to more federal school aid have been objections by southern Congressmen that this would become a device to smash segregation and objections by religious groups—mostly Catholics who profess to see a threat to their parochial schools. Currently pending is a bill to spend \$100 million a year for five years for federal aid to school building. The AFL executive council, scoffing at that as "abysmally inadequate," demanded \$1 billion to help the South build racially integrated schools.



Glass-towered synagogue, Frank Lloyd Wright's first

Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen of Beth Shalom Congregation in Philadelphia made some sketches of what he thought a synagogue should embody and showed them to a friend. The friend said: "Only one man can do it—Frank Lloyd Wright." Wright did it (above). When he submitted the drawings, he wrote: "Herewith the promised hosanna, a temple that is truly a religious tribute to the living god." Said Rabbi Cohen: "It is Mt. Sinai wrought in modern materials."

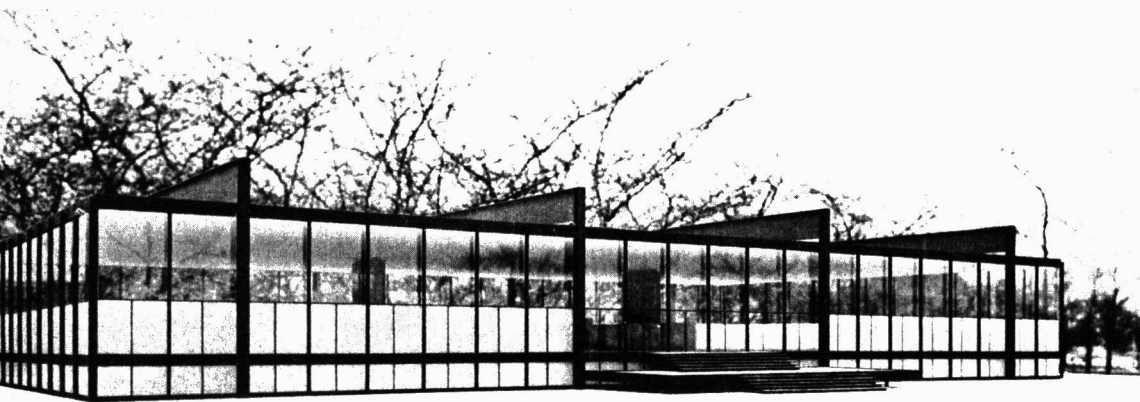
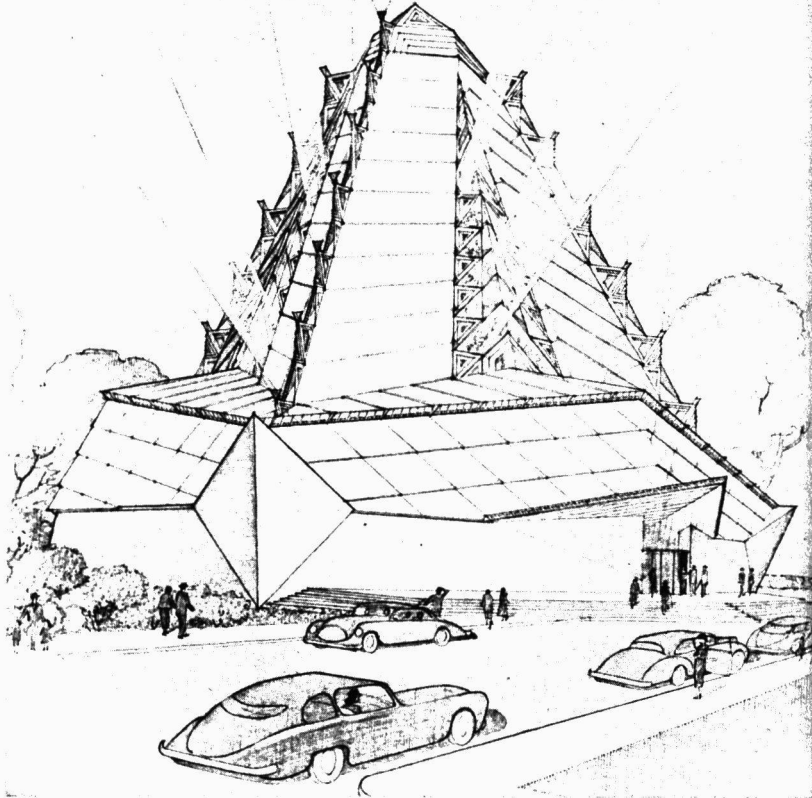
The distorted-hexagon structure will have double outer walls, of wire glass and blue-tinted plastic, with about an inch of air space between. Stamped copper shells will be filled with reinforced concrete. It will be 175' at its widest, 100' tall and is expected to cost \$175,000. Projections on outside (left) are symbolic of the menorah—candelabra—of the ancient tabernacle. Chapel (part of floor plan, lower left) seats 268, an auditorium 1,214. Atop the triangular glass tower will be a floodlit message in Hebrew: I am the Lord, Your God. "With the intuition that only genius mysteriously attains," said Rabbi Cohen, "Mr. Wright has created . . . a Jewish symbol in and of itself."



* The 17: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. Segregation is a matter for local option in four others: Arizona, Kansas, Wyoming, New Mexico.

THE RECORD REPORTS

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT has designed his first synagogue, a project for Beth Shalom Congregation in Philadelphia. The congregation last month embarked on a campaign to raise \$750,000 to erect it "on a grassy mount" at York Road and Foxcroft Road in suburban Elkins Park. The building will be a hexagon surmounted by a triangular sphere of white-wired glass underlaid with blue-tinted plastic; structural members will be green copper. Along each of three ridges from the large pointed concrete bastions at the base of the triangle to the copper cap will be lighted lamps, replicas of the Menorah in the ancient Tabernacle. The apostle of "honest arrogance," now 85 years old, submitted his drawings to Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen with the comment, "Herewith the promised 'hosannah'—a temple that is truly a religious tribute to the living God." The Rabbi calls it "a replica of Mount Sinai—that small mountain of jagged, massive slabs of stone, where Israel encountered God"



Hedrich-Blessing

LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE has designed another building for Illinois Institute of Technology's Chicago campus—this one for the architecture department, which he heads, the industrial design department, and a soon-to-be-established department of urban and regional planning. A drive to raise \$600,000 to finance the project was launched by the Institute last month. The building, 120 x 220 ft, to be enclosed entirely in plate glass (the lower sections opaque), will have a welded steel structure and a concrete roof suspended from four exposed steel girders. Space use within the column-free main hall, 28 ft high, will be defined by low, free-standing wood walls. The floor of the hall will be five ft above ground to admit natural light and ventilation into a full basement containing more teaching and study as well as service facilities

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Washington report: State Dept. to get 2d biggest US office; school aid pushed

Biggest architectural and building news in Washington last month was the awarding of a design contract for a huge State Department headquarters building. It will cover four blocks, be the biggest US office building anywhere except for the Pentagon.

The three joint-venture firms which received the architectural and engineering assignment were Chicago's Graham, Anderson, Probst & White, Inc., Detroit's Harley, Ellington & Day, Inc., and, as Washington associate, the firm of Architect A. R. Clas.

The new structure, with almost 2.7 million sq. ft. of floor area, is intended to reunite under one roof all State Department activities, now scattered in more than a score of buildings. Barring hitches, it is planned to have the structure under way by summer on the four blocks between 21st and 23d Sts. and C and E Sts. in the so-called Foggy Bottom area. Last year \$1 million was appropriated for planning this project; in his budget message last month President Eisenhower requested funds to cover its estimated \$50 million construction costs.

Other big District of Columbia building funds the President requested would finance: 1) a \$49 million headquarters for the Central Intelligence Agency, although it still was not decided whether this would rise in the District or in nearby Fairfax County, Va., 2) the new Senate Office Building and a third House Office Building to cost a total of \$31.2 million, and 3) a \$33.7 million Museum of History and Technology for the Smithsonian Institution on the Mall between 12th and 14th Streets.

Other US building programs. In his state of the union and budget messages, as well as in his special message on school aid, the President also outlined the administration's objectives in its various other construction or construction-assistance programs.

The newest Eisenhower school-aid recommendations, considerably more liberal than his unadopted 1955 proposals, would provide for:

► Annual federal grants for \$250 million for five years, to be matched by the states on a sliding scale according to their own financial resources.

► A five-year program to buy up to \$750 million of local school bonds for communities that are not able to market them at reasonable interest rates.

With national elections coming up in November, Republicans and Democrats both wanted to enact a school-aid law. The Democrats also want to show that they tried to pass one that would give more aid than the Republicans proposed. The problem that bedevils both parties and might prevent the enactment of any school aid bill whatsoever is the prospect of an anti-segregation amendment to the bill that might cause Southern Congressmen to kill the bill.

Hospital aid funds. For local hospital construction aid under the Hill-Burton Act's "old program," the President requested \$88.8 million, the same as last year. The "new" program covering four types of facilities will be increased from \$21 million this year to \$40 million in the fiscal year beginning in July. Another \$1.2 million was requested for grants, as high as 100%, for research in hospital utilization and administration. To date, 16 have been approved.

The budget message also requested \$53 million for new hospitals and modernization for the Veterans Administration. For military construction the President asked appropriations of \$1,817 million, compared with \$1,899 million for the current fiscal year, and for AEC construction authority to use \$2,700 million from unobligated funds still available from a 1955 appropriation.

Skies clearing for Wright's ramp museum, synagogue

At the completion of Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower in Bartlesville, Okla. (p. 107), it appeared that 1956 would witness the start of construction on two more of Wright's most spectacular designs.

► After two important changes, New York's Board of Standards and Appeals approved designs for his spiral ramp museum for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation (AF, April '52, and the

Building Dept. was reported ready to issue a building permit. In the revised plans the diameter of the top level of the five-ring spiral (wider at the top than at the base) was reduced so it would no longer overhang the building line. Instead of using the original Wright-designed support and reinforcing system, the tower will have a conventional structural system, but this will not change its appearance. As a consultant on this structure, the first he has ever engaged, Wright employed Engineer Jacob Feld of New York.

► In Elkins Park, Philadelphia suburb, Beth Shalom Congregation was negotiating for an unidentified western builder recommended by Wright to build the only synagogue he has ever designed—a semi-hexagonal, pyramidal-dome structure representing the shape of the biblical Mt. Sinai (AF, June '54). Last summer not a single contractor accepted the invitation to bid on erecting the \$750,000 nonconventional structure. Nor was any eastern builder found who was prepared to contract directly for the job at a price approximating Wright's estimates. Finally Wright suggested a western builder who has put up three buildings he designed. Last month he was expected to receive the job soon.

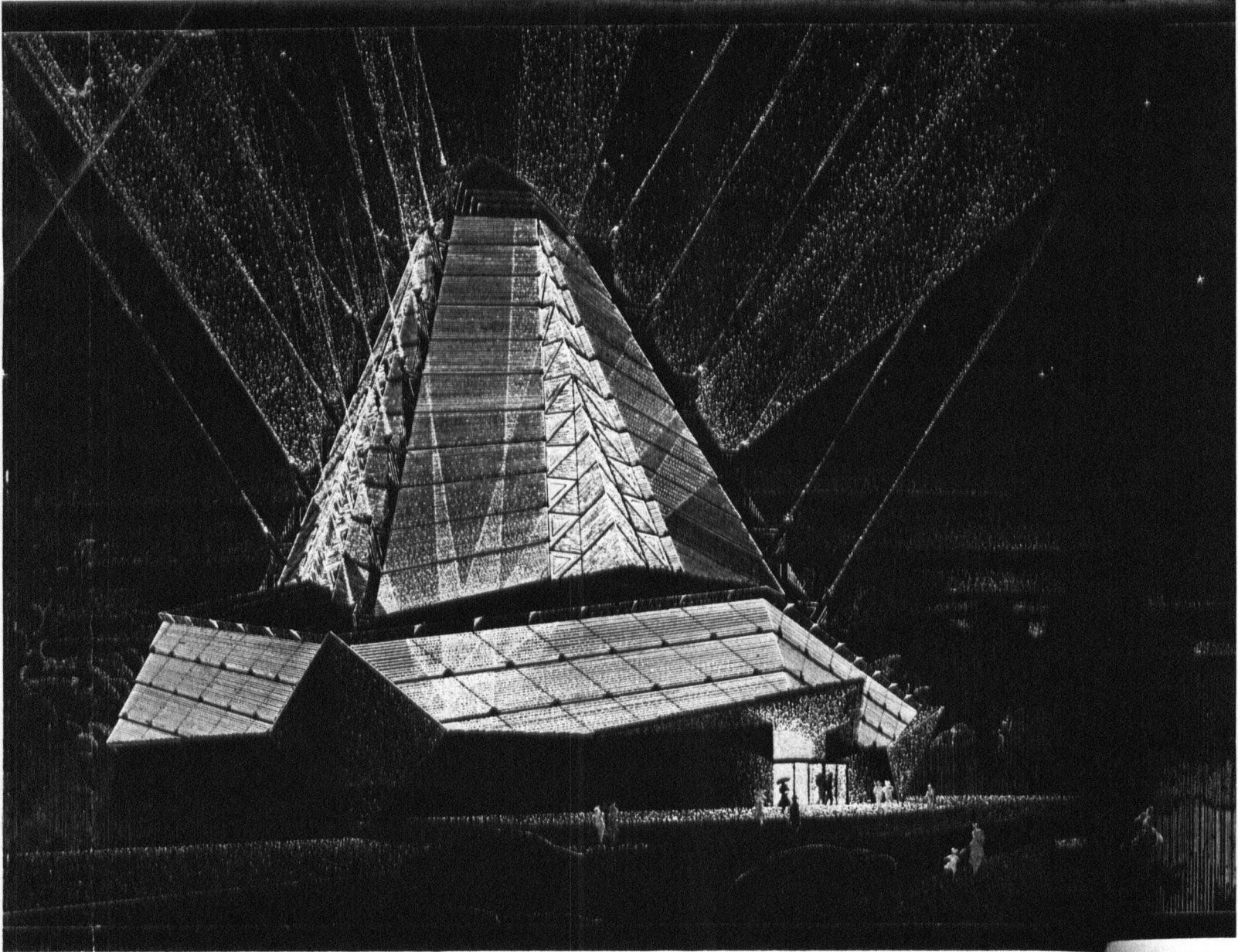
In Taliesin West in Arizona, Wright recently commented with characteristic acidity when he was notified that Venice's Artistic and Technical Commission had rejected his design for a glass-and-marble building on the famed Grand Canal as being inharmonious with other buildings along the canal. He assumed that "the tourists" had won, and said: "Commissions seldom agree with enlightened critics."



Black granite and stainless steel offices for financing firm

Harrison & Abramovitz designed this black granite and stainless steel New York office structure that George A. Fuller has begun erecting for C.I.T. Financial Corp. The second floor of this eight-story air-conditioned building will consist of a rest and recreation area for employees; it will be

indented from the building line and planted with a peripheral band of shrubbery. Senior executives will occupy offices on the setback, terraced, eighth floor beneath a windowless air-conditioning and utilities penthouse. The steel frame will be bolted. The structure will cost about \$9 million.



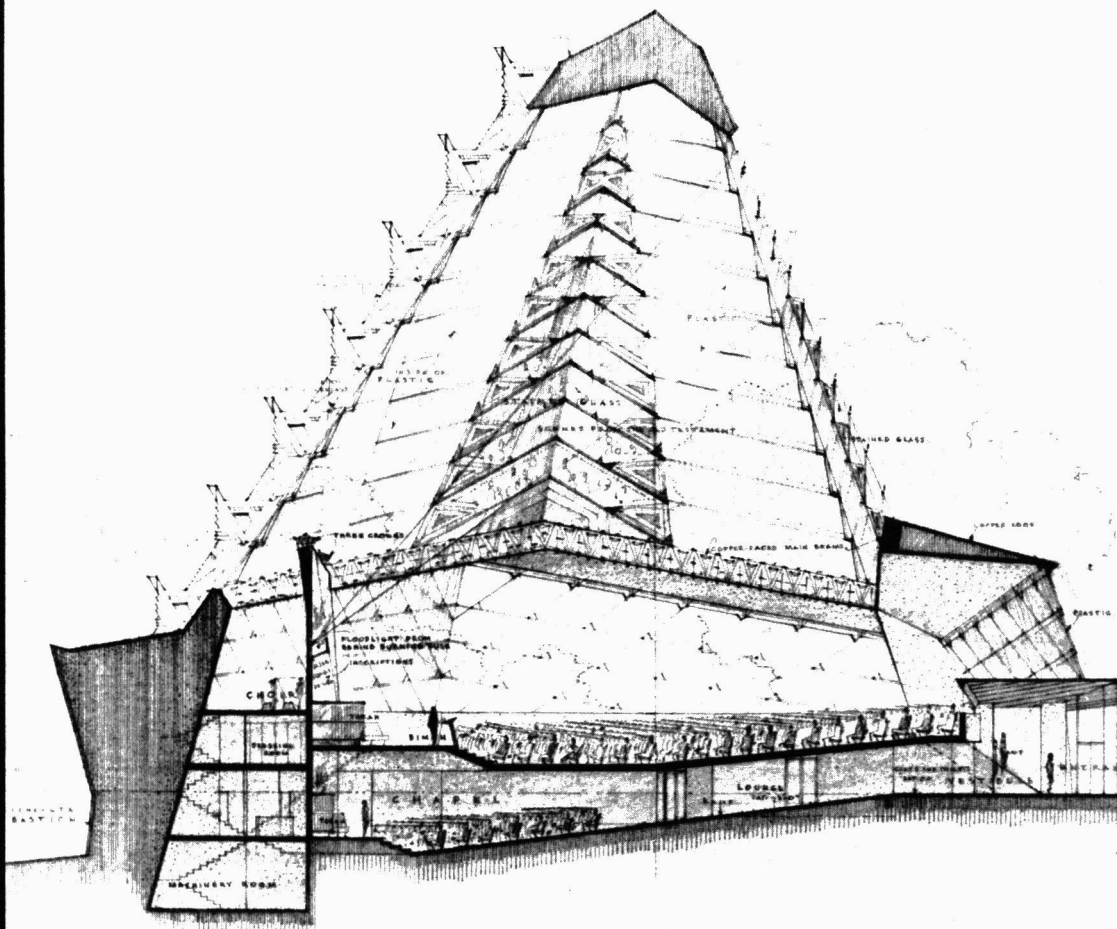
Frank Lloyd Wright 3 new churches

by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.

Worship in many forms is natural to American life, and America's architect laureate, Frank Lloyd Wright, has designed many kinds of churches and chapels during his long career. One of his first masterworks, Unity Temple (1906), still stands in Oak Park (original drawing illustrated). Like recent designs shown here, the early church is symmetrically planned from the center in all directions, achieving a monumental presence for the idea of deity. Fifty years have passed since Unity was built; Wright has given various shapes to religious buildings; but his three latest have a concentrated power, a direct spiritual impact that emanates from a lifetime in which worship and work were essentially one. As different in their forms as the faiths they serve, modestly sized, each one is richly inventive, intensely pure, and eloquent of the praise, the search, the act which unite all worships.



Unity



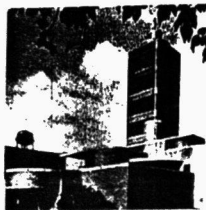
Beth Sholem Synagogue
Philadelphia

In 1930, deep in the economic depression, Frank Lloyd Wright dreamed of the embodiment of religious freedom as a great cathedral encompassing the altars of all faiths, a gigantic pyramidal structure sheathed in glass. A reflection of this dream enlivens Beth Sholem's three bold masts upholding a translucent double tent, glass outside, plastic inside. Three figured stained-glass panels are inset midway between the copper-clad, illuminated masts. The crown is of copper, like the encircling canopy over the massive concrete base. A prism of light, a rock of strength, joyous and austere at once, this synagogue Wright has designed is original in every architectural detail yet clearly it proclaims the authority of ancient tradition.

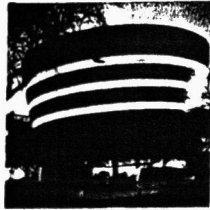


Unity Temple, Oak Park, Chicago.

WORK COMPLETED



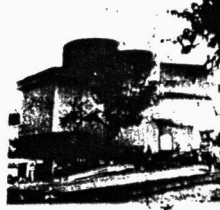
FOR INDUSTRY—The Johnson Wax Building in Racine, Wis., is noted for its unusual research space.



FOR ART—The Guggenheim Museum in Las Vegas is a powerful concrete spiral that blends completely with tradition.



FOR RELIGION—The Shalom House in Shom Park, Pa., uses slanting walls and roof to create a soaring interior space.



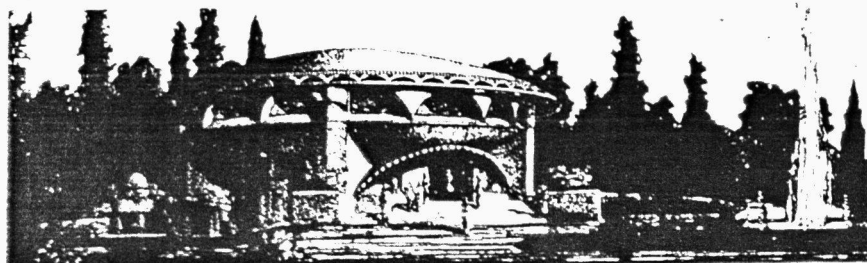
FOR DRAMA—The DeLoe Center Theater, opening next month, has a revolving stage and massive projecting balconies.

Triple Legacy Of Mr. Wright

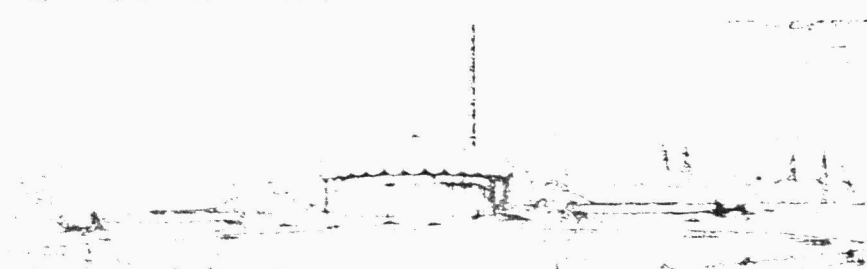
By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The extraordinary public response to the new Guggenheim Museum again puts the limelight on the lifetime of accomplishment of its creator, Frank Lloyd Wright. When he died last April, Wright left a triple legacy. First, there is the series of distinguished buildings constructed over seventy years that have become landmarks of modern architecture. Second, there are some fifty buildings in progress, being carried out by Wright's students and associates of the Wright Foundation. They range from civic buildings to clinics, stores, houses and hotels. Third, there are the great schemes which show Wright's mind at its most daring. So far, these remain dreams. Here are examples of the three aspects of Wright's legacy.

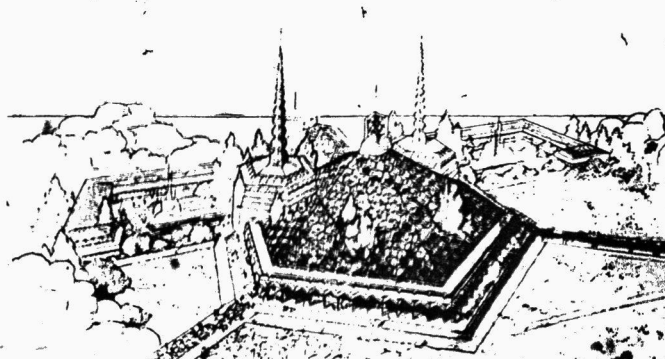
WORK IN PROGRESS



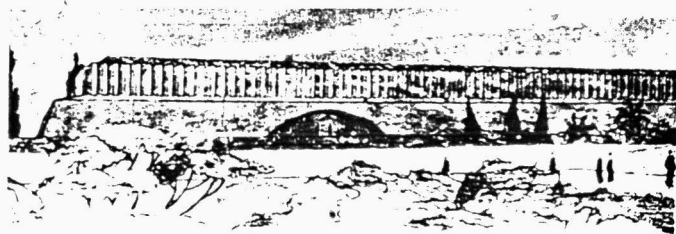
Below: Wright's design for the new Guggenheim Museum in Las Vegas, showing the spiral concrete structure and the surrounding landscape.



DREAMS



STATE CENTER—A proposed capital for Arizona was envisioned by Wright as an area of buildings, gardens and fountains, centered by a 400-foot-wide concrete trelliswork dome. The dome would "filter sunlight over the structure beneath like the foliage of a great tree."



ART CENTER—A museum for the treasures of ancient Babylon was to have been part of the plan for the new State Center. Wright's design for the museum was to be a "great temple" with a "great hall" and a "great courtyard."



Wright's 528-story office tower for Chicago.

Two to bottom: Plaque set of textured beige linen has checkered effect. E. Dames, 1125. McCutcheon's, Gay stripe border linen set from Poland. Follini & Cohn, 52. Laid & Taylor, Delicate embroidery edges linen. Marghab, in uncut-piece set, 5125. Georg Jensen, Liner drawing on linen, Japanese flavor. Yara, Four mats and napkins, 55. Altman's, Black point on cotton mat from Thailand. Runner, in mat and napkins, 5125. Mid of Thailand, White elegantly beak embroidered butterflies. Madras, Eight mats and napkins, 5125. Lissa, Chrysanthemums brighten hand-drawn linen. Lissach, Four mats and napkins, 55. Altman's.

THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

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Letters

NYTM 22 Nov 1959 p88

(Continued from Page 8)
lowed them to be conscious of the grace and charm surrounding them.

As for his theory that the housewives of America are being denied the creative arts of sewing and cooking because of progress, I think it unlikely that many of these same housewives would relish a return to those glorious days spent sewing and straining and scrubbing even for the sake of creativity.

Defying the past will do nothing to elevate the taste of the present. What we need instead from men like Mr. Stone is guidance and planning for the future.

Mrs. PHILIP MEYER
Chappaqua, N. Y.

UGLY STATIONS

TO THE EDITOR:

My compliments to Mr. Stone's article against ugliness.

Perhaps the greatest single factor contributing to America's ugliness seems to me to be the gas station. Gasoline is one commodity nobody buys less or more of than he really needs. These gaudy, vile structures are erected by companies competing against each other—with an extra touch of irony in the fact that some of them belong to the same parent company.

If one gasoline company broke with this awful tradition and started selling gas from a completely different, civilized-looking station, and it advertised that this was its contribution toward a better-looking America, I am certain it would find this to be very good business.

HANS KONIGSBERGER
New York.

PRESERVE THE BEST

TO THE EDITOR:

"Is it wrong to pursue the past?" Mr. Stone's question has missed the target by a literary mile. Was the past all "elegance," "quality" and

"comfort"? Or rather was this "plushness" reserved for the discerning elite capable of assimilating and enjoying it?

The responsibility of the heirs of this elite is not to denounce the "tailfin" or the "efficiency apartment," but to select and preserve the best forms of elegance being created today. The "richness" of high-fidelity recording devices is an example of this beauty, as is the sensitivity of certain modernistic sculpture and its counterpart, not in the neobau architecture of our sterile shopping centers and suburban subdivisions, but in such creations as the Beth Shalom Temple near Philadelphia.

These are the measure of the depth and intensity that our "progress" has made available to us.

LISTER HUMPHREYS
Indiana, Pa.

TOOL'S PARADISE

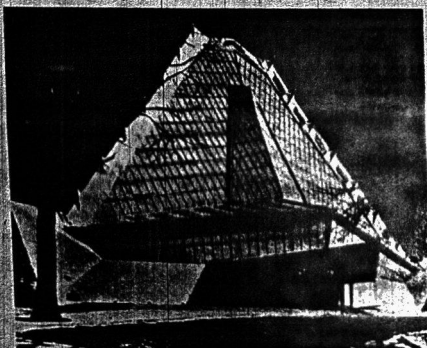
TO THE EDITOR:

Edward D. Stone struck a very responsive note. Implicit in his theme is the feeling that a desire for warmth and beauty has gone out of our lives and that a great deal of the blame rests upon contemporary architects.

It would seem, however, that Mr. Stone has understated an important facet of our culture. Americans are faddists. So are her artists. The fact that Park Avenue looks like "a crevice in a glacier" is a result of this faddism. Miss Van der Rohe, since the passing of Frank Lloyd Wright probably America's greatest architect, stands alone as the master of the glass-walled building. Hundreds of imitators have tried to follow in his footsteps. Hence the plethora of glass and aluminum in New York and Chicago.

The vastly dissimilar contributions of a Stone and a Miss Van der Rohe should, certainly, inspire the kind of diversity that our buildings so desperately need.

(Continued on Following Page)



"MODERN BEAUTY"—The new Beth Shalom Synagogue in Elkins Park, Pa., which was designed by the late Frank Lloyd Wright.

THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

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November 22, 1959



Jane Davis Doggett

A SYNAGOGUE

"We want to create the kind of building that people, on entering it, will feel as if they were resting in the very hands of God." Thus Frank Lloyd Wright described his intention in the design of a synagogue for the Beth Sholom Congregation now under construction in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. The entrance vestibule opens onto the lower temple which is dark and enclosed. On either side of the vestibule ramps lead to the upper temple which will be brilliantly illuminated by the light of the sky through its great roof. The floor of the upper temple which slopes inward gently (see plan) does suggest cupped hands and the congregation may indeed feel that they rest in the hands of God and worship.

The structure is basically a pyramid on a hexagon. The pyramid is formed by a steel tripod, each leg of which rests on a diamond shaped concrete bastion. Subordinate vertical structural members rest on three great concrete beams in the form of chevrons. The roof will be enclosed by sandblasted corrugated wire glass on the outer surface and white corrugated plastic on the inner surface with a 5-in. air space between. All structural steel will be faced with natural finished aluminum in triangular patterns.

The development was warmly welcomed by the community's leaders," he said. "The only opposition, both and very small, came from some minority owners and a shopkeeper. There was no trouble at all with the tenants."

Timothy Relocated

Lawrence Miller, of the Department of Real Estate's Relocation Bureau, cited the Lindsay Park relocation as an excellent example of "the smoothness with which relocation is now carried out."

The bureau supervised the sponsor's relocation of the residents, except for those living on blocks that will contain the new Public School 250, and a playground. Homes were found for these people by the bureau itself.

The Lindsay Park program presents some interesting comments on the impact of a middle-income development on a low-income neighborhood.

"A widespread but fallacious notion," according to Mr. Harte, "is that those displaced by a middle-income development are being inhumanly taken from the only homes they can afford. Actually, we have found that a good many of those living in the substandard homes we

Continued on Page 6, Column 1

A \$30,000,000 National Cultural Center for the performing Arts is planned in Washington. The Federal Government will provide the building site, but Congress has stipulated that the construction money must be provided by public donations.

A national fund-raising campaign, headed by Mrs. John F. Kennedy and Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower, is scheduled to begin Nov. 15. Half the proceeds may be kept by participating cities for their own cultural programs.

Center in Syracuse

The completion of the first phase of a \$24,000,000 music center in Los Angeles is scheduled late in 1963. The first section of the project will be a 3,310-seat symphony hall, called the Memorial Pavilion. In addition there will be two theatre structures.

Half the \$24,000,000 construction cost is being met by public donations, the other half by the County of Los Angeles. The building site is a seven-acre tract bounded by First, Hope, Temple and Grand Streets.

A cultural center will be part of an urban renewal program being planned in Syracuse, N. Y. A \$700,000 center for the arts and sciences is planned in Peoria, Ill.

Winter Park, Fla., is plan-

Continued on Page 4, Column 8

Suburban Synagogue Designs Linked to New Patterns of Life

New patterns of Jewish life in the suburbs are finding architectural expression in some of the original and emancipated designs for synagogues, according to Irving H. Lurie, a consultant on architecture to the United Synagogue of America.

Mr. Lurie, an architect and real estate financier here, has aided in the design of more than 600 synagogues throughout the hemisphere in the last twenty-two years.

The United Synagogue of America, which speaks for the Conservative branch of Judaism has no authority over affiliated congregations, but its suggestions on financing, location, design and construction are usually accepted, Mr. Lurie says.

He explains that the suburban synagogue has taken on a special role in addition to its traditional religious and educational functions. The relative abundance of land in the suburbs has also given the architect greater freedom to design more horizontal lines.

Mr. Lurie rejects criticisms that architects are designing synagogues that resemble secular schools, libraries or laboratories and that they look less "Jewish" than the older synagogues.

Such nostalgia rests on a misconception, he contends, asserting that there is no such thing as "Jewish architecture."

Both in ancient Israel and in other lands where they settled, he says, the Jews were content to adapt local building styles to their own use. The dome, once popular for synagogues, was derived from the Byzantine Christian architecture of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, says Mr. Lurie.

Moorish designs, favored by many Sephardic congregations descended from Spanish Jews, recall the golden era of Jewish life in Moslem Spain.

The first American syna-

Continued on Page 4, Column 2

Among structures to rise as part of new Washington Performing Arts is the auditorium designed by Eero Saarinen & Associates.

Architect Says Tall Buildings Inevitably Will Rise

By FARNSWORTH TOWLE

Resistance to high-rise apartments in the suburbs is really just a rear-guard action, a hopeless battle against the inevitable, a New York architect said last week.

Seymour Jarmul, a partner in the firm of Samuel Paul and Seymour Jarmul, was arguing the need to shift from individual houses to high-rise apartments to accommodate the expected population increase.

Even the garden apartment of today will be impractical in the future, because of the large sites they require.

Mr. Jarmul says that people need light and air and that therefore "we must start building upward." The process, he says, must be preserved for park and recreational facilities.

40-story Buildings

"Practically speaking," he asserts, "five to six acres of land, if developed with 40-story buildings, can accommodate about 2,000 people. If this land were subdivided, as it is in many cases today, into 60-by-100-foot plots, only about thirty-two to forty families could occupy the area."

The inevitability of the change, he says, stems from the increased economic pressures being brought to bear on small communities plus their physical limitations in expanding.

The apartment of the future, in Mr. Jarmul's vision, will be more than what he describes as the dormitories of today. They will be "self-contained communities with recreation and religious facilities," he says. He foresees a thirty-hour week and the establishment of centers around recreational facilities instead of the traditional clustering of cities around cultural centers.

He envisages forty-story honeycomb-like structures, into which the individual could insert his own prefabricated apartment designed in any

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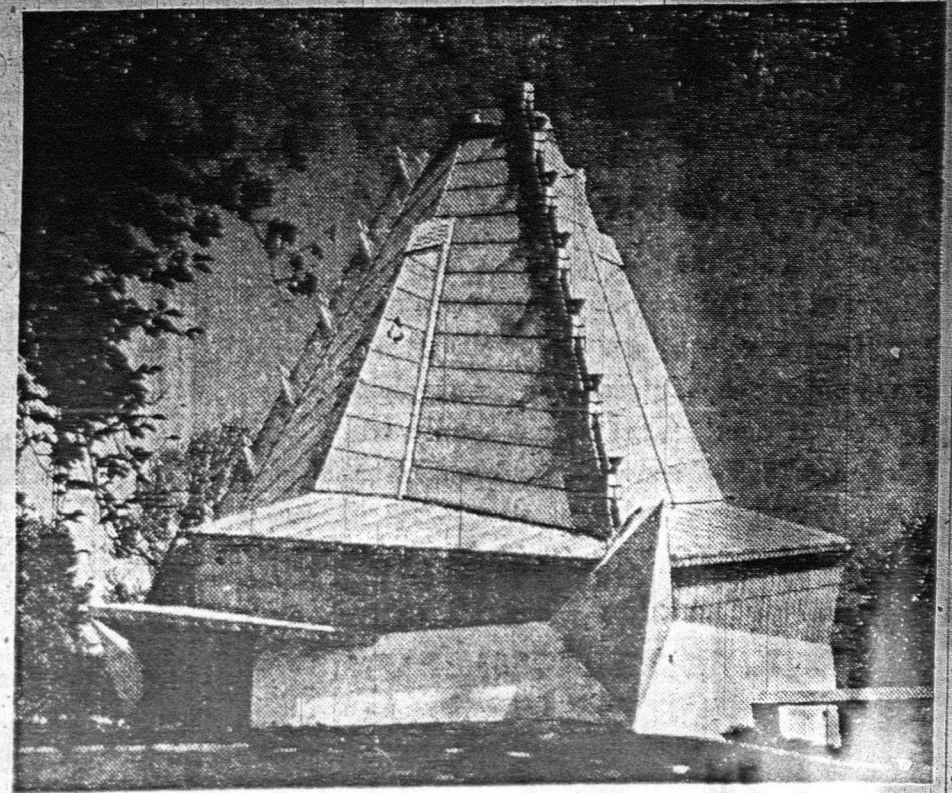
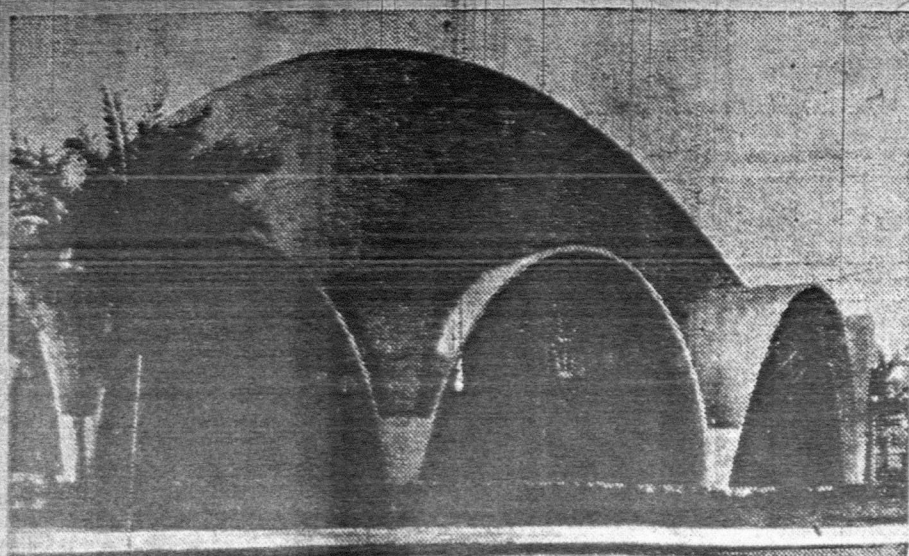
Huntington to 2,400-Home Co.

By EDWARD J. BARRY

As the nation's population continues to grow, the need for new housing is becoming increasingly acute. In the Huntington area, the need is particularly acute. The Huntington Home Co. is planning to build a new housing development of 2,400 homes. The development will be located in the Huntington area. The Huntington Home Co. is planning to build a new housing development of 2,400 homes. The development will be located in the Huntington area. The Huntington Home Co. is planning to build a new housing development of 2,400 homes. The development will be located in the Huntington area.

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Kneses Tifereth Israel Synagogue in Port Chester, N. Y., above, was built in 1956 from plans drawn by Philip Johnson, architect. The Beth Sholom Synagogue, shown at right, is at Elkins Park, Pa. The design for this house of worship was created by the late Frank Lloyd Wright. Percival Goodman was the architect for Temple Beth Sholom in Miami Beach, shown below. The buildings are representative of the individualism that is being expressed in the building of synagogues and temples.



NEW LOOK HAILED FOR SYNAGOGUES

Continued From Page 1

Synagogues also followed local architectural trends, using Colonial or Georgian styles. Many of the Protestant churches of the period. As a result, many of the synagogues built in 1963

in Newport, R. I., and the chance of achieving a true architectural tradition by building in 1810 in Charleston, S. C. on the solid foundation of function rather than by imitating other cultures and styles.

Between World War I and World War II, he finds that synagogue architecture in this country was derivative. He cites "the distinctly Italian Romanesque flavor" of Temple Emanuel in New York City and the "Greek classical" of the Lord Nelson Hotel in Nassau. Construction is about to begin on the Lord Nelson Hotel, a 144-room, oceanfront structure. Mr. Lurie contends that the present approach to synagogue architecture is "a new form of expression" that gives American Judaism a new

New Leaflet Describes Housing Agency Functions

The Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency has published a ten-page leaflet, "Housing Agency Functions—What It Is, What It Does." The leaflet, available to the public, defines the responsibilities of the agency, the functions of its constituent agencies, and

the functions of the Office of the Administrator. The constituent agencies are the Federal Housing Administration, the Public Housing Administration, the Facilities Administration, the Urban Renewal Administration, and the Federal National Mortgage Association. The agency headquarters are in Washington, D. C.

U.S. Department of the Interior



NEWS

U.S. Department of the Interior

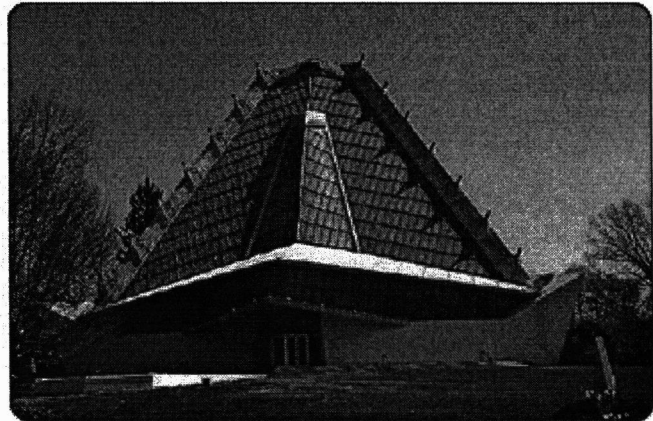
Office of the Secretary
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 4, 2007

Contacts:
Toni Lee, 202-354-2272
Shane Wolfe, 202-208-6416

Interior Secretary Kempthorne Designates 12 National Historic Landmarks in 10 States

WASHINGTON — Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne today announced the designation of a dozen new National Historic Landmarks in recognition of their importance in interpreting the heritage and history of the United States. The landmarks are located in Massachusetts, Ohio, California, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Utah, South Carolina, Missouri, Illinois and Hawaii.

The sites include buildings that mark the evolving architectural style of Frank Lloyd Wright; a quintessential country estate of the Gilded Age; the home of Roswell Field, the legal counsel for Dred Scott in one of the most significant Supreme Court cases in U.S. history; a residence reflecting Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*; and an American Garden City model of an ideal planned community.



Beth Shalom Synagogue in Elkins Park, Pa., designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is a new National Historic Landmark because of its significance in the history of American architecture. The glazed glass pyramidal tower, built in the 1950s, reflects two dominant metaphors – the tent and the mountain – to convey the sense of a collective sacredness.

"These new National Historic Landmarks reflect some of the most important historical and cultural developments in American history," Kempthorne said. "Each of them tells a story about us as a nation and a people. Together they exemplify our history, heritage, literature, and architecture. They are designated as National Historic Landmarks so that we may all enjoy and learn from them."

The National Historic Landmark designation is the highest such recognition accorded by the nation to historic properties determined to be of exceptional value in representing or illustrating an important theme, event, or person in the history of the nation. These landmarks can be actual sites where significant historical events occurred, places where prominent Americans lived or worked as well as sites that represent the ideas that shaped the nation. Designation and national recognition encourages owners to protect and preserve their properties.

The properties are recommended by the National Park System Advisory Board and designated by the Secretary of the Interior. Today, fewer than 2,500 historic places bear this national distinction. Additional information on

the National Historic Landmark program can be found on the NPS website at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nhl/>

The new National Historic Landmarks announced today are:

Aline Barnsdall Complex (Hollyhock House), Frank Lloyd Wright's first commission in Los Angeles, Calif., marks a major watershed in the progression of his architectural style. Designed in a style similar to a pre-Columbian temple and built between 1919 and 1921, Hollyhock House represents a transition from Wright's Oak Park period toward what is known as the California houses, which were distinctive for domestic space planning that made nearly seamless connections between rooms and outdoor spaces. Wright scholar Neil Levine described Hollyhock House as "transitional and prophetic. Its subject matter is nature, and the relation between building and landscape is expressed in a symbolic language that announces the major themes of Wright's work." It not only stood out from Wright's previous efforts, but also stood the test of time against his later works, eventually being considered one of the most significant buildings of his career.

Price Tower, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, embodies the powerful architectural idea of the cantilevered tower -- where the cantilever principle replaces the conventional skeletal frame -- to convey Frank Lloyd Wright's views about the decentralized city in his Broadacre City concept. Its symbolic importance is captured in the statement: "As a tree crowded in the forest has no chance to become a complete entity -- standing free it may establish identity and preserve it." Built between 1953 and 1956 as headquarters for the H. C. Price oil pipeline company, the building's solitary location within Bartlesville's townscape provided for a high-profile silhouette and corporate identity. The 19-story tower has all floors and walls projecting from four vertical shafts of reinforced concrete, allowing for the division of the building into four quadrants. None of the exterior walls are structural, but are screens resting on the cantilevered floors. The tower acknowledges the relationship between American corporate identity and tall-building architecture. Its location in the prairie land of Oklahoma challenges the urban skyscraper myth; by creating a "vertical street," Wright freed land around the base so that the building could stand in its own park and cast its own shadow upon its own ground.

Beth Sholom Synagogue, Elkins Park, Pa., a glazed glass pyramidal tower on a base of reinforced concrete and steel, reflects two dominant metaphors -- the tent and the mountain. Built between 1954 and 1959, it is Frank Lloyd Wright's only synagogue and the product of a fruitful collaboration between Wright and the congregation's rabbi, Mortimer J. Cohen, who suggested the metaphors. Beth Sholom is a "coherent statement of worship" intended to inspire awe and convey the sense of a collective sacredness, purged of individuality. It provides an unparalleled architectural experience as it melds modernity and novelty with traditional meaning and iconography. It is nationally significant as one of Wright's most important commissions during his long and productive career. Located north of Philadelphia, it served the Jewish community as it moved out of the city and into the suburbs after World War II.

Naumkeag, Stockbridge, Mass., is an outstanding example of a Gilded Age country estate, with original late-19th century furnishings and a series of designed landscapes and formal gardens. Located in the southern Berkshire Hills, the estate was designed by the famous firm of McKim, Mead & White and constructed between 1855 and 1886. The property is notable for its designed landscapes that evolved incrementally, with each successive designer incorporating elements of the past with new features to create compositions that spoke of their own time and place. Fletcher Steele is the best known of the landscape architects, whose landscapes were executed between 1929 and 1958 in collaboration with Mabel Choate. Steele was an important transitional figure between classical Beaux-Arts and modern 20th century practice.

Field House, St. Louis, Missouri, is the home of Roswell Field, the attorney who formulated the legal strategy that placed slave Dred Scott's lawsuit for freedom before the Supreme Court. In *Scott v. Sandford*, one of the most controversial cases of the 19th century, Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney declared that no slave could be a U.S. citizen and that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 (that abolished slavery in the territories) was unconstitutional. The 1857 decision widened the political gap between the North and the South and helped precipitate the Civil War. The most effective critic of the decision was Abraham Lincoln, a relatively unknown Illinois lawyer, whose attacks on the case thrust him into the national political scene. Anger over

Taney's decision energized the Republican party and led the nation's first antislavery political party to victory in 1860. It took the Civil War and post-war constitutional amendments to overturn the Dred Scott decision.

Village of Mariemont, Hamilton County, Ohio, is a premier model of an ideal planned community following Garden City principles inspired by Ebenezer Howard, leader of the Garden City movement in England and designer of Letchworth, a few miles north of London. Mariemont village, located ten miles east of downtown Cincinnati, was funded by Cincinnati philanthropist Mary Emery and designed by John Nolen and his associate Philip Foster, starting in 1920. It was a national model of an American Garden City design. Mariemont was not a utopian community. Emery envisioned a balanced community that offered a variety of attractive rental units and single family homes for families of varying income levels, as well as streetcar transportation to downtown Cincinnati, parks, schools, tree-lined roads and avenues, and commercial enterprises arranged around a town center. It is nationally significant for its association with the history of planning in the United States and for architecture and landscape architecture.

House of the Seven Gables Historic District, Salem, Mass., is nationally significant in the areas of historic preservation and architecture because it was a seminal Colonial Revival restoration in 1909 by a leading restoration architect of the times, Joseph Everett Chandler. Its assemblage of houses, some moved from other locations, represents historic preservation practices of the early 20th century. The main building, The House of the Seven Gables, was one of the earliest houses in the country to be restored to its seventeenth-century exterior appearance. It was remodeled to reflect aspects of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1851 romance, *The House of the Seven Gables*. The property was restored and enlarged by Chandler in order to preserve a historic building in an appropriate setting in which to teach immigrants about American history and values. Its restoration was widely publicized and had a significant influence on later restorations in the nation.

Washington Place, Honolulu, Hawaii, is nationally significant for its close association with the life of Queen Lili'uokalani, the last reigning monarch of the Hawaiian kingdom. It was her home from the time of her marriage in 1862 to John Owen Dominis, son of the original builder, to her death in 1917. Her constitutional monarchy was overthrown in an 1893 coup d'etat, and, in 1898, Hawaii was annexed to the United States. Two years later, it formally became a territory. Washington Place, built in 1844-1847, also is significant for its service as the executive mansion for the Territorial Governors from 1918 to 1959, and, after Hawaii became the 50th State of the Union, the State Governor's Mansion, from 1959 to 2002. Washington Place is significant for its association with the historical theme of America's 19th century expansionist history because it occupies a pivotal role in the 19th century history of the extension of U. S. territory into the Pacific and the rise of the nation as a Pacific power.

Central Utah Relocation Center Site (Topaz), Millard County, Utah, was one of 10 relocation camps for the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Commonly known as Topaz, the site covered about 730 acres, 140 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. Most of the residents of Topaz were from northern California, especially the San Francisco Bay area. More professional artists were confined at Topaz than at any other camp. The property retains many concrete foundations, the extensive system of roads and pathways, rock and concrete-lined gardens and ponds, and the bases of guard towers. Also surviving is a concrete monument with incised names of young evacuees.

To date, five relocation camps have been designated as National Historic Landmarks: Manzanar Relocation Center in California, Rowher Relocation Camp Cemetery in Arkansas, Granada Relocation Center in Colorado, Tule Lake Relocation Center in California, and Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming. In addition, the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho became a unit of the National Park System in 2001.

Fig Island, near Charleston, South Carolina, contains the most complex of the 53 known shell ring archaeological sites on the U.S. southeast coast built by various Archaic coastal cultural groups between 3,000 and 5,000 years ago. The property consists of three major rings of shell and three lesser rings attached to the largest ring. The rings are circular walls of shell that define central plazas, which served as places for public interaction, such as feasting and ceremony. The shellfish consumed during feasting events provided most of the

building material for the ring walls. Archaic shell rings are unique in precontact history due to their distinctive architectural forms constructed from the purposeful mounding of shell. The property is among the best sites with preserved early large-scale monumental architecture in the United States during this period. It also is significant for its potential to yield nationally significant information about migration, colonization, and technological innovations and adaptations linked to the earliest sedentary settlements over a period of 2,000 years of precontact history.

Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio, is nationally significant as the original site and model for the landscape-lawn concept that dominated American cemetery design from the mid-19th century into the 20th century. Located four miles north of Cincinnati's central business district, the 345-acre property is the creation of cemetery superintendent and landscape gardener Adolph Strauch. The cemetery was begun in 1858, when Strauch turned away from the rural cemetery tradition and proposed that nature be enhanced by deliberate landscape design. He also provided advice on landscaped cemeteries in other cities. His landscape-lawn plan became well-known through publication in *Atlantic Monthly* and *Scribner's*. Strauch's successor, William Salway, faithfully conserved the legacy, and Spring Grove continued as a model for cemeteries and other designed landscapes throughout America.

The Hegeler-Carus Mansion, LaSalle, Illinois, is a rare surviving example of the residential work of noted Chicago architect, W.W. Boyington, who was among the most important early architects of Chicago. Boyington designed the 7-level, 57-room Second Empire residence for Edward Hegeler, who made a fortune in the zinc smelting business. The house was constructed between 1874 and 1876. Boyington arrived in Chicago in 1853 and enjoyed a prolific career that spanned 20 years before and after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. He designed many hotels, railroad stations, churches, and the first University of Chicago main building, now demolished. One of his best known commissions is the Chicago Water Tower, which survives and is one of the city's major tourist attractions. The mansion's ground floor, directly beneath the first floor, was a utilitarian floor that housed the working offices of Open Court Publishing Company, one of the nation's earliest academic presses and one of the first U.S. publishers to produce English translations of Asian and European religious and philosophical texts.

Beacon Hill Historic District, Boston, Mass, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1962, has received new documentation that expands its significance as a National Historic Landmark. The original designation included a boundary that focused on the south slope of the Hill. In 1972, the boundary was extended to include the north slope. The original nomination provided recognition for the district's Federal and Greek Revival architecture and its early urban design. This added documentation incorporates recent scholarship and extends its period of significance to include late 19th century and early 20th century architectural styles as seen in small apartment buildings. It also documents Beacon Hill's African American history and role in the abolition movement.

Historic preservation is another significant theme associated with Beacon Hill. Beginning in the mid-19th century, Beacon Hill was protected through restrictions on the height of buildings, the development of the area as a center of the antiques trade, and the development of revolving funds and protective zoning. Beacon Hill was designated a local historic district in 1955, bringing all renovations and new construction under review by the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission.

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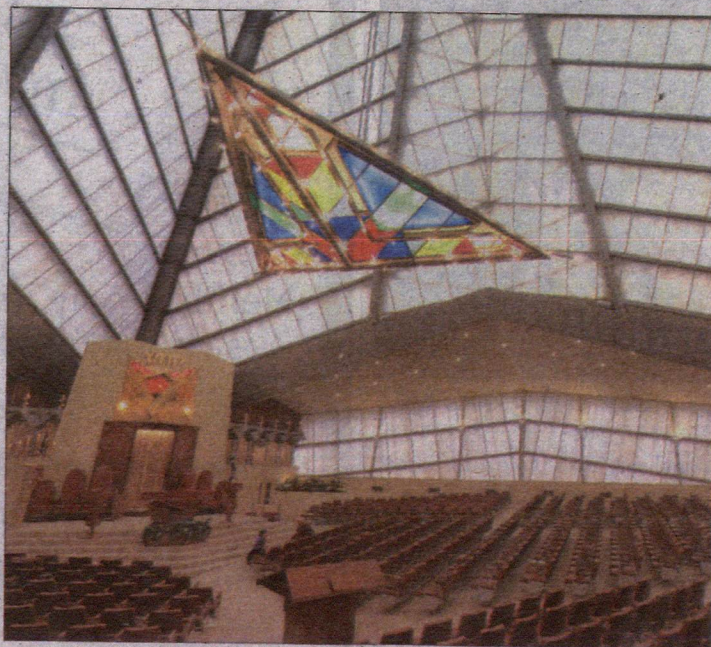
Faith in Dazzling Design

A synagogue created by a famed architect opens to the public

DESTINATIONS | Did you hear the one about the rabbi and the architect?

Few people have. Which is why the members of Beth Sholom in Elkins Park, Pa. — who worship in the only synagogue designed by Frank Lloyd Wright — are stepping forward to tell the story of how their landmark spiritual home was built.

Described as a symbolic Mount Sinai made of concrete, steel and glass, the iconic building somehow never received the attention of more famous Wright designs such as Fallingwater and the Guggenheim Museum. But new public vis-



Visitors sit in seats at Beth Sholom Synagogue in Elkins Park, Pa. The synagogue, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is celebrating its 50th anniversary.



Visitors look at the pyramid-like roof of Beth Sholom Synagogue's sanctuary.

iting hours might change that.

"It should be better known," said Paul Goldberger, architecture critic for the *New Yorker* magazine. "The space itself is just magnificent. It's exhilarating. Everything just soars."

The synagogue marks its 50th anniversary this year by estab-

lishing a visitors center that will be open three days a week. Previously, appointments were required to see Beth Sholom.

From the outside, the pyramid-like roof rises more than 100 feet above the sanctuary. The "shingles" are really panels of corrugated wire glass and fiberglass that filter natural light into the building during the day; at night, the illuminated structure is an ethereal sight for motorists driving by.

The six-sided sanctuary represents the cupped hands of God. A multicolored Plexiglas chandelier is suspended above the nearly 1,100 seats. Wright also designed the eternal light over the ark, where the Torah scrolls are kept.

"The Synagogue lives and breathes; it moves with quiet grace and charm; its lights and shadows continually change with the coming of the sun and the passing of a cloud," wrote Mortimer J. Cohen, the rabbi who commissioned the building. "Under the moon it is a silver tower." KATHY MATHESON (AP)