

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received AUG 23 1985  
date entered SEP 19 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic B'Nai Jacob Synagogue

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number Nissley and Water Streets

N/A not for publication

city, town Middletown N/A vicinity of

state Penna. code 042 county Dauphin code 043

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Chevra B'Nai Jacob Synagogue

street & number Box 241

city, town Middletown N/A vicinity of state Penna. 17057

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dauphin County Courthouse

street & number Front and Market Streets

city, town Harrisburg state Penna. 17101

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date N/A  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

## 7. Description

**Condition**  
 excellent       deteriorated       unaltered       original site  
 good             ruins                 altered             moved      date           N/A            
 fair               unexposed

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

B'Nai Jacob Synagogue is a simple yet architecturally refined one story house of worship which, when constructed, was probably the religious counterpart to the traditional one room schoolhouse. The front gabled-end facade is distinguished by brick recessed panels within which are placed pointed arch window and doorway fenestration. The gabled end is accented by a circular window, divided into eight lights, and capped with a Star of David ornament. All windows are pointed arch and contain leaded stain glass. With the exception of an enlarged front stoop, constructed of brick to compliment the building's brick composition, the exterior is unaltered from its original appearance.

The Synagogue's interior contains an entrance area, one large room as an auditorium with balcony, a small ante-room at the front of the building, and full basement in which covered over religious cleansing baths are located. The interior remains unaltered since the time of the Synagogue's construction in 1906 (with the exception of isle carpeting). The auditorium features original brass light fixtures and center chandelier, wainscoting on the walls, carved wooden balcony railings (and an elaborately balustraded staircase to the balcony off the front foyer), and central Bimah; the Bimah being the central focal point of worship. Also significant is the Holy Arch, containing the "Torah", which is supported by a neo-classical framework of columns and entablature.

The building is situated on a small tract of land which marks the northwestern terminus of Middletown's older, latter 19th Century neighborhoods. Within recent years, commercial development has proliferated the area directly across Water Street from the Synagogue as its fronts on U.S. Route 230 approximately one block away. This commercial development includes a bank, fast food restaurant, supermarket and shopping center-like complex. Future commercial demands in the area may threaten the Synagogue as "higher and better" use of the surrounding real estate is achieved.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1906 **Builder/Architect** Charter members of Synagogue

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

B'Nai Jacob Synagogue was erected in 1906 and has survived to this day as the oldest building erected as a synagogue and continuously operated as such in Dauphin County. Additionally, B'Nai Jacob is the only remaining synagogue in Central Pennsylvania which was built to fulfill the old world, orthodox requirements of Mosaic Law. Although B'Nai Jacob is not the oldest Jewish congregation in the County, such as Ohev Sholom established in the 19th Century, all current synagogue buildings in the County, other than B'Nai Jacob, were constructed later and after 1920 (i.e. Ohev Sholom, Beth El, Keshet Isreal, Eastern Star, and Chisuk Emuna).

Just prior to the end of the 19th Century, principal centers of Jewish populations in America, similar to other ethnic groups, were concentrated in large urban areas. Small towns and rural environments were dominated by the Protestant majority, especially in Central Pennsylvania. However, pioneer Jews began to settle in smaller agrarian towns of inland areas in search of new lives and opportunities and the type of small town atmosphere which they left behind in their European homelands. Still strictly governed by orthodox Hebrew law, both close proximity to house of worship and mandated quorums made it necessary to quickly attract Jewish communities to these towns so that synagogues could be established.

Specifically, Mosaic Law provided that; 1) one could not walk farther than three kilometers from a place of residence on the Sabbath or holidays unless living within a "walled city;" and 2) a quorum of ten males, thirteen years or older, was required in order to perform any or all Jewish services. Therefore, Jewish synagogues grew in small towns, rather than in low density rural areas, to accommodate a nearby neighborhood congregation of sufficient size to meet the quorum.

These factors resulted in the erection of B'Nai Jacob as Middletown's first and only synagogue; the building actually designed and personally constructed by its charter members. Middletown was selected for the establishment of a Jewish community also because it was on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad for easier transportation access to friends and family back in the major metropolitan centers and because it was within close proximity to Harrisburg which could offer back-up employment if the families' trades (e.g. peddlers, shoemakers, tailors, etc.) failed. Because the congregation was small in a practically all Protestant community, the Synagogue's exterior architectural style, Gothic Revival, was intended to blend with the Gothic Revival Protestant churches which were common at the time. As Jewish populations grew, and a sense of architectural heritage was rediscovered, Mid-Eastern styles were employed in later synagogues in Dauphin County (such as Temple Beth El, Front Street, Harrisburg). B'Nai Jacob's interior, because it was not exposed to public view, was designed to be orthodox in layout reflecting the persuasion of the congregation. This is evidenced by the separate seating arrangement (balcony for the women; main floor for the men) and by the location of the Bimah in the center of the worship room.

(CONTINUED)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Ambrose Klain, congregation member and retired Professor of Urban and Regional Planning of the Pennsylvania State University.

Irwin Richman, Professor of American Studies, the Pennsylvania State University.

Middletown Press and Journal, 11/21/81; Harrisburg Patriot News, 10/30/81.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .25 acre

Quadrangle name Middletown

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	8
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3	5	2	3	4	0
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4	4	5	0	8	1	0
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**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at a point on the southwest corner of Nisley and W. Water Streets; thence west/southwest approx. forty five feet six inches (45'6"); thence south/southeast approx. sixty feet (60'); thence east/northeast approx. forty five feet six inches (45'6"); thence north/northwest approx. sixty feet (60') to point of origin.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A

state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeb Stuart

organization Consultant

date 2/1/85

street & number 1226 Green Street

telephone (717)232-1226

city or town Harrisburg

state Penna. 17102

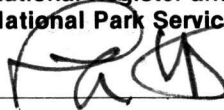
## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

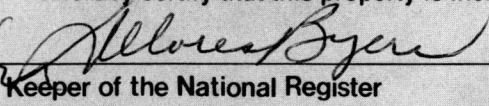


title Dr. Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer

date 8/10/85

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in  
National Register

date 9-19-85

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

B'Nai Jacob Synagogue, Dauphin County

Continuation sheet 1

Item number 8

Page 2

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

This central location is traditional, however increasing in rarity in this country. This is because the Jewish reformed movements of the 20th Century, in which many orthodox congregations were absorbed, changed synagogue physical layouts to more conventional auditorium seating with Bimahs in the front similar to alters, pulpits and lecterns. One of the other synagogues in America which contains the central Bimah is the country's oldest; the Truro Synagogue (N.R.) in Newport, R.I.

Additionally, B'Nai Jacob contains several Torahs, which are over two hundred years of age, and hand made Perochots. When the Synagogue was erected, its pews were brought from the old Dauphin County Courthouse (demolished) in Harrisburg when the Courthouse was remodeled.

As Central Pennsylvania became more urbanized and transportation more efficient, the Middletown Jewish worshipers joined the larger synagogues of Harrisburg as was common in other regional Pennsylvania cities resulting in the decline of the small town synagogue. However, a small number of devoted heirs of the original B'Nai Jacob congregation have maintained and protected the Synagogue as unchanged, both in structure and religious dogma, from essentially the day it was erected unlike its "sister" synagogues which have long since vanished (e.g. Tipereth Israel in Steelton). This has preserved Dauphin County's oldest link to orthodox Jewish worship.

Ref #  
85002413

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

B'Nai Jacob Synagogue  
Dauphin County  
PENNSYLVANIA

AUG 23 1985

Working No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Fed. Reg. Date: 2-4-86  
Date Due: 9/19/85 10/7/85  
Action:  ACCEPT 9-19-85  
 RETURN  
 REJECT  
Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Entered in the  
National Register

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review:  sample  request  appeal  NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria \_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_  
Discipline \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: \_\_\_\_\_ technical corrections cited below  
\_\_\_\_\_ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

7. Description

Condition

- excellent
- good
- fair
- deteriorated
- ruins
- unexposed

Check one

- unaltered
- altered

Check one

- original site
- moved date \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection





DO NOT  
ENTER

ONE WAY

DO NOT  
ENTER

B'Nai Jacob Synagogue

Dauphin County, PA

PD: 1984

PC: Jeb Stuart

NL: with photograph~~er~~

PV: FRONT & SIDE ELEVATION



B'Nai Jacob Synagogue  
Dauphin County, PA  
PD: 1984  
PC: Jeb Stuart  
NL: with photographs  
PV: Interior view, pews



B'Nai Jacob Synagogue  
Dauphin County, PA  
PD: 1984  
PC: Jeb Stuart  
NL: with photograph~~er~~  
PV: Interior view, stairwell



B'Nai Jacob Synagogue  
Dauphin County, PA  
PD: 1984  
PC: Jeb Stuart  
NL: with photographs  
PV: Interior view, stairwell



B'Nai Jacob Synagogue  
Dauphin County, PA

P.D. 1984

P.C. Jeb Stuart

NL: with photographs

PV: Interior View, balcony



B'Nai Jacob Synagogue  
Dauphin County, PA

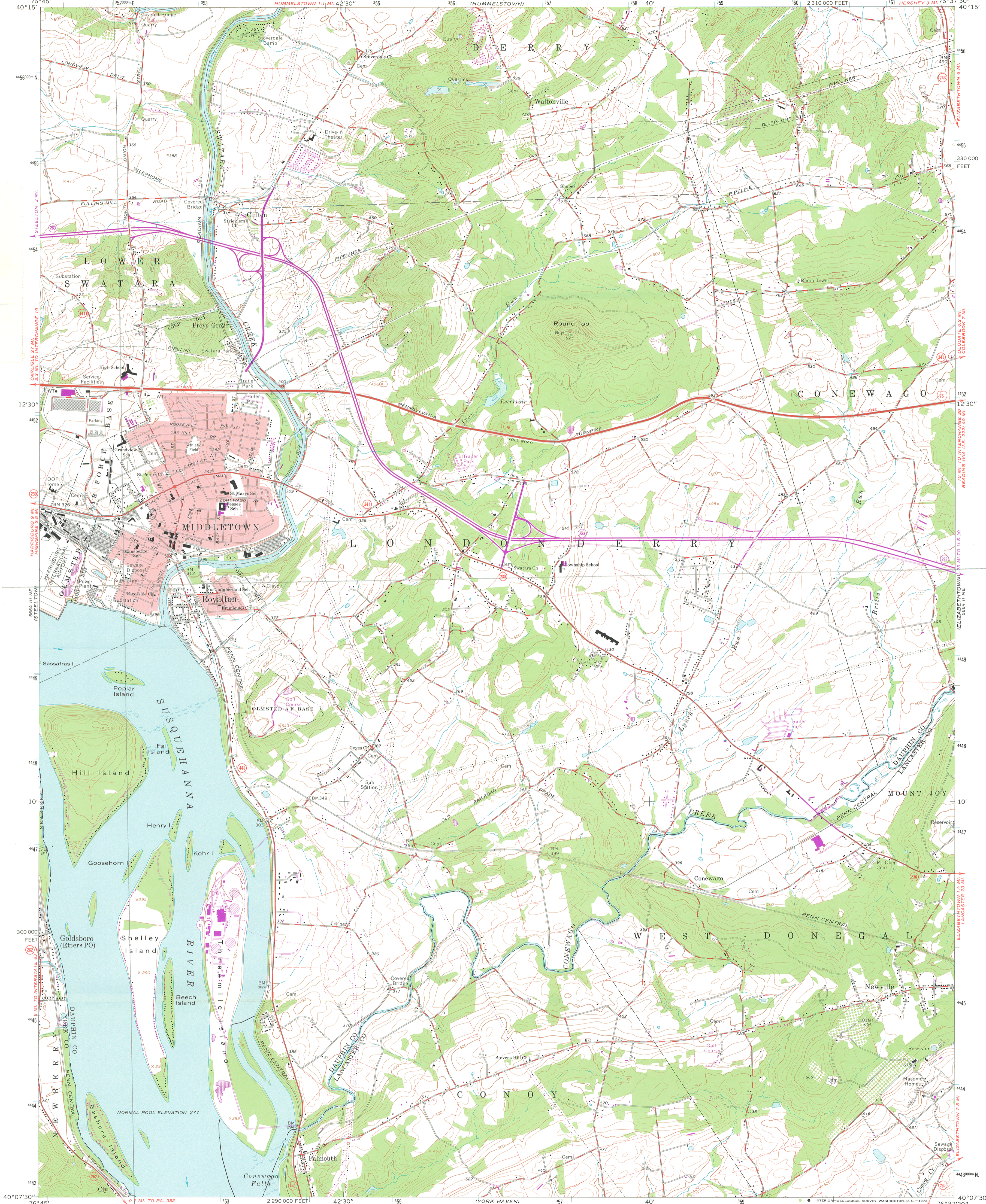
PD: 1984

PC: Jeb Stuart

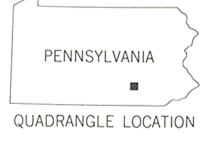
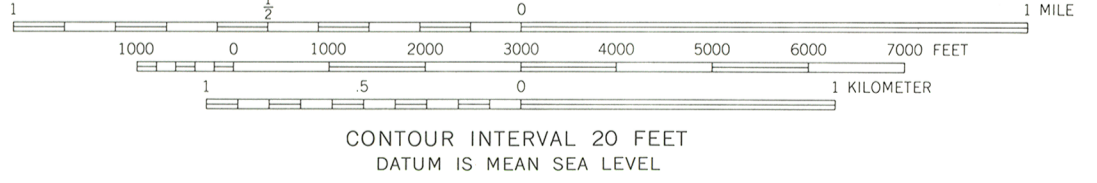
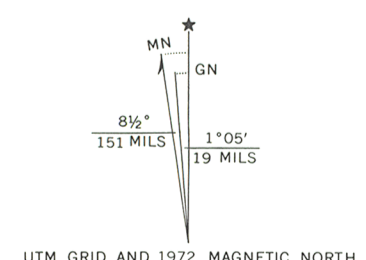
NL: with photographs

PV: Interior view, balcony, pews

B'Nai Jacob Synagogue  
Dauphin County  
Zone 18 E352340 N44450810



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
photographs taken 1961. Field checked 1963  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Pennsylvania coordinate system,  
south zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 18, shown in blue  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with  
State of Pennsylvania agencies from aerial photographs  
taken 1972. This information not field checked

MIDDLETOWN, PA.  
NW/4 MIDDLETOWN 15' QUADRANGLE  
N4007.5—W7637.5/7.5  
1963  
PHOTOREVISED 1972  
AMS 5664 I NW—SERIES V831