

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Congregation Ohab Zedek
other names/site number _____
name of related multiple property listing NA

Location

street & number 118-120 West 95th Street, 122-124 West 95th Street not for publication
city or town New York vicinity
state NY code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10025

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
___ national ___ statewide X local
Michael Polyzach Deputy S/HPO Date 19 JUNE 17
Signature of certifying official/Title _____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____
Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
X 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] Date of Action 8/18/17
Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

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

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
2	0	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

NA

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION / Synagogue

RELIGION / Synagogue

RELIGION / Church school

RELIGION / Church school

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19th AND 20th CENTURY REVIVALS /

foundation: _____

Byzantine, Romanesque

walls: Granite, Sandstone

MODERN MOVEMENT / Moderne

roof: Asphalt

other: _____

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

Congregation Ohab Zedek is located at 118-120 West 95th Street, between Columbus and Amsterdam avenues, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Its adjoining school is located at 122-124 West 95th Street, directly to its west. The Upper West Side is a large residential district, roughly two miles long by one-half mile wide; this block of West 95th Street is typical of the neighborhood's residential blocks, flanked by more commercial avenues (Amsterdam to the west and Columbus to the east) at either end. The synagogue's and school's immediate neighbors on West 95th Street are row houses to the west and apartment buildings to the east.

The synagogue was built in 1926-27 to designs by architect Charles B. Meyers. The adjoining school building was created by the alteration of two former townhouses into a school in 1938-39; the school conversion was designed by architect Herman H. Sohn. The nomination boundary includes the lots associated with the synagogue and school: Manhattan Tax Block 1225, Lots 41 and 43.

Narrative Description

THE SYNAGOGUE

Exterior

Congregation Ohab Zedek is a three-story-and-basement building with its principal facade on 95th Street. The facade is organized in three bays, with the principal bay being an enormous, three-story tall entrance, flanked to either side by a tall, narrow window. The roofline curves, reflecting the curve of the entrance bay. In 1927, the Congregation described its design as:

...a blending of the Byzantine and Romanesque. The facade is of Briar Hill sandstone, superimposed on a massive base of granite, and the interior decorations are of ornamental tracery in Byzantine and Romanesque patterns done in low relief. The Ark is entirely of marble.¹

The facade

The synagogue's facade – approached by a steep flight of steps – is a monolithic stone-faced composition whose main feature is a grand entrance with successive layers of tall, slender columns of varying design supporting a series of concentric round arches. The double entrance within the arch is framed in cast-stone columns and piers whose capitals are adorned with Arabesque designs. Each entrance has a pair of wooden doors with ornamental metal hinges. Above each pair of doors is a transom with, at its center, a circumscribed *magen david* (“shield” or “star” of David).

Inscribed directly above the central column are Hebrew letters spelling out “Congregation Ohab Zedek.” The entire area above the entrance is adorned with abstract floral patterns into which are mixed Judaic symbols, notably a *menorah* (ritual candelabra) directly above the central doorway. Directly above that is a set of five

¹ *First Hungarian Cong. Ohab Zedek: An Inspiration For The Future, A Monument To The Past*, August 26, 1926.

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deeply recessed, narrow rectangular stained glass windows; the infill, which includes more Arabesque designs, rises to a rose window centered on a *magen david*.

To either side of the main entrance, at sidewalk level, is a secondary entrance – each a single pair of wooden doors set within a stone enframingent. Above each door is a blind bulls-eye, and above that a band course which continues the floral patterns above the double entrance.

The rest of the façade is plain, other than a narrow slit-like window to either side, reminiscent of an ancient Moorish fortress. The center of the façade rises up in a curve matching the curve of the entranceway directly beneath it.

Sides and rear

The sides and rear of the building are plain and undeveloped. The most notable elements of the side walls, which nearly abut the adjacent buildings, are the stained glass windows, described below as seen from the interior

Interior

The synagogue has three stories, including the basement, the main sanctuary space, and the women's gallery above. A vestibule connects the main entrance with the main sanctuary space.

Entrance vestibule

The double doors of the double entrance from West 95th Street open into a very shallow space leading to a second set of doors; those doors open onto a short flight of steps, with an ornamental metal railing, leading up into an entrance vestibule. The entrance doors are set in a marble enframingent. On the wall to either side of the entrance is an ornamental metal grille. The vestibule is a wide, shallow hall; at either side of the vestibule, one staircase – with a similar ornamental railing - leads up to the sanctuary balcony (and the easternmost staircase continues from the balcony to the roof), while another leads down to the basement. The ceiling is adorned with elaborate plaster Arabesque ornamental bands. The ceiling light fixtures are non-historic. Opposite the 95th Street entrance are two pairs of double wooden doors leading into the sanctuary.

Main Sanctuary

Contrasting with the relatively severe façade is the sumptuously ornamental sanctuary. It is arranged as a rectangular room, longer than wide, with a second-story balcony at the sides and rear, and a broadly curving vaulted ceiling. At the front of the sanctuary a short flight of steps leads up to the ark, which is set within a tripartite arcade of marble columns supporting three ornamental ogee arches with an Arabesque screen above; the central arch has a tall pointed screen above it, with a representation of the two tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. The opening for the ark, set between the two central columns, is topped by a Hebrew inscription: "Know Before Whom You Are Standing"; directly above it is a projecting light fixture, the *ner tamid* or "eternal light."

Rising above the ark, at the level of the balcony, is a large round arch in the wall, encompassing a rose window of stained glass centered on an enormous *menorah*; beneath the rose window is an arcade with columns of varying heights and ornamental patterns – some paired columns, some single – designed to appear as though

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supporting the rose window. To either side of the ark itself are a pair of ornamentally carved seats, and at the edge of the steps, on either side, a tall standing lamp in the shape of a *menorah*. Above the ark is located a choir loft, visible only from the balcony. To either side of the ark is an exit; one leads to the basement or the choir loft, the other is a fire exit to the rear yard. There are also fire exit doors at the balcony level.

A recessed area in the rear balcony extends over the entrance vestibule so that the large rose window of the façade, centered on a circumscribed *magen david*, is exposed to the interior of the sanctuary. In the center of the ceiling is an enormous stained glass cupola, also centered on a circumscribed *magen david*. Ten tall, rectangular stained-glass windows in the lower level and ten taller, round-arched stained glass windows in the balcony, together with the stained-glass cupola, light the entire space. There is also a tall, narrow stained glass window on either side of the rose window above the ark. Additional lighting comes from downlights in the ceiling, and light fixtures on the underside of the balcony.

The stained glass windows are one of the major ornamental features of the sanctuary, the other being the Arabesque detailing.² As described in the synagogue's dedication booklet:

A feature of the building, never before attempted in a synagogue and unique in the structures of this city, is the lighting which is entirely concealed and the principal source of which is a huge art-glass dome, 28 feet in diameter, through which, in the day, ample daylight penetrates to the entire building, and at night illumination by means of concealed lights also floods the auditorium in the same manner, with no chandeliers visible.³

According to a survey of the glass prepared in 1990:

The stained glass windows surveyed at Congregation Ohab Zedek are very fine examples of turn-of-the-century American opalescent stained glass work. Virtually all of the glass is rolled, some by hand. Some is blown glass. Some of the glass (the red and orange streaky semi-transparent in the tall windows) may be blown European. However, the beauty and historic value of the windows is the result of their being excellent examples of what is called the American Opalescent Stained Glass Period (1890-1920).

The design is exquisite and is enhanced in several ways. The use of hand-beveled "jewels" throughout the window is done subtly. Yet the great number of these expensive jewels adds enormously to the aesthetic and economic value of the windows. The overwhelming burst of red-orange glass at the very top of the tall windows is appropriate, emphasizing the height of the windows. The diamond pattern unites subtle color changes in the background glass, down-playing wide shifts in colors from cool blues and greens to warm pinks and violets. The leaf pattern in the upper part of the grid is a dramatic, timeless decorative touch that gives viewers a representational element in an otherwise geometric design. The Star of David at the very top is a crowning focal point for the eye and the eight-pointed star behind the tablet is a solid base for the flamboyant burst of red-orange.

² According to a list of contractors in the synagogue's archive, the leaded glass was supplied by Hashlach, Walker Co. Other contractors in the list include: American Seating Company – pews; Benedict Stone Corp. – cast stone; V. Foscat., Inc. – terrazzo; Friedman Marble & Slate Works, Inc. – marble work; Gould & Taylor Cut Stone Co., Inc – sand stone; I. Lauer – stone carver; McConnell & Co – granite; John Polachek Bronze & Iron Works – bronze work; Shapiro & Aronson, Inc. – lighting fixtures; Harris H. Uris Iron Works – ornamental iron.

³ *First Hungarian Cong. Ohab Zedek: An Inspiration For The Future, A Monument To The Past*, August 26, 1926.

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There are ten 6'8" x 17" windows in the upper part of the sanctuary and ten 6'9" x 8'5" windows in the lower sanctuary.⁴

The lower walls are plain except for the stained-glass windows with projecting sills. The five windows on either wall, and at either level, are organized as a single window at either end separated by a blank area from a group of three windows in the center.

Seating is provided by wooden pews. Towards the front of the sanctuary is a *bimah* – the ritual raised area from which services are led.

The walls themselves have plain plastered surfaces, but certain areas are covered in the same kind of Arabesque ornament as is found in the vestibule and on the façade. The entire balcony rail, on all three sides of the sanctuary, is adorned with a design centering on an endless arcade, not unlike the arcade above the ark. The wide ribs supporting the vaulted ceiling are adorned with a different, but stylistically similar ornamental pattern; yet another pattern is used for the areas between the ribs, the windows, and the dome. The ribs themselves spring from supports in the wall in yet another Arabesque pattern. Each window in the balcony meets the vaulted ceiling in a pendentive, which is also adorned with an ornamental Arabesque. Throughout the sanctuary there are large bronze memorial plaques affixed to the walls, both in the sanctuary and in the balcony.

Basement

The basement houses a "beit midrash," or study room, directly below the sanctuary; it has a small ark and bookcases and is used for daily prayer services. It also doubles as a social hall. There are a number of other utilitarian spaces in the basement.

THE SCHOOL

Exterior

The façade of the four-story school building has a stone-faced ground floor with a central entrance, flanked by a pair of windows to either side and three brick-faced stories rising above it. The chief ornamental detail of the first floor is the entrance – the double doors are set between two ribbed piers rising to a stylized capital with a floral pattern that might be intended to relate to the more elaborate floral patterns of the adjoining synagogue façade. The paired windows are simple rectangular openings with a series of small rectangular indentations running along their top; above each pair is an incised circumscribed *magen david*.

The second floor is marked by three narrow windows, each set within a round-arched frame suggested by simple projecting brick stretchers, the arch supported on small cast-stone rectangles with floral ornament similar to those at the entrance. The third and fourth floors are marked by three sets of paired rectangular windows with simple sills. Between each pair of sills at the third story is a small cast-stone square incised with the Hebrew letters aleph and bet, one above another; these would symbolize the aleph-bet – like the English "alphabet," a symbol of school learning. The area between each third-story window and the fourth-story window above it is adorned with a simple pattern of alternatingly recessed and projecting brick course. The roofline is simply coped.

⁴ "Survey of Stained Glass Windows for Congregation Ohab Zedek," prepared by Alpat Stained Glass Studio, 1990; copy on file in the synagogue's archive.

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An exterior metal staircase connects the rear of the upper floors to a small open area at ground level. The side and rear walls are plain and undeveloped, other than with window openings.

Interior

The school's interior reflects its history as a pair of houses converted into a school building, and therefore does not have a typical school plan. It appears that the redesigned interior spaces were utilitarian in style from the time of conversion into a single building.

First floor: A multi-purpose space for daily and evening classes, a kitchen, two bathrooms, and five offices (for the rabbi and the staff).

Second floor: A social hall, behind which are three small offices and a storage closet; there is also access from this floor to the synagogue's sanctuary.

Third and fourth floors: These have identical layouts, including three classrooms, one bathroom, and one tiny office; in addition, the third floor has access to an outdoor patio.

There do not appear to be any clear historic materials; the staircases appear to date to the 1939 conversion.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance extends from 1926, when construction began on the synagogue, through 1967 to reflect the synagogue's continuing significance

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Although the building is owned by a religious institution, it is primarily significant for its architecture and for its role as the home of the Ohab Zedek congregation and a center of Orthodox Judaism in New York City.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Ethnic History

Social History

Architecture

Period of Significance

1926-1967

Significant Dates

1926-7, 1939

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Jewish

Architect/Builder

Charles B. Meyers (synagogue)

Herman H. Sohn (school renovations)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Congregation Ohab Zedek, at 118 West 95th Street in Manhattan, is historically significant under Criterion A in the areas of ethnic history and social history as an early 20th century synagogue surviving on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Built 1926–27 for Congregation Ohab Zedek, as the seventh home of a congregation of Hungarian origin – the second built specifically for the congregation – it dates from a period when the New York City had become one of the world's major Jewish population centers, and the Upper West Side had developed a significant Jewish population. Congregation Ohab Zedek became known for its adherence to traditional Orthodox Jewish religious practice; while other congregations, originally Orthodox in orientation, shifted to the Conservative movement, Ohab Zedek remained strictly Orthodox. The congregation also became known for its Hungarian origins, though it was only one of many New York congregations with roots in Hungary. It also became known for its religious leaders, most notably Joseph “Yossele” Rosenblatt, among the world's most famous cantors.

The building is architecturally significant under Criterion C as an example of an intact early 20th century synagogue in Manhattan. Its unusually handsome design, by architect Charles B. Meyers, combines Moorish-inspired ornament with Judaic motifs. The Moorish style of ornament developed in Europe and America from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries in the belief that the Moorish represented a more “Eastern,” and therefore more culturally appropriate style for Jewish buildings. Ohab Zedek specifically reflects the influence of the recently built B'nai Jeshurun synagogue in Manhattan, which created a “Semitic” style much emulated in synagogues of the period. The adjoining school and community center at 122-124 West 95th Street was planned with the synagogue but construction was delayed until 1939. The school represents the alteration of two row houses behind a new, modest Moderne façade designed by Herman H. Sohn. The building housed the Beth Hillel Institute, a religious school, through the 1950s; the congregation continues to use the building for educational programming, as well as synagogue offices and the synagogue's kitchen.

Congregation Ohab Zedek survives as a distinctive architectural, cultural and religious landmark of the Jewish community of the Upper West Side and New York City.

The Manhattan's Jewish community's migration from the Lower East Side to Harlem to the Upper West Side

From about 1880 up until World War I, some two million Jews – roughly one-third of all the Jews in Europe – arrived in the United States.⁵ Even before this mass migration, however, New York City had a Jewish community dating back to 1654, when a group of refugees fleeing the Inquisition in Brazil arrived in the Dutch colony of Nieuw Amsterdam. The community's long history and great size make New York City by far the most historically and numerically significant Jewish community in the United States and one of the most significant in the world.

The great majority of Jewish immigrants to New York during those decades around the turn of the century settled on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. As the community prospered, many younger and more assimilated members left that area to settle in Harlem. As noted by *The American Israelite* in 1903:

⁵ Moses Rischin, *The Promised Land: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (New York, 1970), 20.

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New Ghetto in Harlem. Northward Migration of New York City Russian and Polish Jews.

An interesting population change, now in progress for about three years, is the removal of a large number of East Side Russian and Polish Jews to Harlem. The section marked out as the new Ghetto is that immediately north of Central Park, from One Hundred and Tenth to One Hundred and Twentieth street, and from Lenox to Park Avenues. Here are thirty city blocks, in which up to 1900, there were scarcely any Jews. According to real estate men in the section, there are now at least 20,000 in the same area....

It must not be supposed, however, that the new Ghetto is in every way like the old. It is vastly different.... It is a Ghetto with American trimmings. It is made up for the most part of Polish and Russian Jews who have spent ten, fifteen, and twenty years in the country and accumulated fair competences... The lower East Side, with its congested tenements, its pushcarts, its Yiddish, is distasteful to them.... Their migration up town does not materially change the East Side. Their places are taken by the new immigrants... There is a general moving up in the social scale.

The new community needed new synagogues, and many congregations built new homes. As recounted in *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* in January 1907:

So many are the congregations and synagogues that have sprung up in Harlem during the last decade, and are still springing up, that it is difficult to tell what is the exact religious complexion of that section of the city. This is due to the fact that though Harlem, especially that portion of Harlem between 110th and 116th streets toward the east, has become a Jewish district, its population is a moving one, its classes are numerous and divergent, and all characters can be found from the strictly orthodox Russian Jew, who still clings devotedly to every traditional belief, to the scion of the prosperous new generation, who ignores religious connections in pursuit of the pleasures that his newly-acquired wealth allows him to enjoy. Every sort of congregation, in all stages of growth, can be found....⁶

And the same periodical noted in a November 1906 article:

A difference in profession is not the only one that distinguishes the Harlem synagogues from each other; there is also a difference, as in the lower part of the city, in the nationalities of the congregations, German, Portugese [sic] Russian and Hungarian Jews all being represented.⁷

Before long, the Jewish community migrated once again, this time to the Upper West Side. The 1920s saw a general migration of Jews and Jewish institutions from both Harlem and the Lower East Side to the Upper West Side, which emerged as a middle- and upper-income Jewish neighborhood. As described by historian Deborah Dash Moore:

For Jews...the Upper West Side was the opposite of the Lower East Side. It appeared as the upper class apotheosis of Jewish acculturation. Its world contrasted vividly with immigrant Jewish life on the East Side.... A Central Park West address symbolized for many Jews the ultimate sign of success. "Eighty-Sixth Street is the Main Street of the most compact and prosperous Jewish community in the city of New York," wrote Aaron Frankel about his neighborhood. "It may well be the most Jewish Street in New York. In any case, it is reputedly that street where Jews feel most comfortably at home." Frankel described the Upper West Side as "packed with movie theaters, with dress and haberdashery shops and 'beauty bars,' and an amazing number of

⁶ "The Harlem Synagogues," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger*, January 11, 1907, 250.

⁷ "The Harlem Synagogues: The Movement Northward," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger*, November 30, 1906, 89.

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lingerie shops... Grocery, butcher, and dairy stores abound," he continued, "as do the bakery shops dispensing in little blue boxes lush pastries that are almost the sacramental bread of the neighborhood...."⁸

As Jews migrated to the new neighborhood, synagogues naturally followed. As described by historian Jeffrey S. Gurock:

Several of Harlem's oldest congregations... [relocated to] the growing Jewish community on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Temple Israel, for example, sold its synagogue at Lenox Avenue and 120th Street...[and] moved to 91st Street between Amsterdam Avenue and Broadway. The congregation followed, as longtime Rabbi Harris put it, "the westward drift of our congregants." Congregations Shaare Zedek... and Anshe Chesed continued their traditions of following their most affluent members to newer sections of Manhattan and also erected large synagogues during the 1920s on the West Side. And by 1929, Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein followed suit when he moved to establish a branch of the Institutional Synagogue in the emerging Jewish neighborhood on the Upper West Side.⁹

Congregation Ohab Zedek exemplifies this migratory history of the Jewish community. Originally located on the Lower East Side, it moved first to Harlem, and then to the Upper West Side.

First Hungarian Congregation of Ohab Zedek

Congregation Ohab Zedek ("Lovers of Righteousness") has a long and distinguished history, and occupied several synagogue buildings before building its current home - by far the longest-occupied of all its homes - in 1926-27.

The congregation traces its origins to 1872, when it was founded on Manhattan's Lower East Side by a group of Orthodox Jews of Hungarian origin. As described in *The American Hebrew* in 1898, in an article marking the congregation's 25th anniversary:

Early in August, 1872, a number of Jews of Hungarian birth determined to form the first Hungarian congregation (at 69 Ridge Street), and to conform strictly to orthodox tenets of the faith. Morris Schlesinger was elected the first president, and at his suggestion the above name was given to the organization. Six months after its first organization the Ridge Street meeting-place was found to be too small, and a larger room was hired at the corner of Houston Street and Avenue B. In 1874 the first scroll was purchased, and in that year also the congregation moved to the corner of Third Street and Avenue C, and had a membership of over one hundred.¹⁰

In 1882, the growing congregation bought a "chapel building" at 70 Columbia Street, formerly owned by the New-York City Mission and Tract Society.¹¹

This building was changed to conform to orthodox ideas. A gallery was erected for female worshippers.... Cantor Weiss was engaged to come from Hungary, at a salary of \$700 per annum. At this time there were 150 members.¹²

⁸ Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 68.

⁹ Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Jews of Harlem: The Rise, Decline, and Revival of a Jewish Community* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 178.

¹⁰ *The American Hebrew*, February 11, 1898, 459.

¹¹ *New York Times*, April 14, 1882, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

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In 1886, the congregation moved one more time to a new Lower East Side location, a pre-Civil War synagogue building (today known as the Orensanz Center) at 172 Norfolk Street. The synagogue's dedication attracted the notice of the *New York Times*:

The first regular synagogue in this country ever devoted to the use of Hungarians was dedicated yesterday afternoon. The building...is large enough to seat 1,500 people.... The congregation is of the strictest orthodox type, and has accordingly separated the pulpit, or reading desk, from the holy ark, which were formerly in one piece. The organ, which is unorthodox, has also been removed, and the only music permitted is that furnished by a boys' choir. There are 350 members in the congregation.... No minister has yet been placed in charge, as it is intended to bring one from Hungary. While the members of the congregation are almost entirely Hungarian, Hebrews of other races will be welcome to participate in the worship.¹³

Four years later, the congregation did indeed bring in a rabbi from Hungary:

Until 1890 the services had been conducted by a cantor, but owing to the increased prosperity which attended the congregation, it was decided to extend a call to the Rev. Dr. Philip Klein, a Hebrew scholar of great learning. Rabbi Klein, who was then stationed at Liebau, Hungary, accepted the call, and immediately came to this country.¹⁴

Rabbi Klein served as the congregation's rabbi for the next 36 years.

By 1906, the congregation had grown to more than 250 members, in part thanks to a merger with another synagogue, Shomre Hadath. Many of those members, however, had begun moving from the Lower East Side to Harlem, as part of the general migration of upwardly mobile Jewish families described above.

In November of 1906, Congregation Ohab Zedek laid the cornerstone for its new synagogue, on East 116th Street between Lenox and Fifth Avenues.¹⁵ Planning had begun in 1903; construction problems delayed completion until 1909. The program for the dedication ceremonies included an explanation for the new location, quoting the resolution of 1903:

...in order to comply with the wishes of numerous members who had moved up-town, a branch synagogue be erected up-town, in accordance with the existing laws of the Congregation, and that the affairs of this branch synagogue be conducted by the same executive as the home synagogue.¹⁶

Ohab Zedek in Harlem, in other words, was intended to be an extension of, rather than a replacement for, the congregation still based on Norfolk Street. Gradually, however, the Harlem synagogue became the main building, and in 1921 Ohab Zedek sold the Norfolk Street building to another congregation. In 1922, the *New York Times* described Ohab Zedek as "the most largely attended Orthodox Jewish synagogue in New York."¹⁷ This statement should not be understood to mean that Ohab Zedek was the largest synagogue building in New York, or necessarily the largest congregation by membership, but simply that more people – members or otherwise – attended services there, likely in part because of its outstanding cantor, Josef "Jossele" Rosenblatt.

¹³ "Devoted to Hungarians," *New York Times*, August 13, 1886, 8.

¹⁴ "A Synagogue's Celebration," *New York Times*, February 7, 1898, 12.

¹⁵ "Dedication of the Harlem Synagogue," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger*, November 9, 1906, 11.

¹⁶ "History of the Congregation 'Ohab Zedek,'" *Dedication Services of Temple 'Ohab Zedek' of Harlem*, February 21st, 1909.

¹⁷ "Dr. Drachman Resigns," *New York Times*, October 28, 1922, 13.

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During this period of its history, Ohab Zedek was led by two rabbis – Rabbi Klein and Rabbi Bernard Drachman. Rabbi Drachman left the congregation in 1922, while Rabbi Klein remained until his death. But by far the best-known figure associated with the synagogue was its cantor, Josef “Jossele” Rosenblatt, whom the congregation brought from Europe in 1912; he served at Ohab Zedek until 1926. During his tenure at the synagogue he became known as one of the finest cantors in the world, and, besides leading services, undertook concert tours, singing at Carnegie Hall in 1918 (while turning down an offer to sing with the Chicago Opera the same year). An example of his reputation is an article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that appeared in 1919, in advance of a concert tour coming to that city:

A new and phenomenal tenor will be heard...when Josef Rosenblatt, cantor of the Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek in New York, gives his first concert in this city. According to reports, Rosenblatt possesses a tenor voice which rivals the opulence of Caruso in operatic airs, and which in its expressive sentiment in the interpretation of Jewish folksongs and chants of the synagogue recalls McCormack’s rendition of Irish melodies. In addition, Rosenblatt has cultivated the head-tones or falsetto register of the male voice until a high F lies within his range, and in this upper region of the voice is said to have attained a coloratura technique of which Galli-Curci need not be ashamed. His trills, according to one critic, take one back to Melba.¹⁸

Congregation Ohab Zedek’s New Home on the Upper West Side

Orthodoxy was considered on the wane in the 1920s, but Ohab Zedek continued to thrive. In 1921, the congregation absorbed another congregation, Shares Israel, and in 1923 it absorbed a third congregation, Pincus Elijah. That same year, following the general trend of the Jewish community moving from Harlem to the Upper West Side, the congregation announced plans to build a new synagogue, on West 95th Street, on the site of the former home of Pincus Elijah – not as a replacement for the Harlem Synagogue, but as an Upper West Side branch. In much the same way as the congregation had had two synagogues in simultaneous use, an older one on the Lower East Side and a newer one in Harlem, now it would have two synagogues in simultaneous use, an older one in Harlem and a newer one on the Upper West Side. As described by Rabbi Isaiah Levy in the dedication speech:

The same causes which necessitated our moving to upper Harlem in 1906 made it imperative for us to build this magnificent edifice in which you are now seated so that we may accommodate not alone the great number of our membership who have moved to this section, but also the ever increasing number of Jews who are moving to this section and who, I am sure, are in quest of the very kind of place of worship that we have built here.¹⁹

In December 1923, during a celebration of the congregation’s 50th anniversary, plans were announced for the new building:

The First Hungarian Congregation, Ohab Zedek, observed golden jubilee exercises yesterday at the synagogue, 18 West 116th Street, Rabbi Philip Klein conducting the services, assisted by Moritz Neuman, president of the congregation. The latter announced plans for construction of a new synagogue on the upper West Side, to cost \$500,000, the building to include a Talmud Torah [religious school] and community center.²⁰

¹⁸ “Cantor Rosenblatt To Sing Here Jan. 12,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 12, 1919, 6B.

¹⁹ *Program of Ceremonies of the First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek – Dedication of its New Synagogue*, April 10th, 1927; typescript in the archive kept by the congregation.

²⁰ *New York Tribune*, December 3, 1923, 11.

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The following week, at an anniversary dinner at the Hotel Astor, Rabbi Klein repeated the announcement, and that it was proposed to raise \$1,000,000, to build a synagogue, school and community center. By this time, Ohab Zedek was well enough established to receive letters of commendation from New York State Governor Al Smith, Supreme Court Justice Irving Lehman, financier Felix M. Warburg, and President Calvin Coolidge – the later stating that the congregation “has always taken a prominent part in the movements for the betterment of American citizens, and in all charitable and benevolent enterprises.”²¹ The project was announced again in February 1925; the cornerstone of the new building was finally laid in May of 1926:

The First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek recently laid the cornerstone for its new west side synagogue. The erection of this synagogue at 120 West Ninety-fifth Street marked the fifth time in a little more than half a century that the congregation found it necessary to select a new house of worship. The present plans of the Ohab Zedek contemplates the immediate completion of the synagogue on West Ninety-fifth Street, to which section many members of the congregation have moved, and thereafter the erection of a Talmud Torah and community center building on the adjoining property which has been recently purchased.²²

September of the same year, the congregation announced completion of the synagogue:

Oldest Orthodox Congregation in New York Completes New Synagogue: First step in \$1,000,000 Center to be Memorial to Late Dr. Philip Klein

Announcement has been made that the new upper West Side Synagogue of the First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek, one of the largest and oldest Orthodox Jewish Congregations in New York City, erected on West Ninety-Fifth Street near Amsterdam Avenue, is completed. The first services will be held at midnight on Saturday, September 4th, when, according to the Orthodox Jewish ritual, prayers will be said and the building will be formally opened to the public with addresses by the Rabbis of the Congregation and its officers.²³

According to the announcement, the synagogue was still planned to be just the first part of a much larger building program that would eventually include a school and community center, though neither of these in fact was ever built:

The Synagogue marks the completion of the first step in an ambitious program undertaken by the Congregation two years ago in the interests of Orthodox Jewry of the entire city and which is to include the construction of a vast educational and communal center to cost upwards of \$1,000,000 and of which the new synagogue may be called the cornerstone.²⁴

The entire project was intended as a memorial to the recently deceased Rabbi Klein:

The purpose to establish in this city a single spot where the activities of Orthodox Jewry in religious, educational, social and charitable lines might be centralized was the outcome of the wish to honor Dr. Philip Klein, for thirty-six years Rabbi of the Congregation, whose death last March was followed within twenty-four hours by that of Mrs. Klein, and the group of buildings, began [sic] during Dr. Klein's life, will now be completed as a memorial to his services to the Congregation and to the community.

It was emphasized that the new synagogue would operate in tandem with older synagogue in Harlem:

²¹ *New York Times*, December 10, 1923, 5.

²² *The American Israelite*, May 20, 1926, 2.

²³ *The American Israelite*, September 2, 1926, 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

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The new structure...will not in any way supplant the older edifice of the Congregation at 18 West 116th Street, where services will continue to be held and which will remain as a center of worship for the Orthodox Jews of Harlem. Rabbi Isaiah Levy, who came to the Congregation from England several years ago to serve with Rabbi Klein, is Rabbi of the Congregation and will officiate in both Synagogues, as will Dr. Samuel Vigoda, Cantor, who recently came to Ohab Zedek from Hungary as the successor to Cantor Joseph Rosenblatt, whose world wide fame was gained during the long connection with the Congregation, and Cantor Isidore Doppelt, formerly cantor of Pincus Elijah Congregation, that several years ago was merged with Ohab Zedek. The vested boys choir of sixty voices, directed by Professor Meyer Posner, also will be heard in both synagogues.²⁵

The 1920s were a period of enormous expansion of Jewish institutions in New York City. As summarized recently by historian Eitan Kastner:

In the 1920's, New York City saw the culmination of a great Jewish building boom. Between the end of the Great War and the onset of the Great Depression, elaborate and impressive synagogues, temples, and educational institutions were built by the entire range of the city's prominent Jewish factions. The members of the oldest Reform congregation in Manhattan, Temple Emanu-El, raised a colossal Romanesque house of worship on Fifth Avenue in 1929. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA), which would serve as the flagship institution for Conservative Judaism, opened the doors to its grand Georgian Morningside Heights building in 1930. And while these two institutions decided upon established aesthetic styles for their buildings, the fledgling Orthodox Yeshiva College chose a striking and innovative combination of traditional and modern styles for the first structure of its Washington Heights campus in 1928.²⁶

Ohab Zedek's new home was very much part of this building boom. In his speech at the dedication ceremony for the new building in 1927,

It is a happy coincidence that at a period when the Jewish community of this great metropolis, in the progress of its activities, has embarked upon a building of institutions and synagogues, a good many of which have recently been dedicated, we of the Ohab Zedek, too, are not lagging behind in our building program.²⁷

And to design the new synagogue, Congregation Ohab Zedek turned to architect Charles B. Meyers, the designer of that first Yeshiva College building.

Architect Charles B. Meyers and the design for Ohab Zedek

Charles Bradford Meyers (1875-1958) had a long and productive career designing everything from tenements and stables to garment center lofts, banks and synagogues. A graduate of City College and Pratt Institute, he opened his architecture practice in 1899. From early work on multiple dwellings in Greenwich Village, he moved on to public buildings, hospitals, courthouses and schools – his municipal buildings include the former Health and Hospitals Building at 125 Worth Street (1935) and the Criminal Court Building (in association with Harvey Wiley Corbett, 1939) at 100 Centre Street. His municipal connections included work as an associate on the design of the Tammany Hall building on East 17th Street (1928-29), the New York State Building at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, and serving as chair of the Joint Committee on City Departments from 1925 to 1929.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Eitan Kastner, "Yeshiva College and the Pursuit of a Jewish Architecture," *American Jewish History*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (June 2010).

²⁷ *First Hungarian Cong. Ohab Zedek: An Inspiration For The Future, A Monument To The Past*, August 26, 1926.

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Though most of his work seems to have been on government-related commissions, Meyers also designed Jewish institutional buildings. Within just a few years in the mid-1920s, he designed two Upper West Side synagogues – the Orthodox Ohab Zedek (1925-26), and the Reform Rodeph Sholom (1928-30), on whose Board of Trustees he sat – and part of the campus of Yeshiva University (1928), the main educational institution of Modern Orthodoxy in the United States.

Ohab Zedek's home on Norfolk Street had been Gothic in inspiration, and the 116th Street building deliberately used a related style (called "Tudor" in the press). But for the 95th Street building, Meyers turned to a style that had become popular for synagogues in the late 19th and early 20th century, based on a type of "Moorish" ornament. This style, popular in the 1920s, had developed in synagogue architecture in Europe and America from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries, in the belief that the Moorish represented a more "Eastern," and therefore more culturally appropriate style for Jewish buildings.

As one historian explains, in discussing the introduction of Moorish ornament into 19th-century European synagogues:

When churches began to forsake classical architecture for the Gothic styles of the Middle Ages, synagogues (with few exceptions) did not follow suit, partly because Gothic was thought to be identified too closely with Christianity. Perhaps the revival of interest in the Jews of medieval Spain was responsible for a return to the architectural style of their synagogues. In a spirit of romantic escapism, the [synagogues] of the industrial age evoked the splendor of the palaces and gardens of the Alhambra. Reports of the synagogues of Toledo, now used as churches, began to percolate. Perhaps there was also the thought that the Jews derived from the Middle East, and in Islamic countries, had enjoyed a greater continuity of residence and respect than in the west; their architectural association with Saracenic detail would therefore have been of longer duration than other styles.²⁸

A modest use of the style by Gottfried Semper in 1838-40 for interior detail at a synagogue in Dresden may be the earliest example. It was followed by grander examples:

At mid-century, the interior of the Cologne Synagogue, designed by E.F. Zwirner of Berlin...shows how much more elaborate the Moorish decoration had become since Semper's comparatively restrained interior at Dresden. The synagogue in the Tempelgasse in Vienna (1853-58)...was carried out in full-blooded Arabic detail by the well-known Viennese architect and city planner Ludwig von Förster, in conjunction with Theophil von Hansen. Förster was also responsible for the synagogues in Vienna (Leopoldstadt), at Miskolez, Hungary and at Pesht (1860) – the latter banded externally with colored bricks, its façade interspersed with stone and terracotta, decorated with angle towers and cupolas.²⁹

Architect Leopold Eidlitz brought the style to New York in 1868, in his design for the former Temple Emanu-El (demolished). Frank Furness (unlike Eidlitz, not himself Jewish) used the style at the Rodef Shalom synagogue in Philadelphia (1869/70).

By 1866, elaborate angle towers which characterized this design, were an accepted feature of the Moorish style; they were adopted in many countries, crowned with balloon-like cupolas or onion-shaped and bulbous domes. They flank synagogues of varying sizes at Liverpool, London and New York (Lexington Avenue) [Central Synagogue].³⁰

²⁸ Edward Jamilly, "The Architecture of the Contemporary Synagogue," in Cecil Roth, ed., *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 766.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 767.

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A more recent review of the subject points out that the use of Moorish elements remained strictly ornamental:

No architect ever aimed to recreate on Western soil an actual Oriental palace or mosque (let alone one of the famous “Oriental” synagogues such as those of medieval Spain). The ground plan, structural engineering, and important stylistic elements always reflected contemporary Western tastes and practices. What was Islamic was mainly decorative. The only structural element adapted from the “Orient” were perhaps the slender pillars with floral and vegetal capitals. And these, too, were often made of iron, using the latest Western methods of construction.³¹

The version of the Moorish seen at Ohab Zedek had been developed just a few years earlier, in 1918, at the B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue in Manhattan by architects Walter S. Schneider and Henry B. Herts. As described by historian Andrew S. Dolkart:

Schneider and Herts’s design for B’nai Jeshurun began what Robert Stern has called “a new phase of synagogue design.” For their B’nai Jeshurun design, Schneider and Herts...returned to a Middle Eastern design vocabulary. However, their design differed from the idiom used for nineteenth-century synagogues. The exterior of the synagogue does not have the ornate decorative quality seen on the facades of the Central Synagogue and other early Moorish synagogues. Rather, B’nai Jeshurun is an austere stone building with ornament limited to the tall centrally placed entrance portal.³²

Dolkart notes that:

The ornament used on the façade of B’nai Jeshurun was inspired by actual Middle Eastern architecture. As Herts noted, “the designs and symbols used in the Synagogue, were suggested by symbols found in the ornament and in the walls of extant remains of buildings in ruins and graveyards in Palestine, in Egypt, and in Iberia.” In a 1920 article on the synagogue published in *Architecture* and probably written by Walter Schneider, the source of the building’s design is also discussed: “The purpose was to seek among the archaeological fragments of the period and time most closely related to Jewish unity as a nation in Palestine. Extensive research in the various collections in the Metropolitan Museum of Art furnished inspiration for a design that reflects a blending of several styles and periods more or less related.”³³

The result was called a “Semitic” style.

In the years just after World War I, when a large number of new synagogues were built in New York City, Semitic architecture, with its mix of forms from Middle Eastern cultures where Judaism had flourished, became popular for synagogue design. This form originated with the design of B’nai Jeshurun.

One of the synagogues inspired by this new “Semitic” style was the new home for Congregation Ohab Zedek, which bears a strong resemblance to B’nai Jeshurun, outside and also, if to a lesser extent, inside. Though the congregation described the building’s sources as “Byzantine and Romanesque,” the Moorish inspiration is clearly visible: tall, slender columns flanking the grand entrance; column capitals adorned with Arabesque designs; strapwork ornament on the ceiling and the galleries; and Judaic symbols interlaced throughout.

³¹ Ivan Davidson Kalmar, “Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture,” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Spring/Summer 2001 (New Series), 72.

³² Andrew S. Dolkart, National Register nomination for Congregation B’nai Jeshurun, New York County, N.Y., 1989.

³³ Sources for Dolkart’s citations: Herts quotation is from Israel Goldstein, *A Century of Judaism in New York: B’nai Jeshurun 1825-1925* (NY: B’nai Jeshurun, 1930), 262. Probable Schneider quotation is from “The Temple B’nai Jeshurun,” *Architecture* 41 (January 1920), 18.

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Meyers's design for Ohab Zedek includes a monolithic stone-faced façade whose main feature is a grand entrance set within successive layers of colonettes of varying design supporting a series of round arches. The colonettes are decorated with a variety of ornate patterns. The double entrance within the arch is framed in cast-stone adorned with Arabesque designs, into which are mixed Judaic symbols, notably a *magen david* (shield or "star" of David) in the small circular windows above the doors. Above the entrance, elaborate cast-stone ornament, also of Arabesque design with Judaic symbols, notably a *menorah* (the large candelabra that once stood in the Temple in Jerusalem), rises to an enormous rose window adorned with a *magen david*. The rest of the façade with its narrow slit-like windows is reminiscent of an ancient Moorish fortress. The façade's roofline curves upward to follow the curve of the central entrance. Most of these elements – grand entrance with arches and colonettes, monolithic façade, and narrow slit windows – can be found at B'nai Jeshurun.

Contrasting with the relatively severe façade is the brightly lit ornamental sanctuary, lit on either side with enormous stained glass windows, at the front with a large rose window above the ark, and in the ceiling by a stained glass cupola. The ornament here, nevertheless, continues the Moorish-style ornament intermixed with Judaic symbols, including in a triple-arched porch surrounding the ark, in the elaborate strapwork plaster ornament in the ceiling, and similar ornament all along the balcony.

In the dedication booklet, the congregation described its new building:

The new West Side Synagogue is one of the handsomest and most complete in the city. Its architecture is a blending of the Byzantine and Romanesque. The architecture is by Charles B. Meyers. The façade is of Briar Hill sandstone, superimposed on a massive base of granite, and the interior decorations are of ornamental tracery in Byzantine and Romanesque patterns done in low relief. The Ark is entirely of marble.

A feature of the building, never before attempted in a synagogue and unique in the structures of this city, is the lighting which is entirely concealed and the principal source of which is a huge art-glass dome, 28 feet in diameter, through which, in the day, ample daylight penetrates to the entire building, and at night illumination by means of concealed lights also floods the auditorium in the same manner, with no chandeliers visible.... The Synagogue, with its gallery for the women of the Congregation, accommodates more than eight hundred persons.³⁴

The congregation's opinion of its new building was shared by outside observers. From *The American Hebrew* in 1927:

More than half a century of religious steadfastness will be celebrated next Sunday when the First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek of New York formally dedicates its magnificent new synagogue... The new temple [is] marked by an architectural austerity that combines beauty and dignity....³⁵

The new synagogue was dedicated on April 10th, 1927. Cantor Rosenblatt, though officially no longer cantor of Ohab Zedek, sang with a choir.

The Talmud Torah

³⁴ *First Hungarian Cong. Ohab Zedek: An Inspiration For The Future, A Monument To The Past.*

³⁵ *The American Hebrew*, April 8, 1927, 755.

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The initial plans for Ohab Zedek's new home on West 95th Street were meant to be part of a three-part memorial to Rabbi Klein. As described in *The American Israelite* in January 1927:

As the outcome of the two-day national memorial convention held to honor the memory of the late Dr. and Mrs. Philip Klein... a committee of thirty-three was appointed, to be later increased to 1,000, and which is to bring to fulfillment the Rabbi Hillel Klein Foundation...

[T]he Foundation is to consist of a three-fold memorial, embracing locally the erection of a Beth Hillel in New York City for the study of the Torah; nationally the erection of a Rabbi Klein Memorial Wing of the Yeshiva Collage, and Internationally to forward plans for the creation of a Colony in Palestine to carry out the work in the Holy Land in which Dr. Klein was for many years actively interested...

Locally, the synagogue was also to be part of a three-part memorial: the synagogue, a Talmud Torah (religious school) and a community center. As described in a pamphlet celebrating the new synagogue:

The new Synagogue marks the completion of the first step in an extensive program undertaken by the Congregation, which is to include the construction of an educational and communal center, of which the new Synagogue may be called the cornerstone.³⁶

The congregation had a community building down the block, at No. 128 West 95th Street, inherited from Congregation Pincus Elijah and opened in 1918 as the West Side Community House.³⁷ That institution's purpose was "to promote Jewish education among the young and social helpfulness to those worthily deserving."³⁸ In 1926, Ohab Zedek acquired the site directly next door to the synagogue, at 122-124 West 95th Street; as part of the arrangement, the congregation gave up its former community building.

Despite the initial plans for a new school, the congregation had to postpone construction for more than a decade, perhaps because of financial considerations during the years of the Great Depression. As Max Rosenfeld, the congregation's president, announced in the memorial booklet of 1939 celebrating the congregation's 65th anniversary:

At long last we are about to achieve the dream of our Sainted and revered Dr. Philip Hillel Klein... The building of the "Beth Hillel Hebrew Institute" is about to become a reality. Work has been commenced after many years of struggle and heartache and we are about to realize the fruition of our ideal: a real Talmud Torah... We have a great deal to look forward to. A modern building where Torah will be the keynote and all activities will be held under the influence of the Synagogue.³⁹

The school building in use today was created by altering the existing buildings at 122-124 West 95th Street in 1939; the alteration was designed by architect Herman H. Sohn. Information about Sohn is sparse. He received his B.S. in Architecture in 1911 from the University of Pennsylvania.⁴⁰ In Manhattan, Sohn designed apartment houses, an office building, several tenements and garages. He was later in a partnership with Martyn Weston, with whom he designed a three-story firehouse for the City of New York in 1946, and work in Brooklyn including storefronts on Fulton Street; single-family houses at 2071-77 Bragg Street, 2051-83 Bragg Street,

³⁶ *First Hungarian Cong. Ohab Zedek: An Inspiration For The Future*, op. cit.

³⁷ "West Side Community House Opened," *The American Jewish Chronicle*, May 17, 1918, 44.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Congregation Ohab Zedek, *65th Anniversary Celebration, Hotel Plaza, March Twelfth, Nineteen Thirty-Nine* (n.p.)

⁴⁰ University of Pennsylvania General Alumni Society, W.J. Maxwell, *General Alumni Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania* (Alumni Association, 1922), 209.

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3085-3091 Avenue U, an apartment building called Woodruff House at Woodruff and Crooke avenues, and similar projects in Queens, as well as several small projects in Manhattan.⁴¹ After World War II, Sohn and Weston designed the Kingsway Jewish Center (listed in the National Register).

Sohn altered two existing houses into a new school building, extending the building out to the property line, adding a rear extension, and creating “new class rooms, gymnasium, auditorium and social rooms, new toilets, etc.”⁴² The Certificate of Occupancy was issued in 1939. Sohn’s new façade is a modest Moderne design, typical of the period. Most of its ornament derives from the color of the brick and projecting brick segments outlining the windows and small cast-stone panels with a floral pattern; there are also two incised circles with a *magen david* within.

The educational programs were run by the Beth Hillel Hebrew Institute until it was dissolved in 1953. The congregation continued to operate a religious school from the building into the 1960s.⁴³ While they no longer operate a religious school, the congregation uses the building for youth programming, educational services, and private religious events. The synagogue’s offices and its kitchen are also in the building.

The congregation and its later history

Congregation Ohab Zedek continued to flourish over the following decades, maintaining its original Hungarian identity but also serving a wider community. That Hungarian identity was not particularly unusual; according to an historian of the Hungarian Jewish community in America:

In 1938 one source claimed, without giving the details, that there were thirty Hungarian synagogues in New York City alone, but this was probably an overestimate.⁴⁴

Like many Upper West Side congregations, however, Ohab Zedek suffered a gradual decline in membership. The congregation sold the Harlem building in 1938 to a Baptist church. By the 1960s the neighborhood around West 95th Street began to decline, suffering from rising crime. As described in a 1987 study of the Upper West Side:

Certain blocks between 48th and 110th streets, especially between Central Park West and Amsterdam Avenue, were particularly troubled. The area contained 199,000 people when the 1960s began, 66 percent of whom were white; 40 percent of these whites were Jews. Although they were in the majority on all but a few blocks, the whites - Jewish and others - lived uneasily with their black and Puerto Rican neighbors. The plight of a Jewish temple, Congregation Ohab Zedek, at 95th Street and Columbus Avenue, is a case in point. During the summer it was actually dangerous to walk (as observant Jews must do) to the temple for Sabbath services, and at all ... times parents had to escort their children to and from the synagogue because they would otherwise be attacked by

⁴¹ Manhattan Buildings Department, New Building application 238 of 1946; “Building Plans Filed,” *New York Times*, October 20, 1945, 26; “Building Plans Filed,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1945, 34; “Building Plans Filed,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1945, 46; “3d Ave. Transit Plans New Garage Building,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1945, 32; “L.I. Builders Plan New Home Groups in ‘Luxury’ Class,” *New York Times*, November 12, 1950, 241.

⁴² New York City Department of Buildings, Alteration Application No. 2097 of 1938; work commenced March 30, 1939, work completed July 26, 1939.

⁴³ Information about the institute was supplied by the synagogue’s executive director.

⁴⁴ Robert Perlman, *Bridging Three Worlds: Hungarian-Jewish Americans, 1848-1914* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), p. 220.

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gangs. Not surprisingly, the congregation lost one hundred members between 1965 and 1966. Hostility to white residents of the West Side, Jews and non-Jews, was widespread.⁴⁵

By the early 1990s, however, Ohab Zedek began to attract a new, younger membership:

[Ohab Zedek's] present incarnation began only about five years ago with the hiring of Rabbi Allen Schwartz, a man almost as young as many of his congregants. The influx of young singles, many of them in their 20s, happened because "the neighborhood changed," Rabbi Schwartz says. "There's significant rental housing on Columbus Avenue. There are two huge apartment buildings in the area with scores of young professionals and graduate students, people who have just joined the work force. When I came here I never said to them, 'Join our shul.' I said, 'Just join a shul, become a responsible member of the community.'"

Executive director Sol Zalcgendler says: "This was an older shrinking congregation which had some difficulties, and [Rabbi Schwartz] revitalized it. He had a distinctive vision of what the shul should be...and he builds relationships with people...."

There are [now] more than 500 members in all, 90 percent of whom live on the West Side.⁴⁶

Today, Congregation Ohab Zedek continues to thrive. It remains an Orthodox congregation, as it was originally. The synagogue reflects the history of New York City Jews in the early 20th century, including the cantorial tradition, and now also that history at the beginning of the 21st century. As such, Congregation Ohab Zedek remains a vital part of the living history of its neighborhood, and of its city.

⁴⁵ *New York Affairs*, Vol 10, 1987, 29.

⁴⁶ "Young at Heart," *The Jewish Week*, November 12-18, 1993, 20.

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Moore, Deborah Dash. *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

New York Affairs. Vol 10, 1987, 29.

New York City Department of Buildings. Alteration Application No. 2097 of 1938.

New York Times, April 14, 1882, 8.

New York Times, December 10, 1923, 5.

New York Tribune, December 3, 1923, 11.

Perlman, Robert. *Bridging Three Worlds: Hungarian-Jewish Americans, 1848-1914*; University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.

Program of Ceremonies of the First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek – Dedication of its New Synagogue. April 10th, 1927; typescript in the archive kept by the congregation.

Rischin, Moses. *The Promised Land: New York's Jews, 1870-1914*. New York, 1970.

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Congregation Ohab Zedek
Name of Property

New York County, NY
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .20 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u> Zone	<u>586974</u> Easting	<u>4516221</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

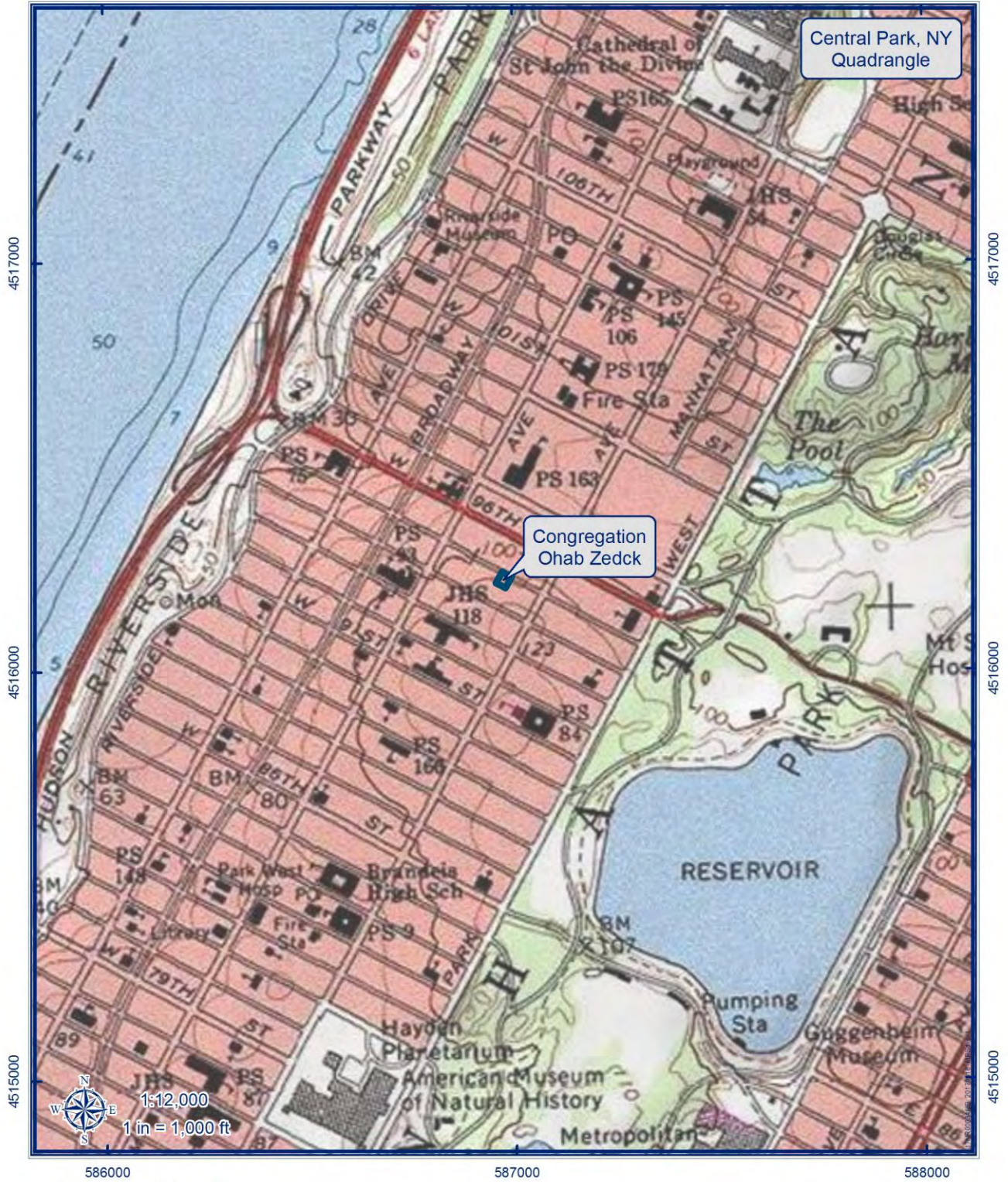
The boundary was drawn to include the parcels historically associated with Congregation Ohab Zedek.

Congregation Ohab Zedek
Name of Property

New York County, NY
County and State

Congregation Ohab Zedek
New York, New York Co., NY

118-20 West 95th Street
New York, NY 10025



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



Congregation Ohab Zedek



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Congregation Ohab Zedek
Name of Property

New York County, NY
County and State

Congregation Ohab Zedek
New York, New York Co., NY

118-20 West 95th Street
New York, NY 10025



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



Congregation Ohab Zedek



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Congregation Ohab Zedek
Name of Property

New York County, NY
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anthony Robins
organization _____ date April 2017
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town New York state NY zip code _____
e-mail trob@pipeline.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Congregation Ohab Zedek

City or Vicinity: New York

County: New York State: NY

Photographer: Anthony Robbins

Date Photographed: March 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0001
Congregation Ohab Zedek and school and community center, in the West 95th Street streetscape, looking west

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0002
Congregation Ohab Zedek, 95th Street façade, looking south

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0003
Congregation Ohab Zedek, 95th Street façade, looking south; detail

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0004
Congregation Ohab Zedek, school and community center, 95th Street façade, looking south

Congregation Ohab Zedek
Name of Property

New York County, NY
County and State

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0005
Congregation Ohab Zedek, alley between the synagogue building (left) and the school (right) looking south

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0006
Congregation Ohab Zedek, school and community center, rear, upper stories, looking north

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0007
Congregation Ohab Zedek, school and community center, rear, first story, looking north

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0008
Congregation Ohab Zedek, entrance vestibule

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0009
Congregation Ohab Zedek, entrance vestibule, detail

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0010
Congregation Ohab Zedek, entrance vestibule, staircase to balcony

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0011
Congregation Ohab Zedek, sanctuary, looking south towards the ark

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0012
Congregation Ohab Zedek, sanctuary, looking north towards the entrance

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0013
Congregation Ohab Zedek, sanctuary, ceiling, looking north towards the entrance Congregation Ohab Zedek, sanctuary, east wall of the balcony, looking south

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0014
Congregation Ohab Zedek, sanctuary, ark, looking south

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0015
Congregation Ohab Zedek, basement, *beit midrash*, looking south

NY_New York_Congregation Ohab Zedek_0016
Congregation Ohab Zedek, school and community center, typical classroom

Property Owner:

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

name Congregation Ohab Zedek, Chad Hopkowitz, Executive Director
street & number 118-120 West 95th Street telephone _____
city or town New York state NY zip code 10025

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.





קמ אומב צירס

CONGREGATION
OHAB ZION

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS
POLICE DEPT





 **cb**
CROSSBRIDGE
at manhattan childrens center

 **mcc**

 **mcc**



























UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 7/7/2017 Date of Pending List: 8/2/2017 Date of 16th Day: 8/17/2017 Date of 45th Day: 8/21/2017 Date of Weekly List: 8/24/2017

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 8/18/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary
Comments:

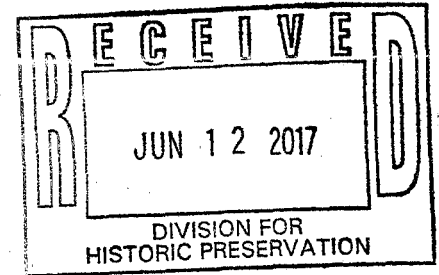
Recommendation/
Criteria

Reviewer Alexis Abernathy Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2236 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair

June 7, 2017

Sarah Carroll
Executive Director
SCarroll@pc.nyc.gov

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

212 669 7902 tel
212 669 7797 fax

Mr. Michael F. Lynch, P.E., AIA
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Director, Division for Historic Preservation
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 189
Peebles Island
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: Congregation Ohab Zedek, 118-120 West 95th Street

Dear Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Lynch:

I am writing on behalf of Chair Meenakshi Srinivasan in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of Congregation Ohab Zedek, located at 118-120 West 95th Street in Manhattan, for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission's Director of Research Kate Lemos McHale has reviewed the materials you submitted and has determined that Congregation Ohab Zedek appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Carroll".

Sarah Carroll

cc: Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Kate Lemos McHale, Director of Research



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner



23 June 2017

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places

Mail Stop 7228

1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Re: National Register Nomination

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following nine nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

International Paper Administration Building and Time Office, Saratoga County
Potter Historic District, Monroe County
Second and Ostrander Historic District, Suffolk County
Charles and Anna Bates House, Suffolk County
Swan River Schoolhouse, Suffolk County
Congregation Ohab Zedek, New York County
George Sumner Kellogg House, Nassau County
West High School, Cayuga County
Morgan Dunne House (Ward Wellington Ward in Syracuse MPDF), Onondaga County

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office