

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Central Synagogue

AND/OR COMMON

Congregation Ahawath Chesed-Shaar Hashomayim

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

646-652 Lexington Avenue

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

18th

STATE

New York

CODE

COUNTY

New York

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Congregation of Central Synagogue, Community House of Congregation

STREET & NUMBER

123 East 55th Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, New York County Clerk's Office
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

DATE

1966

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Landmarks Preservation Commission, 305 Broadway

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

41

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE		CHECK ONE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED	DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED			
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED				

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The main entrance (East) fronts on Lexington Avenue with the flank (north) on 55th Street. The facade is five bays wide containing three entrances. Between the three doors are two projecting walls which define the two striking octagonal towers surmounted by large ribbed globes of bronze. The facade is worked in alternating light and dark stone creating a rich polychromy in the window arches, door frames and belt courses. The central door is a tripartate entrance surmounted by a large circular window with braces forming a geometric design. Above the rose window are five small square windows with star tracery.

The north flank repeats the rich stone work and contains six stained glass windows with a handsome cornice above of small rounded corbelled arches. The clerestory rises above with six small rounded windows under a low pitched roof.

The structure has a basement level and a main floor that measures approximately 93x140 feet. The plan is basilican with a nave and aisles and a combination of flat and gabled roofs. The exterior walls are loadbearing and the interior space has the additional support of delicate cast iron columns polychromed with moorish detail which rise to a truss roof. The interior roof detail is "hammer beam" combining gothic with the eastern decorative ornament. The floors are wood covered by elaborate Minton-style tiles original to the building. Also perfectly preserved are the wooden balcony and organ loft, original wooden pews and the elaborate carved Ark in the center bay of the west wall. The auditorium seats about 1,500. The richest detail is reserved for the Ark where the quantity of ornament in gold, red, blue and yellow is concentrated.

There have been only minor changes since 1872. The present stained glass replaces painted glass, the gas lights were electrified and in 1946 the painted stencil patterns were freshened. The synagogue has been cared for and kept in mint condition and remains one of the rare surviving examples of this architectural style.

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8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1872

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Henry Fernbach

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The early history of Central Synagogue shows that the congregation was made up of the union of two earlier groups; Shaar Hashomayim (Gate of Heaven) 1839 and Ahawath Chesed (Love of Mercy) 1846. The consolidation was formally achieved in 1898 to become Central Synagogue. Land was acquired in 1864 at Lexington and 55th Street. The architect, Henry Fernbach (1828-1883) had worked with the architect, Leopold Eidlitz on Temple Emanu'el in New York (demolished 1927). Central Synagogue is gothic in plan, Moorish Revival in detail and the finest surviving example of this style. It is very strongly related to the Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati although of later date. Rabbi Isaac M. Wise who directed the Cincinnati Temple was the leader of Reform Judaism in America and his son Jonah B. Wise served Central Synagogue as Rabbi for over 25 years. In 1873 Rabbi Isaac Wise founded the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Central Synagogue joined the Union in 1878.

This building is one of the best preserved in New York in its original state and has been in continuous use longer than any other synagogue in the city. It is an outstanding example of the Moorish-Revival Style and along with the Plum Street Temple, Cincinnati are rare surviving examples of the period. Declared a New York City Landmark in 1966.

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

UTM REFERENCES

A | 1 | 8 | | 5 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 0 | | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 0 |

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

B | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Manhattan tax map, Block 1309, Lot 56. Beginning at Southwest corner of East 55th Street and Lexington Avenue, North 140 feet, West along 55th Street, South 100.5 feet, 140 feet East along South boundary to Lexington Avenue. On the East; 100.5 feet along Lexington Avenue to Southwest corner of Lexington Avenue and East 55th Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Historian

2/28/75

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ____

STATE ____

LOCAL ____

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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9

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Harpers Weekly, July 6, 1872, "The New Jewish Synagogue," corner of 55th Street and Lexington Avenue, New York Engraving by S. Fox after a photograph by Rockwood.

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