

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED SEP 20 1978  
DATE ENTERED NOV 15 1979

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  
B'er Chayim Temple  
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
Corner of Union and South Centre Streets  
CITY, TOWN  
Cumberland  
STATE  
Maryland  
VICINITY OF  
Sixth  
COUNTY  
Allegany  
CODE  
24  
CODE  
001

3 CLASSIFICATION

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

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
Hebrew Congregation B'er Chayim / c/o Dr. Benjamin Felman  
STREET & NUMBER  
100 South Centre Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Cumberland  
VICINITY OF  
108 Harrison Street  
Cumberland, Maryland  
STATE  
Maryland  
21502

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Allegany County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER  
30 Washington Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Cumberland  
STATE  
Maryland  
21502

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
DATE  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN  
STATE  
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

# 7 DESCRIPTION

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

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The B'er Chayim Temple is located on the southeast corner at the intersection of Union and South Centre Streets in Cumberland, Maryland.

The temple is a two-story brick building laid in common bond on a low foundation of rock faced, coursed ashlar with a smooth faced stone cap, except on the south which has a brick foundation. It has a three-bay front on South Centre Street and a five-bay elevation along Union Street. A three-bay, 2½-story addition facing onto Union Street stretches across the rear of the synagogue, and a smaller, one-story addition stands on the south side to the rear.

The west facade has a pediment in the gable <sup>and</sup> a cornice, both decorated with modillions. This facade is divided into even bays by four brick pilasters; each bay contains a round-arched window on the second floor. The center bay on the first floor has double doors in an enclosed brick portico that sits on a brick base of flat basket weave pattern with molded brick steps. There is a pediment broken at the bottom above the doors and a small round-arched window in each side of the portico. These contain translucent glass etched with a Star of David. The doors are tall, and each leaf is paneled with two horizontal two vertical panels below two square lights. On either side of the entrance is a stained glass window with segmental arch. Above each of these windows is a larger stained glass window with semicircular arch. The central window on the second floor contains two narrower, round-arched windows under one semicircular brick arch. All the windows on this facade have drip moldings from the arches and tin-sheathed wooden sills. There are two openings in the pediment, a horizontal stained glass window with segmental arch and a ventilator in the peak.

The north facade has five recessed bays, each with an opening on both floors. The five on the second floor are windows like those in the north and south bays of the front facade (the westernmost window has been bricked in). The westernmost bay on the first floor contains a flat-arched stained glass window. The fourth bay from the front contains a recessed doorway with transom. The others have 1/1 light, double-hung sash of translucent glass. There are ventilation holes and one very small, barred basement window in the foundation. The south facade is almost identical to the north facade.

The building has a gable roof covered with tar paper over metal roofing. There is a brick cornice below the eaves. The small lawn in front is enclosed with a wrought iron fence with heavy posts and delicate arrow-like railings. Each panel of the double gate carries an arched iron plaque reading "Synagogue."

The addition on the rear hides the east end of the synagogue. It is a 2½-story brick structure that resembles a residence. There are several basement windows in the rock-faced stone foundation. An arched opening leads into a deeply recessed doorway in the west bay of the first floor; to the east of this is a three-part window with large wood lintel. On the third floor are three windows; a thin belt course runs around the building at the level of the sills of these windows. A double, hipped-roofed dormer is centered between corner parapets in the mansard roof. Seven similar windows recessed slightly with segmental arches are located on the first two floors of the east facade and two smaller windows are located in the third floor; six star-shaped tie rod ends are also located here. A corbeled cap chimney rises from the south side of the building; the roof is flat except for the mansard on the north. Another door and

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B'er Chayim Temple  
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Maryland

CONTINUATION SHEET      ITEM NUMBER      7      PAGE      1

(DESCRIPTION, Continued)

windows are located on the south. The south addition was added against the temple wall and is currently used as a kitchen.

The building has a meeting house plan with stairs on either side of the first floor vestibule leading to a hall and the temple itself on the second floor. The north stair has one flight with a winder; the south stair has two flights with an open well and one landing. Both stairs are lighted by stained glass windows and have plain balusters, chamfered newels, and closed strings.

The hall on the second floor has a stair -- one flight with winder and enclosed with recessed paneling -- at the north end that leads to the choir loft. The temple is entered from this hall through a round-arched opening with plain wooden trim. The ceiling consists of a plastered four centered arch vault. The choir loft has recessed panels and is trimmed with a cornice, frieze, and bed molding. A large set of organ pipes is situated in the center of the loft.

On either side of the central aisle in the temple are eleven curved pews. In front of these are curved rails with recessed, round-arched panels. Two bowl-shaped lamps hung on chains provide indirect lighting for the temple area. On the side walls are three ceramic lamps shaped like a benitier basin that tapers down to a pendant. These lamps project from the walls; each has a bead and reel and a fret band with an acanthus leaf pendant.

The most ornamental part of the Temple, which for the most part is simply decorated, is the Ark, or closet, in which the Laws are stored. This wooden, symmetrical structure extends from the platform to the ceiling. On either side are two rectangular pilasters, with caps, mounted on square pedestals. Each pedestal has a recessed architrave panel. These pilasters and two Doric columns on similar pedestals support a three-part entablature with bed moulding. A metallic Hebraic inscription is on the frieze. The columns support an overhanging portion of the three-part entablature. Below this entablature and between the columns are a baseboard, two recessed panels with egg and dart trim and four foliated scrolls and a cornice. Above this cornice are amber glass doors with a small, capped cornice on either side. An iron grate on the door has scrolled decoration connecting the bars at the top, middle, and bottom; the center of each door is decorated with a wrought iron wreath with a Hebraic letter in the center. The small pilasters support a semicircular amber glass transom with heavy wooden trim, cornice, and frieze. Above this transom, at the bottom of the three-part entablature is bed moulding. Between the frieze of the transom and this bed moulding is a large wooden, acanthus leaf, scrolled bracket with bed moulding around its base.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET #2.

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(DESCRIPTION, continued)

Atop the three-part entablature is a decorated pediment, mostly Moses' Tablets of the Ten Commandments in metallic Hebraic characters. These tablets are part of a large semicircular panel topped with semicircular cornice. At the top of the entire structure is an acanthus-leaved cartouche with foliated scrolls on either side. On either side of the tablets are foliated scroll moulding and on either side at the base are recessed architrave panels. On either side of the entire tablet ensemble are two small pilasters each with a raised architrave panel, a cornice, and an urn atop it. The sides of the decorated pediment extend back to the wall with curved moulding extending to the edge of the entire structure. An iron "candle" lamp hangs by a chain from the overhanging portion of the three-part entablature.

ADDENDUM TO DESCRIPTION

Additions to the 1866 B'er Chayim Temple:

- 1) Rabbi's house. This large brick structure was added to the east end of the synagogue in October, 1900 at a cost of \$2,409.17. It served as the rabbi's home until 1920, when it was converted to a Temple House. (Cumberland Evening Times, January 31, 1926.)
- 2) Kitchen. This small rectangular addition was built in 1913. (City of Cumberland Building. Permit #3536.)
- 3) Entrance. The entrance projecting from the east end echoing the front pedimented gable was added in 1925. (City of Cumberland Building Permit #7756.)

The entrance matches the style of the original building with a pediment echoing the main one and round-arched windows on the sides. The rabbi's house (now Temple Hall) is of similar scale and has a round-arched doorway echoing the windows in the Temple. The kitchen is not visible from the main street facades and does not have any particular style.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES     1866

BUILDER/ARCHITECT     John B. Walton

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The first documented mention of Jewish settlers in Cumberland was in 1816, when the Episcopalian and Presbyterian congregations asked for donations towards building a church. Among those who gave generously were" . . .three Roman Catholics and one Hebrew. . . ."1

According to the B'er Chayim centennial publication, "By 1853 twelve Jewish families were known to be in Cumberland, which then had a population of 6,150. This was enough to warrant the establishment of a congregation and on April 27 of that year, this little group first met for that purpose."2 On May 23, 1853 the legislature of Maryland incorporated the B'er Chayim Congregation.3

A writer for a Jewish newspaper attended the celebration of the congregation's incorporation and noted thirty men and twenty women meeting in a Baltimore Street building that was "neatly arranged" and "suitable for the object in view."4 In the same year as their incorporation the congregation purchased land for a cemetery on Baltimore Pike.5

In 1858 the congregation moved to Semme's Law Building on Washington Street.6 Land for a temple at Union and South Centre Streets was purchased by the congregation in October of 1865.7 John B. Walton, a locally "prominent contractor" built the synagogue in 1866.8

Lowdermilk wrote in 1877 of a membership of twenty and eighty "pew holders."9 Thomas and Williams, in 1923, noted the steady growth of Cumberland's Jewish community that numbered 100 families.10

A brief description of the character of the congregation is given in The Anniversar Story, published in 1953:

Although the early Jewish community no doubt started as orthodox, the movement of reform then abroad in the land was early felt in Cumberland and old customs and symbols were gradually discarded...the separation of men and women at services was no longer felt necessary even before 1867.... As time went on the definite dissatisfaction with the old forms and ceremonies of the service produced many changes. Yet, at all times Sabbath observance was insisted upon and generally practiced. The question of covering the head during divine services was argued bitterly and with zeal until about 1875, when it was voted to discontinue the practice.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Footnotes, Significance Statement.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 40' x 102'

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1,7	6,9,21,4,0	4,3,9,11,7,0
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

B 

ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

C 

ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

D 

ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

Lot  
40' x 102' at 102 S. Centre Street, at the southeast corner of the junction of S. Centre Street and Union Street. 40' on S. Centre Street and 102' on Union Street.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

1 km

NAME / TITLE

William Pratt and Dave Dorsey

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Allegany County Historic Sites Survey

December 2, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

County Office Building, Pershing Street

(301) 777-5967

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Cumberland

Maryland 21502

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Nancy Mills

9/14/78

TITLE

ACTING STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Carol D. Shull

DATE

11-15-79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: Eming Jane Saxe

DATE

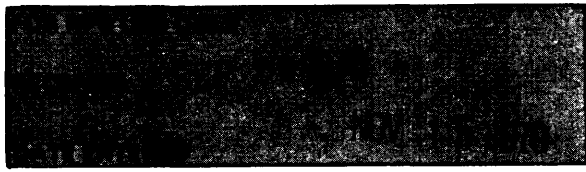
11-14-79

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Regional Coordinator

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**



B'er Chayim Temple  
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(SIGNIFICANCE, continued)

As some of the old dissidents moved away or passed onto their eternal reward, the Congregation became more conscious of itself as an American Jewish Institution instead of a European adaptation.<sup>11</sup>

After the turn of the century, changes in "old forms and the old rituals" were more pronounced.<sup>12</sup> The Rabbi with the longest term of service to B'er Chayim Congregation was Dr. Morris Baron, a graduate of Harvard and Columbia Universities. He was rabbi from 1906 to 1921, when he became a lawyer. In addition to his rabbinical duties Dr. Baron taught ancient languages, German, and history at the Allegany Academy.<sup>13</sup>

The impressive western facade features a pedimented box cornice with modillions. Four brick pilasters, with corbeling and caps, define and give depth to this main facade. The original portion of the Temple is architecturally effective yet retains a simplicity in form and decoration that reflects the orthodoxy of the congregation that built it. Conversely, the turn of the century addition, with decorative mouldings, double row brick arches, mansard facing, and umbrage porch, is a reflection of the more liberal attitudes of reform Judaism practiced by subsequent congregations. Here it can be seen that although the earliest part of the temple retains much of its original appearance, the congregation which it serves has changed with the times. The building as it stands today is a monument to the early Jewish residents of Cumberland and to the changing character of religious beliefs over the last century and a quarter.

<sup>1</sup>James W. Thomas and T.J.C. Williams, History of Allegany County, Maryland (Philadelphia: L.R. Titsworth and Co., 1923), pp. 460-1.

<sup>2</sup>The Anniversary Story, 1853-1953, Centennial publication, B'er Chayim Congregation, Cumberland, Maryland, 1953, Ch.I.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>The Occident and American Jewish Advocate, Vol. XL, pp. 327-8, August 1853 as quoted in The Anniversary Story.

<sup>5</sup>Will H. Lowdermilk, History of Cumberland (Baltimore: Regional Publishing Co., 1971 -- Reprint of the 1878 edition.), pp. 477-79.

<sup>6</sup>The Anniversary Story, Ch. II.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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B'er Chayim Temple  
Allegany County  
Maryland

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**SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The B'er Chayim Temple is a good example of a building in stylistic transition from the Greek Revival to the Romanesque Revival. Constructed in 1866, it is dentiled form with a late use of the Greek Revival, exhibiting the temple pediment facing the street and a main facade divided into three bays by Doric pilasters. The window treatment is representative of the Romanesque Revival with its round-arched heads and label moldings.

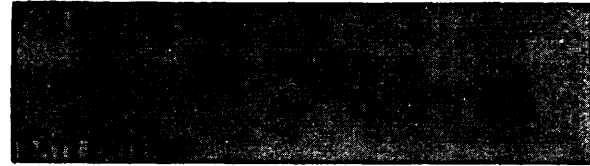
Several German congregations built places of worship in Cumberland in the mid-19th century. The Jewish congregation that built this temple was one of these and as such is part of the settlement patterns of the City of Cumberland.

The temple was built by John B. Walton, the earliest known builder in Cumberland. The 1925 entrance is believed to have been designed by a local architect, George Sansbury. The identification of these men adds to the knowledge of their work and the history of building in Cumberland.



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(SIGNIFICANCE, continued)

<sup>7</sup>Allegany County Land Records, 24/62.

<sup>8</sup>The Anniversary Story, Ch.II.

<sup>9</sup>Lowdermilk, History of Cumberland, p. 478.

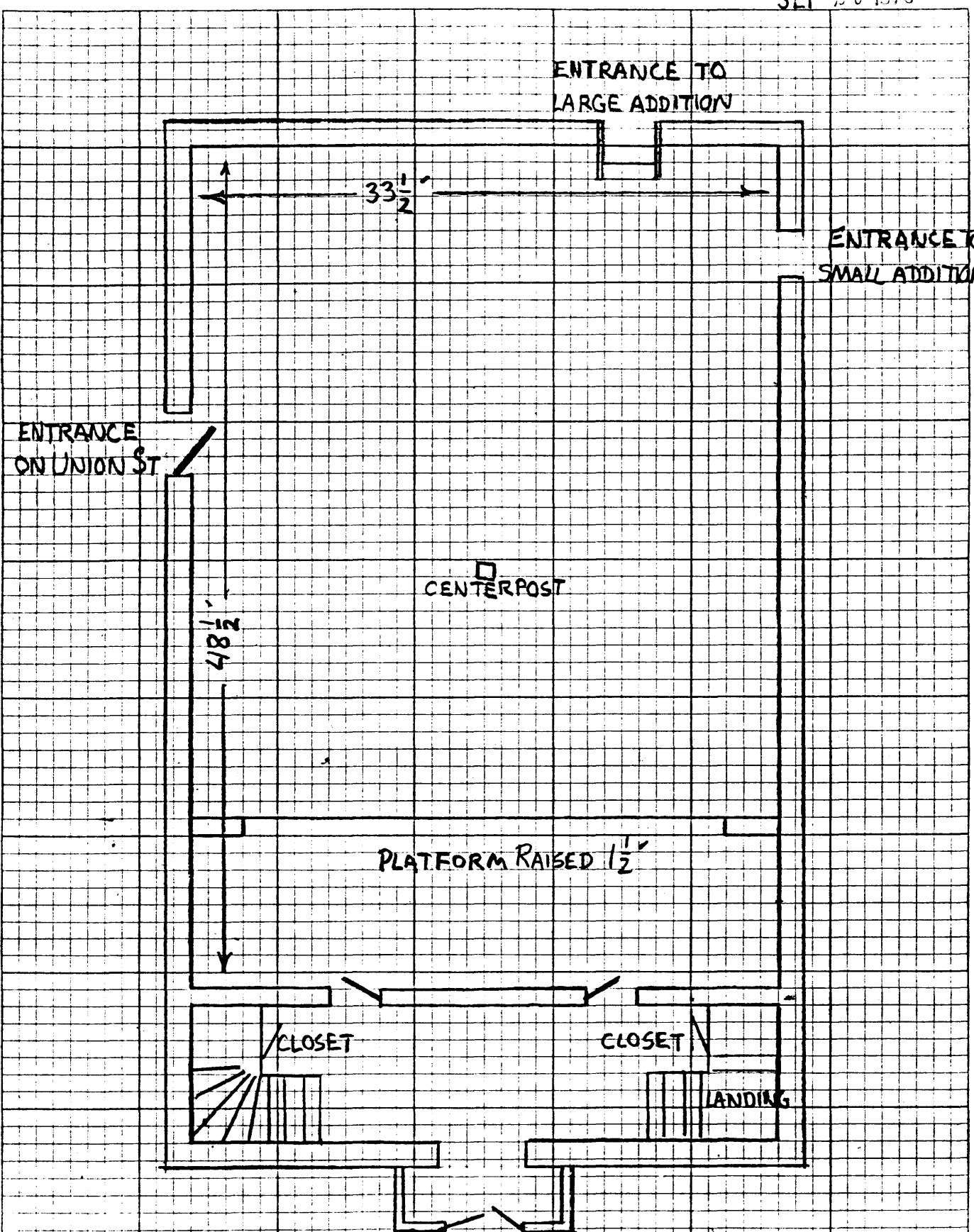
<sup>10</sup>Thomas and Williams, History of Allegany County, p. 472.

<sup>11</sup>The Anniversary Story, Ch. II.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas and Williams, History of Allegany County, pp. 1275-76.

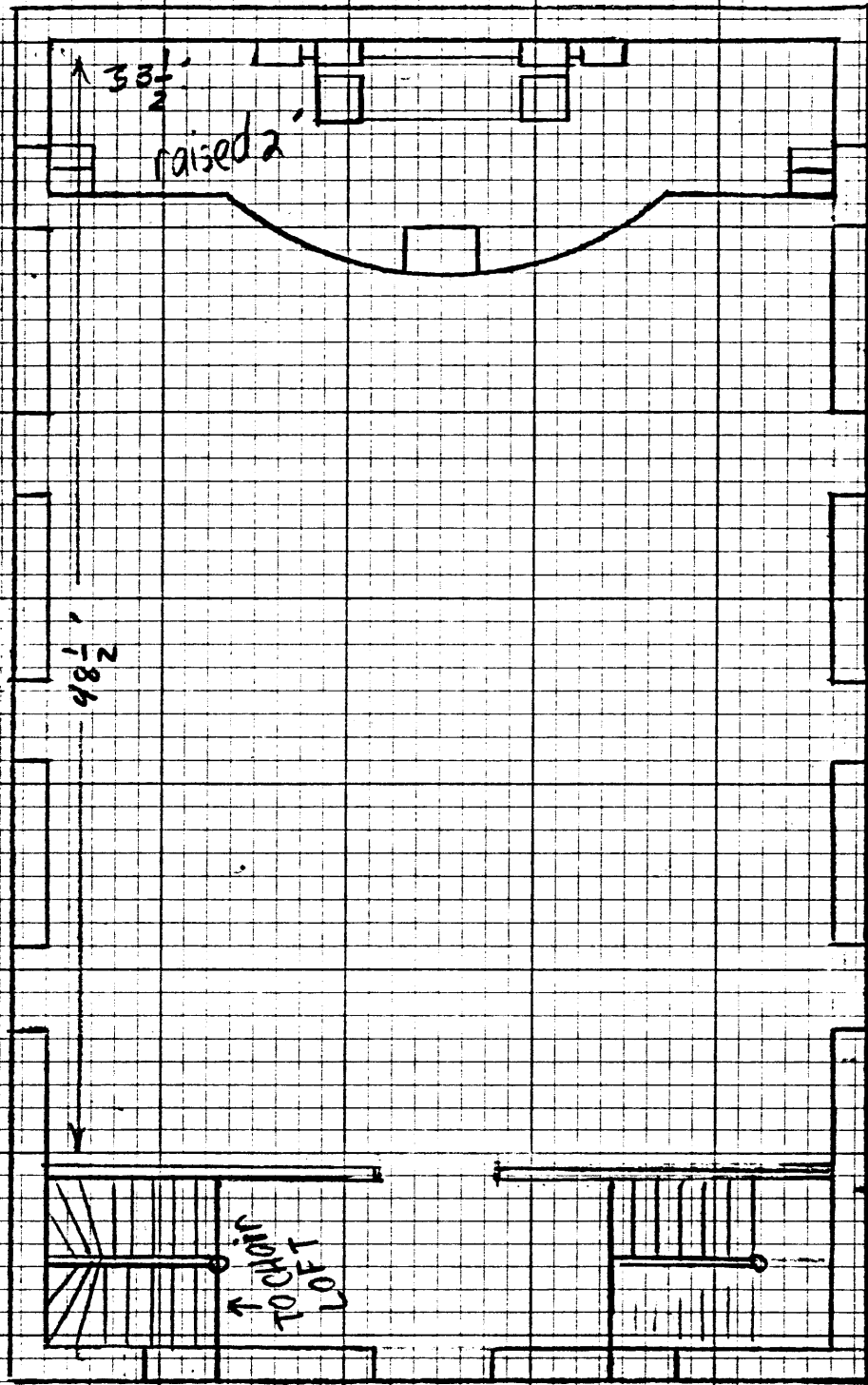
SEP 20 1970



B'er Chayim Temple

First Floor

$$\frac{1}{8}'' = 1'$$



B'er Chayim Temple Second floor

1/8" = 1'