

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



908

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Jewish Center of Coney Island

other names/site number The Jewish Center of Brighton Beach

2. Location

street & number 2915 Ocean Parkway [] not for publication

city or town Brooklyn [] vicinity

state New York code NY county Kings code 047 zip code 11235

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Rudolph Purpant DSHPO 9/26/13
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register
[] see continuation sheet

[] determined eligible for the National Register
[] see continuation sheet

[] determined not eligible for the National Register

[] removed from the National Register

[] other (explain) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Edson H. Beall 12.11.13
date of action

The Jewish Center of Coney Island

Kings County, New York

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	0	TOTAL

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/ religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/ religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE NINETEENTH &

EARLY 20th CENTURY REVIVALS/

Renaissance Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation _____

walls Concrete, Brick & Terra Cotta

roof Tile & Asphalt

other _____

Narrative Description

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

The Jewish Center of Coney Island

Kings County, New York

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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 associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location

C a birthplace or grave

D a cemetery

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure

F a commemorative property

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage

Period of Significance:

1929-1940

Significant Dates:

1929/1930

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Bloch & Hesse

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by historic American Building Survey

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .37

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 587416 4492621
Zone Easting Northing

3 18
Zone Easting Northing

2 18

4 18

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anna Broverman

organization Columbia University date June 12th, 2013

street & number 1172 Amsterdam Avenue telephone 212.854.3510

city or town New York state NY zip code 10027

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

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

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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

name Jewish Center of Brighton Beach (Contact Jules Loweff, president & Adria Pine, board chair)

street & number 2915 Ocean Parkway telephone

city or town Brooklyn state NY zip code 11235

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

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

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The Jewish Center of Coney Island
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Jewish Center of Coney Island -2915 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn

Narrative Description of Property:

The Jewish Center of Coney Island, now the Jewish Center of Brighton Beach is located at 2915 Ocean Parkway in the New York City borough of Brooklyn, Kings County New York. The building has been used as a house of worship and community center since it was built in 1929, and it is located mid-block on the east side of Ocean Parkway between Neptune and Oceanview Avenues. Ocean Parkway was designed as a landscaped boulevard by Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1870s to connect Prospect Park with Coney Island and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. As one of America's earliest and intact parkways, it is lined with large-scale commercial, residential, religious, and service buildings. Neptune Avenue, a busy street with low scale commercial and residential buildings, bounds the block to the north, and Oceanview Avenue, a quiet residential street with housing stock ranging from the early twentieth century to today, is located to the south. To the north of the building is a six-story 1920s apartment building with commercial tenants on the first floor, and to the south is another six-story apartment building constructed in 1921. Facing onto Brighton 1st Street, to the east, is a row of two-story detached duplexes dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To the west of the Jewish Center, along Ocean Parkway, are three twenty-five story apartment buildings. The Jewish Center of Coney Island is a rectangular building set at an angle on its lot. The lot encompasses the Jewish Center and is equivalent to its historic boundary. The building retains its integrity to a high degree.

Building Exterior-

The Jewish Center of Coney Island is trapezoidal in plan and consists of one solid mass. The building's raised basement and four stories are disguised as two large floors, with the main entrance located above street level via a grand stair. The religious institution was designed in the Renaissance Revival and Semitic styles and utilizes cast stone on the front façade and bricks on the side and rear facades. Green metal roofing caps the building and an angled rectangular elevator shafts can be seen on its right hand side.

The Ocean Parkway façade is clad in a golden-colored cast stone. The shape of the cast stone block varies from square to rectangular and its golden tones range from light to more vibrant tones. The façade is austere with little decoration besides quoining on the corners and perforated cast-stone blocks above the entryway. The building's raised basement and three stories are capped by a cornice with vine designs and modillions that support copper gutters and a hipped red tile roof.

The two main features of the façade are a grand staircase that leads to a raised entrance and a second story loggia. The staircase starts at street level and rises to three centrally located entrances. The staircase is made of concrete, with symmetrical, cast-stone wing walls on either side. Before the 1960s metal light posts with three globes were added to the square piers at the base of the walls at the sidewalk. At the same time metal railings, separating the building's three entrances were added, along with a delicate metal gate that encloses the stair. The main entrance itself is comprised of three arches each with double doors. The doors, which are not original, are located in the central area of the building, and each pair has an original wooden fanlight with two

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ten-commandment tablets. The arches are capped with scrolled keystones, while five decorative cast-stone blocks with perforated Arabic decorations sit above the entrances. Between these blocks and the keystones are metal letters spelling out “Jewish Center of Brighton Beach” in a Hebraic English font (the date these letters were installed is not known). Flanking the main entrance on street level are recessed doors that provide an entrance to the building’s basement. They are simple in design, with original double doors surrounded by wood and a transom above.

The second main feature on the façade is the second story loggia, which rests on a simple stringcourse that divides the first and second stories. The loggia is recessed from the façade and is divided into five bays by four simple end pilasters with a balustrade railing. Within the loggia the two outer bays and central bay contain windows, while the middle bays contain double doors. Directly above the second floor openings are windows that correspond to the third floor. Yellow brick clads the interior of the loggia, differentiating this section from the rest of the façade.

Two secondary facades are visible on the building from the street. The north façade is visible and is split into three stories, all of which have four windows spread equally across the façade. The windows on the main floor are large and filled with stained glass, while the basement and third story windows are square one over one sash windows. Here yellow brick is used as the main building material for its similarity in color with the main façade’s cast stone. The bricks are laid in horizontal bands that resemble ashlar masonry.

The south façade is also visible from the street and abuts a vacant lot that was never built upon.¹ This façade is made of both yellow and red bricks and contains a metal fire stair along the back. The main features of this façade are the three large stained glass windows that correspond to the sanctuary. There are one over one sash windows on the first and third floors. On this side of the building an elevator shaft, placed diagonally on the roof and clad in horizontal bands of yellow brick, projects out of the central part of the roof.

The rear façade is red brick and reveals the building’s five stories. The walls of the raised basement and first two stories gradually step back at odd angles until they reach the walls of the third and fourth floors. The building’s mechanical systems sit on the roof of the first floor, and a fire stair connects the third and fourth floors. One over one sash windows dot this façade reflecting the building’s interior layout.

Building Interior-

The interior of the Jewish Center of Coney Island consists of five floors planned around two large double height spaces – the main sanctuary and the auditorium. Two stairwells located near the front façade on the northern and southern sides of the building connect the building’s raised basement and four stories to these spaces. The main sanctuary comprises most of the first floor and is open to a mezzanine balcony above. The auditorium is located on the third floor is open via a balcony to several small meeting rooms located on the

¹ This neighboring vacant lot was not part of the original property, but was recently purchased by the Jewish Center of Brighton Beach; it is not part of this nomination.

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fourth floor. The building's basement is also planned around two large rooms; a community hall located near the front façade and the small sanctuary located at the rear of the building.

The main entrance of the Jewish Center of Coney Island is accessed via the grand exterior staircase on the front façade. Three pairs of wooden doors lead into a rectangular lobby with yellow and red diamond patterned terrazzo floors, which feature an encircled Star of David. A dark green marble chair rail flows from the lobby into the hall via two large rectangular openings where three identical pairs of doors lead to the main sanctuary. The northern end of the hall contains an electrical room and a staircase, and the southern end leads to a vestibule. The vestibule contains an elevator on the southern wall and a coatroom accessed by an arched doorway on the western wall. This room has terrazzo floors, a dark green marble chair rail, and an Art Deco chandelier.

The main sanctuary is an elongated hexagonal shape, and is styled in a more Classical design than the exterior of the building. A central aisle divides the room, with a glass partition separating the seats on the right hand side of the room in half. The simple décor consists of red auditorium seating and carpet. Four stained glass windows featuring designs of the Ten Commandments, the Torah, and the shield of Israel line both the north and south walls, which were paneled with wood in the late 1960s. The ceiling is a simple and elegant coffered design with gold detailing. The main feature of the room is the bimah and ark, which are situated in a large recessed arch. The bimah is raised three steps from the floor and is carpeted in red. The ark is paneled in wood, has six separate pictures on each side, and has four Doric columns along its front. The ceiling of the arch is covered in orange and gold wallpaper that recalls tile work. Above the arch are six interior stained glass windows; three more pairs of stained glass windows are on each side.

Behind the bimah and arch on the eastern end of the building are the rabbi's offices and dressing rooms, and a hallway links these rooms and the main sanctuary to the metal fire escape on the south side of the building. The fire stair leads upwards to the old organ room and a small hallway that lies behind the interior stained glass windows.

Two staircases on the north and south ends of the building lead down to the raised basement or up to a mezzanine. The raised basement has a separate entrance on both the north and south sides of the building's façade. The entrance on the southern side of the façade opens into a foyer with terrazzo floors and an Art Deco chandelier as well as an office with glass windows. To the right is a small room that was previously used as a rabbi's study and once had an arched door that led directly from it to the foyer, but at some point it was closed and covered over. From the office one can either go right to a staircase, or to the left, where two hallways lead to a social hall, classrooms, men and women's bathrooms, a second staircase, a boiler room, and a small sanctuary. The whole basement was redone a few years ago but has since received much damage due to Hurricane Sandy. As of now the walls on most of these rooms are stripped to the original plaster or studs.

Both staircases on the north and south ends of the building continue from the basement to the third floor. The stairwells are clad in cast stone similar to that on the exterior of the front façade and have terrazzo flooring. The cast stone is painted with a faux wood design that includes an intricate red design at about chair rail height.

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Up one flight of stairs, on the western side of the building is a mezzanine, which leads to a balcony overlooking the main sanctuary. The mezzanine has terrazzo flooring, a white textured plaster ceiling and is lit by the decorative cutout designs seen on the front façade. Two doors on the eastern side of the hall lead to a balcony that overlooks the main sanctuary. The balcony has paneled wood walls like the rest of the sanctuary and two wrought iron Art Deco chandeliers.

The second floor of the building contains a ballroom, classrooms, a hall, a women's room, and a small men's room. The lady's room is located on the northern side of the building, and was used as a dressing room for weddings and big events. It has marble washbasins and chair rails made of white subway tiles. A hall, which connects the ballroom to the other rooms on the floor, also leads to the exterior loggia seen on the front façade via two double doors. The ballroom is a large double height room with an open floor and stage. It was also paneled in the 1960s renovation and has a red acoustical tile ceiling. It is lit by metal hanging lamps that vary in design and by four large arched windows. A wrought iron balcony from the third floor overlooks the space, which is now being used as a ping pong school.

The third and final floor contains classrooms and meeting rooms. One classroom is located directly off the main hall while the others are located off the balcony that overlooks the ballroom.

Over the years, the building has received renovations, but in general retains its integrity to a high degree. The façade of the building has undergone little change since its construction in 1929 mostly consisting of the addition of railings, light posts, and a gate on the entry stairway. Spatially the interior is the same that it was upon its completion in 1929. There have been some redecorations, the largest of which was the paneling of the first through third floors in the late 1960s.

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Statement of Significance:

The Jewish Center of Coney Island, built between 1929 and 1931, is significant under criterion A for its association with the Jewish Community Center movement of the late 1910s and 1920s and as an indication of the development of Brighton Beach, at the southern edge of Brooklyn, as a new, middle-class residential neighborhood with a substantial Jewish population in the 1920s. The Jewish Community Center movement had its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century when congregations established centers that provided social and cultural services to the newly arrived and disadvantaged members of the Jewish community. These new centers included schools and places of worship, and were modeled after Christian establishments like institutional churches and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). By the turn of the twentieth century, controversy between the religious and secular Jewish communities and a rapidly increasing Jewish population necessitated a new type of facility where the three traditionally separated institutions of synagogue, school, and community center were combined. The Jewish Community Center movement is highly significant in the story of American Judaism as it marked a new and intrinsically American development in synagogue architecture.²

In addition, the building is also significant under criteria C, as an exemplary example of synagogue architecture in the 1920s. The center was designed by Bloch and Hesse, an architecture firm that designed many buildings in the New York area and that is particularly known for their synagogue and restaurant design. The building was loosely designed in a modern interpretation of the Renaissance Revival and Semitic styles and incorporates modern materials that cater to the building's modern function as a Jewish Center. Historicist design had long been used for synagogues. Designs included all sorts of styles. In the mid nineteenth century the Moorish style was particularly popular, and from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, the Classical Revival style was preferred. By the 1920s, Classicism was used for numerous types of buildings and architects began to look for a new style that better represented the history of the Jewish people.³ One such idiom was the "Semitic" style, which was based on the architecture of numerous Middle Eastern civilizations where Judaism had thrived. The Jewish Center of Coney Island is a unique combination of modernized Renaissance Revival and Semitic styles.

No one knows exactly when the first Jews came to New York City, but in 1654 twenty-three Sephardic Jew refugees arrived from Brazil. Upon arrival they met with resistance from Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant but were granted permission to stay from the Dutch East India Company.⁴ Shortly after, in 1655, the first synagogue was established under the name Congregation Shearith Israel. Throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century, New York's Jewish community continued to develop and acted as an example and supporter of other colonial Jewish communities. In 1727 the English rulers of New York gave Jews

² David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999).

³ National Register of Historic Places, B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue Nomination sec. 8 pg. 1; nomination prepared by Andrew Dolkart (1989).

⁴ "New York Jewish History," New York State Education Department, http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/research/res_topics_pgc_jewish_essay.shtml.

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naturalization, and three years later the first synagogue building was constructed on present day South William Street. Jews were given full citizenship in 1740 and numbers slowly increased to 400 colonists in 1775.

Brooklyn had been a center for Jewish settlement since the mid nineteenth century with many immigrants hailing from Bavaria and Alsace. The first synagogues began to appear around the same time: Beth Elohim was built in Williamsburg in 1848 and the Congregation Baith Israel Anshei Emes in 1854. As the nineteenth century progressed, Brooklyn's population increased exponentially, and by 1880 the population was approximately 600,000, with Jews making up a large percentage of the population. Transportation played a key role in the settlement of Brooklyn: The completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, the construction of the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges at the turn of the century, and the expansion of the subway system in 1908 all opened up the borough for development.⁵

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Jews began moving to Brooklyn from the Lower East Side and the other neighborhoods of Manhattan in search of lower rents and more open space. Simultaneously, foreign Jews began immigrating directly to Brooklyn, in particular to the Brownsville neighborhood. Brownsville was a small community in the 1890s with a population of roughly 4,000 Jews, but by 1905 that number had risen to 50,000.⁶ Bridge construction and the expansion of public transportation allowed people to flock to Brownsville and either commute to their jobs in Manhattan or establish their own industries in the area. The population grew at an astonishing rate, and by the 1920s approximately 250,000 Jews lived in the area making up 80 percent of its population.⁷ Such quick settlement left the neighborhood with many infrastructure problems that promoted overcrowding, poverty and poor health. In response, wealthy Jews from Williamsburg created a vocational school that provided an education for children, English classes for adults, youth clubs, and a lecture series in 1898. The school was so popular that it was expanded a year later to include a wide variety of recreational activities and institutions that helped the community. It became known as the Hebrew Education Center and served as another model for the Jewish community centers to come.⁸

The Jewish Cultural Center movement has roots as far back as the early nineteenth century, when many Ashkenazic Jews emigrated from Central Europe. Though Ashkenazic Jews claimed the majority, Sephardic traditions continued to prevail in New York's synagogues. Tensions arose between the old Sephardic population and the new Ashkenazic Jews in 1825, resulting in a split in the Jewish community and the creation of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun that same year. Though the Jewish population had been slowly increasing, a large influx of German Jews arrived after the failure of the 1848 Revolution.⁹ With the growing population, secular Jewish organizations like B'nai Brith and the Order of the True Sisters were established, along with a Jewish hospital.

⁵ Ilana Abramovitch and Sean Galvin, editors. *Jews of Brooklyn* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 5.

⁶ Abramovitch and Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn*, 6.

⁷ Ibid, 41.

⁸ Ibid, 41.

⁹ National Register, B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue, 8 pg. 3.

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During the 1860s, American Judaism began experiencing a reform movement, which had begun earlier in Germany. German immigrants brought these new ideas with them and established their own synagogues, challenging older congregations in New York. New ideas included the use of family pews instead of separate areas for men and women, the addition of organs, mixed male and female choirs, and shorter services spoken in the language of the congregations.¹⁰ After the Civil War, changes kept coming as Jewish communities became Americanized. Greater numbers of people worked on the Sabbath and joined social clubs causing numbers at services to decrease. Others were attracted by new forms of entertainment, including dance halls, sports, and, later, movies. Synagogues found themselves fighting to stay relevant in the lives of their congregations, which were dropping their old way of life for the new American lifestyle. Thus a tension between Americanization and the traditional Jewish community emerged. In response, congregations used the institutional church, the settlement house, and the social club as a model to revitalize their communities. Hence the synagogue became not just a place of worship but a place of community building, entertaining, and caregiving.

Though the movement's roots were planted in the early reforms in the synagogue during the second half of the nineteenth century, the first true Jewish Center did not come about until 1917. when the Jewish Center on the Upper West Side of Manhattan was founded. The center aimed at providing not only religious services but also a place for social, cultural, and recreational activities. The idea proved popular with the local community and was later copied by the Brooklyn Jewish Center.

The Brooklyn Jewish Center was built in 1921 and combined the three leading Brownsville Jewish organizations – the Hebrew Educational society, the Stone Avenue Talmud Torah, and the Congregation Ohav Sholom – into one entity.¹¹ The combination of functions – community center, education, and worship – brought the community into the synagogue, thus making it appealing to the greater Jewish community. Architecturally, this change manifested itself on the facades of the new centers. Instead of designing a structure that resembled traditional religious structures, Jewish Centers were designed as functional institutions. David Kaufman compares the underlying principles of the Jewish Community Center with those of a department store saying, “Both were service institutions offering many wares under one roof.”¹² The Brooklyn Jewish Center housed a gymnasium, kindergarten, library, classrooms, dining room and synagogue and was designed in the neoclassical style. The center proved highly successful and was copied throughout the United States. However, it was particularly prominent in Brooklyn with Jewish centers popping up in many neighborhoods such as Brighton Beach.

As Brownsville grew, people again started looking for new neighborhoods with lower rents and more space. One such neighborhood was Brighton Beach. Originally Brighton Beach was part of the village of Gravesend along with Manhattan Beach and Coney Island. In 1823 Shell Road, a toll road into Coney Island, opened the area for expansion. In the 1860s developers bought oceanfront property and turned the area into a resort, starting with Coney Island in 1868. A year later the railroad magnate William Engemann built the Ocean

¹⁰ National Register, B'nai Jeshurun sec. 8 pg. 4 and Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool*, 13.

¹¹ Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool*, 250.

¹² *Ibid*, 255.

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Hotel as an alternative to seedy Coney Island, and in 1879 he built the Brooklyn and Brighton Beach railroad linking the area to Downtown Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Bridge, and Manhattan.

Brighton Beach attracted middle class crowds with the lavish Brighton Beach Hotel and seaside entertainment. Another attraction was horse racing, which was established in the area in 1879. Though Engemann excluded Jews from his hotel, the establishment of the elevated train allowed them to summer in Brighton in boarding houses and bungalow colonies. The area was popular because unlike destinations in upstate New York, men could take the train to work during the week and return to their vacationing families in the evenings. The Brighton Beach Baths, a members only club, opened in 1907, providing vacationers with pools, recreational sports, and entertainment. At its peak the club had 12,000 members, many of whom were vacationing Jews.¹³

Though the area became more crowded with the advent of public transportation in 1908, it still retained its village feel until the end of World War I. By the 1920s, the area's three-story wooden houses and bungalows were being rented year round, spurring the development of a commercial strip along Brighton Beach Avenue.¹⁴ By the mid-1920s, Brighton Beach experienced a real estate boom as both Jewish immigrants and United States citizens moved into the area in hopes of escaping overcrowding and slum conditions in the Lower East Side, Williamsburg, and Brownsville. In the summer of 1925, land values literally tripled, and in that decade alone thirty apartment buildings with modern amenities and spacious rooms were constructed.¹⁵

In order to create a larger Jewish community, the first settlers built synagogues and other institutions. Brighton's first synagogue was constructed by the Hebrew Alliance of Brighton Beach by the Sea Incorporated in 1928, who had previously then held services in a shack.¹⁶ The building was designed after a fifteenth-century Florentine synagogue, and had a large rose window containing a Star of David. However, the one synagogue could not service the whole community, and there was much concern about potential "mushroom congregations."¹⁷ Consequently other congregations formed and numerous synagogues were built, including the Jewish Center of Coney Island, which was constructed between 1929 and 1931. Originally the congregation was named the Jewish Center of Coney Island. The congregation was originally founded in 1914 on West 5th Street in Coney Island (originally named Temple Adath Israel). The name reflected the aspiration of the synagogue to

¹³ "Brighton Beach," Brooklyn Public Library, <http://www.bklynpubliclibrary.org/ourbrooklyn/brightonbeach/>. 3/14/13

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Abramovitch and Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn*, 92.

¹⁶ *ibid*, 90.

¹⁷ "Coney Island Jewish Center Planned For Corner Plot on Ocean Parkway," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 5th, 1925. Mushroom congregations or synagogues were temporary places where services were held for the Jewish high holidays due to the lack of space in official synagogues. They were for profit ventures lead by people with no rabbinic training. They were serious problems in interwar New York City to the point that the city's rabbi's "declared war" on them in 1930, and in 1934 a law was passed that made running one a misdemeanor. "Mushroom Synagogues," *The New York Jewish Week*. http://www.thejewishweek.com/special_sections/text_context/mushroom_synagogues. 3/31/13

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serve the entirety of Coney Island which, in addition to being a neighborhood, was the actual island including Sea Gate, Coney Island, Brighton Beach and Manhattan Beach. The institution's name changed to the Jewish Center of Brighton Beach in 1947.

Throughout the nineteenth century, architects debated the appropriate architectural style for a synagogue. In the mid-nineteenth century the Moorish style was deemed appropriate because of its historical association with Judaism. Synagogues at the time were growing in size and monumentality, reflecting the increasingly prosperous congregations and Americanization. In the late nineteenth century, the Classical Revival style became popular after the discovery of Roman synagogue ruins in Palestine, and remained popular until the 1920s.

The Jewish Center of Coney Island is unusual in that it utilizes both Renaissance-inspired motifs, such as the loggia in its design and in its simple interior, as well as elements of the Semitic style. The building's design utilized the "Semitic" style in its austere façade, golden colored cast stone, and decorative detailing. Walter B. Schneider and Henry B. Herts developed the style for their design for Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in 1916. The new style specifically related the history of the Jewish people by combining architectural features from civilizations where the Jewish culture had flourished. Architectural forms and decoration were more austere than the Moorish style of the nineteenth century and were derived from Jewish symbolism and various Middle Eastern styles dating from the first, second and third centuries A.D.¹⁸ For example, stones with a golden hue were commonly used to recall the color of stones in Israel, which can be seen in the cast stones used at the Jewish Center. Other common details include complex geometric patterns and bright colors commonly seen in the architecture of the Middle East. In a 1920 article on B'nai Jeshurun, the architects discussed their design:

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.¹⁹

The Semitic style is historically important in that it proved that Jews could have their own style of architecture and that synagogues did not have to be copies of mosques or churches. The design of B'nai Jeshurun proved highly influential in 1920s synagogue design. That decade witnessed a boom in synagogue construction due to an increasing Jewish population and because of the growth of the Jewish Community Center Movement. Other examples of synagogues in the Semitic style include the Park Avenue Synagogue (1926) on East 87th Street and Congregation Rodeph Sholom (1929) on West 83rd Street.

The architects of the Jewish Center of Coney Island were Bloch and Hesse, a firm known for its synagogue construction. Ben C. Bloch (1890-1977) was born in Chicago and raised in New York. He was the son of a prominent figure in the Jewish Reform movement and graduated from Cornell in 1912 with a degree in

¹⁸ National Register, B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue, sec. 8 pg. 7.

¹⁹"The Temple B'nai Jeshurun," *Architecture* 41 (January 1920): 18.

United States Department of the Interior
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The Jewish Center of Coney Island

Name of Property

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architecture. He started his career in the firms of Henry B. Herts (one of the architects of B'nai Jeshurun) and William Welles Bosworth and then went to work for his uncle Simeon B. Eisendrath in the firm of Eisendrath and Horowitz, who specialized in movie theater and synagogue design. Walter Hesse (189?-1975) was a native New Yorker and graduated with an architecture degree from Columbia University in 1913. Bloch and Hesse formed their partnership in 1916 but continued to work in the Eisendrath and Horowitz offices throughout the 1920s. In 1922 Bloch & Hesse worked with the firm as associate architects on the Free Synagogue House at 26-36 West 68th Street.²⁰

The year 1922 was a significant for Bloch and Hesse, as they received their first independent commission for the Brooklyn Borough Gas Company. The firm received a citation of excellence from the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce for the gas company commission, which combined a gas plant with offices and sales spaces. Later commissions included the True Sisters Club (1928) on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and Sutton Manor (1934), a group of tenements in Midtown East. The firm was known for its synagogues and restaurants. They received commissions for the synagogue at John F. Kennedy airport, the 21 Club, Mama Leone's, Lundy's (National Register listed), several Mayflower Doughnut stores, and over thirty restaurants for the Schraffts Restaurant chain. Other commissions included schools, private homes, and extensive work for the American Broadcasting Company. In 1954 Herb Shalat joined the firm, taking over for Walter Hesse, and today the firm has become Shalat Architects.²¹

Bloch and Hesse were commissioned to design the Jewish Center of Coney Island before 1925. They first designed a grand building in the classical style that housed numerous recreational and religious functions, which were eventually scaled down due to budget. The synagogue's prominent design and location called attention to the presence of the Jewish community. A newspaper article dating from 1925 says that the congregation had originally planned on building a grand community center with a social hall, pool, gymnasium, classrooms, and 800 seat auditorium.²² The center originally had an organ, which was removed when it was converted into an Orthodox synagogue.

In the years after the building's construction, the neighborhood slowly slid into decline. The quick real estate boom of the 1920s had strained the area's infrastructure and damaged its beaches. The Great Depression only exaggerated the area's decline. As Jewish families lost their jobs and homes, they came to Brighton in hopes that relatives would take them in. In a few short years, the once spacious apartment buildings were overflowing, and in 1932 the city declared Brighton Beach an overcrowded slum.²³ Though authorities had written off the neighborhood, it remained a vibrant and active community.

The period between World War II and the 1950s brought both devastation and a new group of immigrants to Brighton Beach. During the war, the community had suffered an extremely high death toll. Upon

²⁰ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Lundy's Brothers Restaurant Designation Report," report prepared by Jay Shockley (1992).

²¹ Landmarks Preservation Commission, Lundy's Brothers.

²² "Coney Island Jewish Center."

²³ Abramovitch and Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn*, 93

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their return, many soldiers left the neighborhood completely due to the difficulty in finding adequate housing. Conversely, as past residents moved out, a new group of immigrant Jews was arriving from Poland, Germany and Eastern Europe.²⁴

This new group was composed of Holocaust survivors who were looking for a safe place to start their new lives and they ended up in Brighton Beach for two reasons. First, immigration into the United States required a signed affidavit from an American citizen stating that they would support the immigrant upon their arrival. Many of these affidavits were signed by people living in Brighton Beach. Secondly, an organization for the resettlement of Jewish war refugees called The New York Association for New Americans decided that Brighton Beach was an appropriate place for Holocaust survivors to relocate due to its large central and eastern European Jewish community.²⁵ By the end of the 1950s, Brighton Beach had one of the largest Holocaust survivor populations in the country.

In the following decades, Brighton again began to decline. An aging population and suburban flight combined with city budget cuts left the area with a declining population and minimal services. Crime and gang violence increased, leaving residents afraid for the area's future. However, things started to turn around in 1975 with yet another influx of Jewish immigrants, this time from the Soviet Union. When these immigrants were looking for a place to go, the New York Association for New Americans again directed them to Brighton Beach because of its already extant Eastern European Jewish community.²⁶ Though initial tensions existed between the old residents and immigrants, the neighborhood slowly began to improve.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the area's fortunes continued to rise. The Russian immigrants helped drive up real estate values and push out much of the crime, and Brighton Beach is now known as one of America's premier Russian neighborhoods.²⁷ Since the 1990s, more immigrants from the Middle East and Asia have moved to the area, but it still houses a large Russian and Ukrainian Jewish population. The older Jewish community made a large effort to try and integrate the two communities with mild success, and the Jewish Center of Coney Island is home of one of the most successful mergers of the two communities. The Russian American Jewish Experience, an organization that caters to young Russian Jews, has attracted hundreds of young people to the center since its inception in 2006. The center is home to a small congregation, provides classes for the community, and has a popular ping pong school. In November of 2012, the Center was damaged due to Hurricane Sandy, closing briefly before resuming services in March of 2013.

²⁴ Abramovitch and Galvin, *Jews of Brooklyn*, 95

²⁵ *ibid*, 96.

²⁶ *ibid*, 99.

²⁷ *ibid*, 106.

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The Jewish Center of Coney Island
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Ilana Abramovitch and Sean Galvin, editors. *Jews of Brooklyn* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999).

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

The Jewish Center of Coney Island

Name of Property

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Verbal Boundary Description

The Jewish Center of Coney Island is located at 2915 Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, NY. The building is located on the eastside of the parkway and faces the west. Sited on a .37 urban lot, it is bordered by a parking lot at the south and a six-story apartment building to its north. The boundary is indicated by the heavy black line on the attached mapping.

Boundary Justification

The Center is located on the lands associated with its 1929-30 date of construction and 1929-1940 period of significance.

United States Department of the Interior
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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Jewish Center of Coney Island

Name of Property

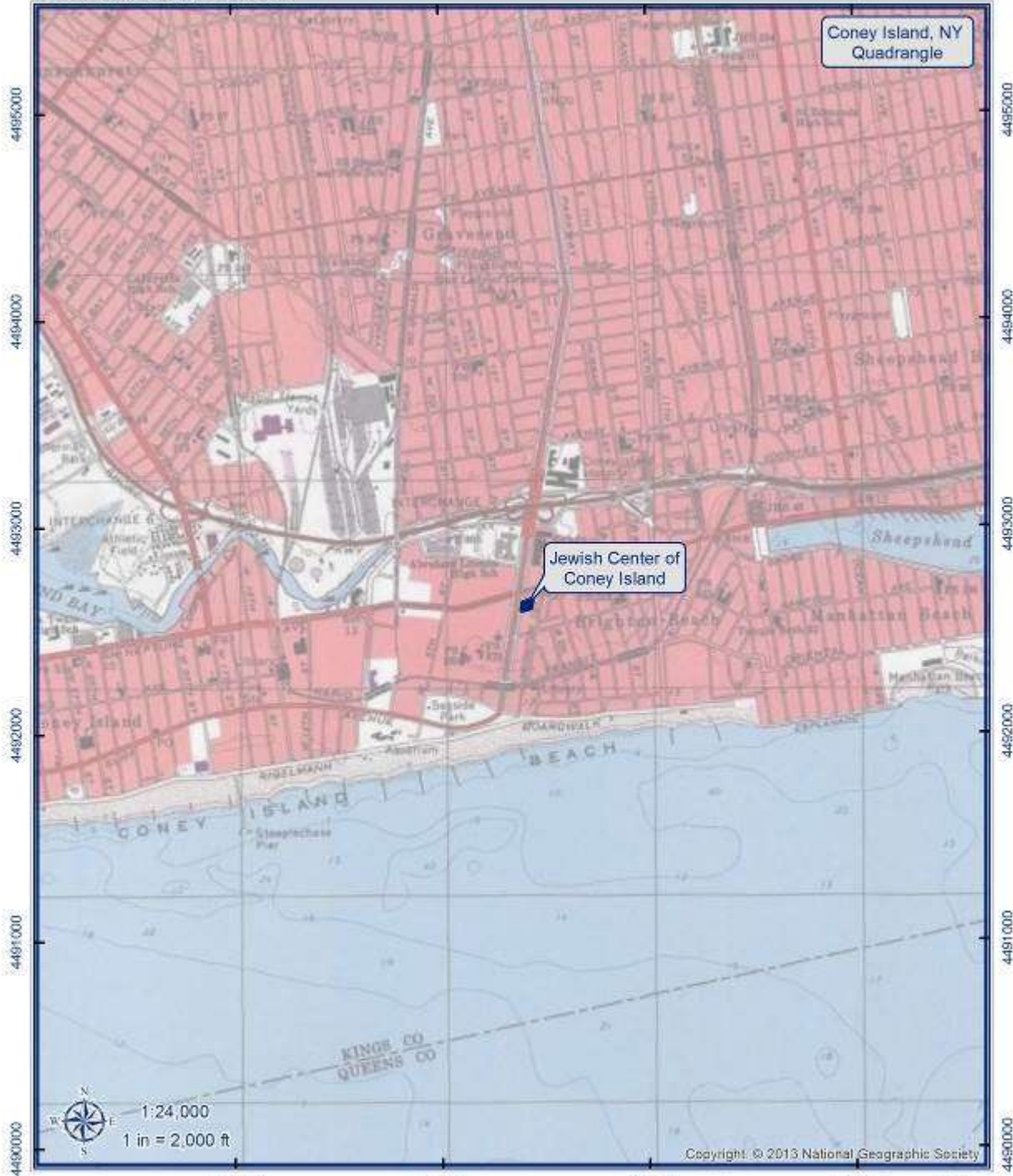
Kings County, New York

County and State

Section 10 Page 2

Jewish Center of Coney Island
Brooklyn, Kings Co., NY

2915 Ocean Parkway
Brooklyn, NY 11235



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



Tax Parcel Data:
NYC PLUTO
<http://www.nyc.gov/>



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

The Jewish Center of Coney Island

Name of Property

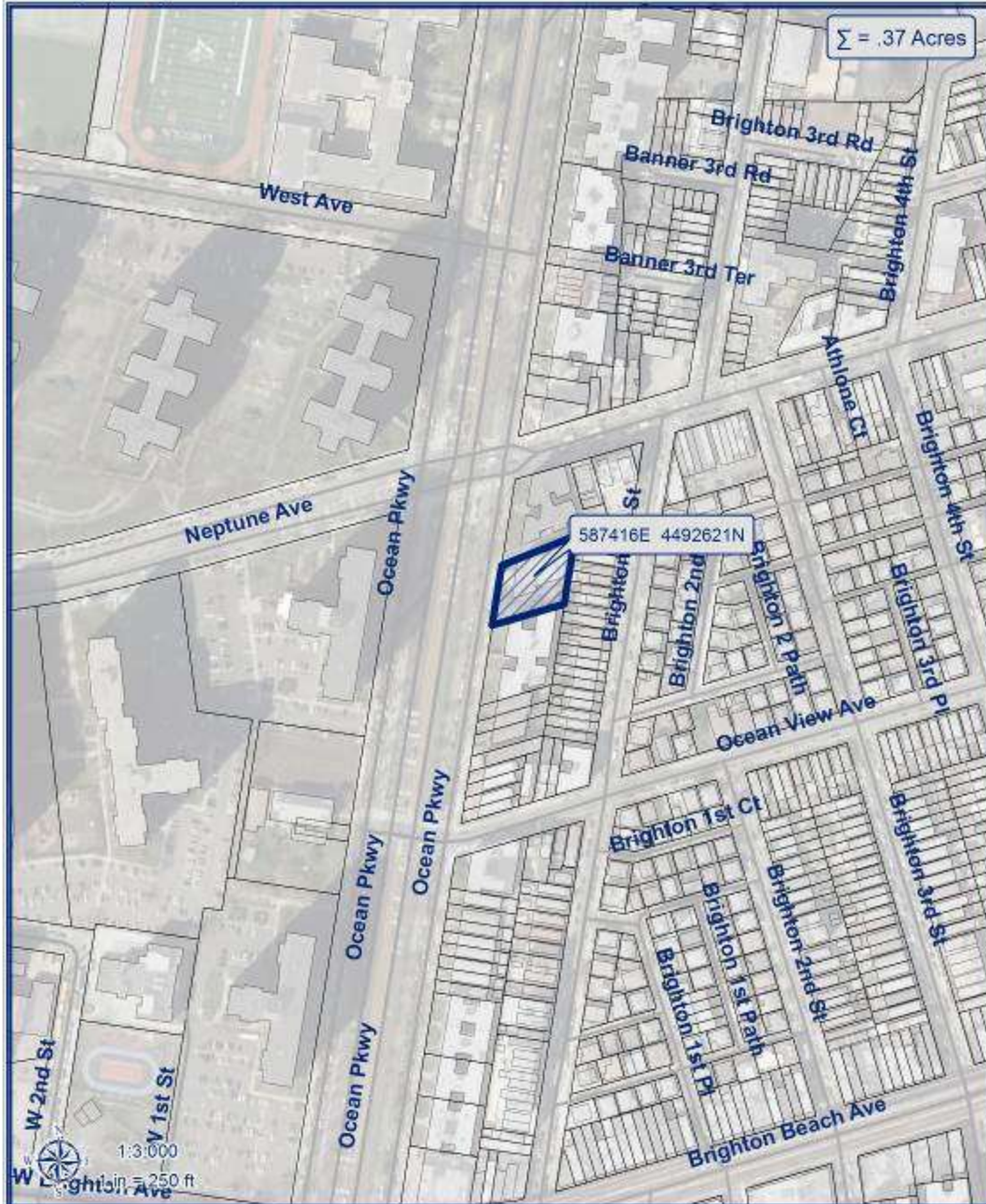
Kings County, New York

County and State

Section 10 Page 3

Jewish Center of Coney Island
Brooklyn, Kings Co., NY

2915 Ocean Parkway
Brooklyn, NY 11235



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



Tax Parcel Data:
NYC PLUTO
<http://www.nyc.gov/>



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

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Section 11 Page 1

The Jewish Center of Coney Island
Name of Property
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County and State

Additional Information

Photographs

Name of Photographer: Anna Broverman

Date of Photographs: March 10, 2013

Location of Original Digital Files: 539 W. 112th Street, Apt. 1D, New York, NY 10025

Number of Photographs: 12

Photo #1 Main façade, camera facing east

Photo #2 Ocean Parkway to the south of the building, camera facing south

Photo #3 Ocean parkway to the north of the building, camera facing north

Photo #4 Main entryway of the building on the main façade, camera facing east

Photo#5 Interior of the main entryway showing the terrazzo floors and marble chair rail, camera facing northwest

Photo #6 Interior of the main sanctuary looking towards the ark, camera facing east

Photo #7 Interior of the main sanctuary looking back towards the main entrance, camera facing northwest

Photo #8 Interior of the ballroom, camera facing northeast

Photo #9 Interior of the small sanctuary and its ark, camera facing northeast

Photo#10 Close up of the main sanctuary's ark, camera facing east

Photo #11 Interior of the room that formerly held an organ above the ark of the main sanctuary, camera facing north

Photo#12 A close up of the cast stone and hand painting used throughout the interior of the building, camera facing east



JEWISH CENTER OF BRIGHTON BEACH



NO PARKING
ANYTIME
9-5





JEWISH CENTER OF BRIGHTON BEACH















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Jewish Center of Coney Island, The

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Kings

DATE RECEIVED: 10/25/13 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/20/13
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/05/13 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/11/13
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13000908

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 12.11.13 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places**

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



FIELD SERVICES BUREAU • DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
STATE AND NATIONAL REGISTERS OF HISTORIC PLACES PROGRAM

STATEMENT OF OWNER SUPPORT

Jewish Center

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

The undersigned, Jules Loweff, President and Adria Pine, Chair, Board of Trustees,
(print or type trustee or board member name and title)

are the senior officers of the religious corporation that owns the property at:

2915 Ocean Parkway Brooklyn, NY 11235
(street number and name, city, state of nominated property)

and support its consideration and inclusion in the State and National Registers of
Historic Places.

Jules Loweff 8/6/12
(signature and date)

Adria Pine 9/26/12
(signature and date)

Jewish Center of Brighton Beach

2915 Ocean Parkway

Brooklyn, NY 11235

(mailing address)





**Landmarks Preservation
Commission**

Robert B. Tierney
Chair

August 5, 2013

Kate Daly
Executive Director
kdaly@lpc.nyc.gov

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

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

212 669 7926 tel
212 669 7797 fax

Re: *The Jewish Center of Coney Island, 2915 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn*

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of The Jewish Center of Coney Island, located at 2915 Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The Commission has reviewed the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau and has determined that this building appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Therefore based on this review, the Commission supports the nomination of The Jewish Center of Coney Island. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kate Daly

Cc: Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Mary Beth Betts, Director of Research

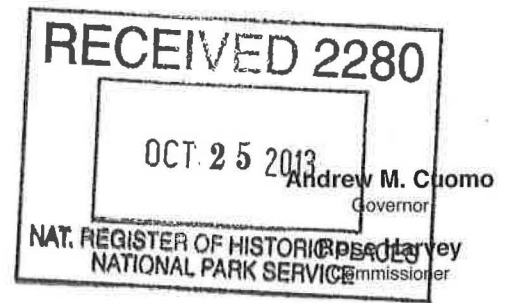


New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau • Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189

518-237-8643

www.nysparks.com



27 September 2013

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to enclose five National Register nominations to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register. All nominations are submitted on discs:

Rafael Guastavino Jr. House, Richmond County
Jewish Center of Coney Island, Kings County
Kismet Temple, Kings County
Quogue Cemetery, Suffolk County
Noah Hallock House, Suffolk County

Please feel free to call me at 518.237.8643 x 3261 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office