

1193

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name B'nai Israel Synagogue and Cemetery
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 210 South Crawford Street
city, town Thomasville
county Thomas code 275
state Georgia code GA zip code 31799

() vicinity of

(N/A) not for publication

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

Category of Property:

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

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

buildings	1	0
sites	1	0
structures	0	0
objects	0	0
total	2	0

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of previous listing: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 meets the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Mark R. Edwards _____ Date August 25, 1997

Mark R. Edwards
State Historic Preservation Officer

In my opinion, the property () meets () does not meet the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register Paul R. Ferguson 10/14/97

() determined eligible for the National Register _____

() determined not eligible for the National Register _____

() removed from the National Register _____

() other, explain: _____

() see continuation sheet _____

for _____
Keeper of the National Register Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

Religion: religious facility
Funerary: cemetery

Current Functions:

Religion: religious facility
Funerary: cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Other: Late Victorian: Romanesque Revival

Materials:

foundation	Concrete
walls	Brick
roof	Asphalt
other	Glass

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The B'nai Israel synagogue is a one-story, gable-front brick building set on a small lot south of Thomasville's principal commercial corridors. Built in 1913, the synagogue was designed in the Romanesque Revival style with broad proportions, brick pilasters, and round-arched windows. The interior plan consists of an entrance vestibule, sanctuary, and a rear social hall. The curvilinear gallery is located across the rear (northeast end) and is ascended by stairs located at each corner of the vestibule. Small utility rooms are set beneath the stairs. The small, one-story rear wing is entered from the southwest wall of the sanctuary and contains a social hall, kitchen, and bathroom. This wing originally contained a mikveh, a ritual bath used for purification before such ceremonies as weddings. The social hall replaced the mikveh in 1948.

The main facade of B'nai Israel features a center double-leaf entrance flanked by two two-part round-arched windows. Like all of the windows in the synagogue, the front windows are single-light hopper windows with frosted glass. Art glass with abstract geometrical patterns is set within the round arch. A third, smaller window is set above the door, between two pilasters. In addition to the windows, decorative elements include corner pilasters with pyramidal concrete caps, and a brick corbel table and stringcourse. A white concrete water table encircles the entire building. A pedimented entry supported by Tuscan columns was probably added shortly after the synagogue was built.

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Section 7--Description

The northwest and southeast sides feature four round-arched windows: a large, three-light window set below the balcony and three one-over-one-light windows. The rear elevation is composed of the plain front wall of the sanctuary and the hip-roofed brick social hall. A storm in 1989 damaged the roof, which was covered with new asphalt shingles.

The entrance vestibule is a rectangular room that nearly spans the width of the building. The sanctuary is entered through paneled double doors that are on axis with the main entrance. The room features wood floors, beaded wainscoting and ceiling, and plaster walls. This space also contains a display case with historic Torah coverings.

The sanctuary is a large, rectangular-shaped space with the ark containing the Torah at the southwest end along the wall. The ark is essentially a curtain screen with the attached Decalogue (Tablets of the Law) above. The eternal light was added in 1948. The bimah, the rostrum or desk from which the Torah is read, is elevated on a small platform that included a turned balustrade. The rectangular-shaped bimah is ornamented with pilasters and the reading surface is canted toward the ark, suggesting that the reader faced the ark (usually oriented to the east) with his back to the congregation, as was the Orthodox tradition. A rostrum has been added which faces the congregation.

The wood pews, which are original to the building, are arranged in three rows down the length of the building. The gallery across the rear was built as a place for women to worship. Traditionally, Jewish men and women have prayed separately. (Soon after the synagogue was dedicated, a women fell from the balcony. Since that incident women have sat on the left side of the synagogue on the main floor.) Like the entrance vestibule, the sanctuary features wood floors and a beaded wainscoting and ceiling. In addition, the wood cornice is coved with corner drops. Many of the lighting fixtures are original: the bare-bulb sconces and balcony lights and the chandelier that hangs in the center of the room.

The rear wing was largely rebuilt in 1948, when the mikveh, which was set in the floor, was filled in with concrete. The plan was altered when a bathroom and kitchen were added and very little historic fabric is evident on the interior.

There are few landscape features associated with the synagogue because its lot is very small, not much larger than the footprint of the building. Small grassy strips of lawn surround the building on all sides. Foundation plantings are located along the front and sides of the building.

The Jewish cemetery, located on Vine Street northwest of the synagogue, comprises about one acre and measures 250 by 275 feet. It is surrounded by a chain-link fence with a cast-iron entrance sign that reads, "19 Hebrew Cemetery 09." Approximately 90 burials are organized in long rows and

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Section 7--Description

feature of a variety of stone markers, many inscribed with Hebrew. A few markers feature urns and marble edging around family burial plots. Landscape features include mature deciduous and evergreen trees, small shrubs planted around several of the plots, and grass lawns. The cemetery is currently active.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

Architecture
Religion

Period of Significance:

c.1909-1947

Significant Dates:

1909 - Jewish cemetery established in Thomasville.
1913 - Synagogue built on South Crawford Street.

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

Not known.

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)

B'nai Israel Synagogue and Cemetery are significant under the theme of religion and are among the few resources that represent the nearly 150-year Jewish presence in Thomasville. Jews, mostly German, first settled in Thomasville during the 1840s and 1850s. The small Jewish community included merchants and itinerant peddlers. The peddlers, often new arrivals, sold goods from wagons and carts, before saving enough to open a store. Anti-Semitism in Thomasville reached a high during the Civil War when prominent citizens of Thomasville and Thomas County accused the city's Jews of passing counterfeit money and other acts of disloyalty to the Confederacy. By the end of the 19th century, the Jewish community in Thomasville increased with the influx of Jews emigrating from Russia. Still small in numbers, the city's Jews worshiped in the Masonic Lodge and later in the second floor of the municipal library. Services were conducted by a circuit rabbi. In 1909, as the Jewish community in Thomasville organized and raised funds, it established a Jewish cemetery that conformed with traditional Jewish burial practices. In 1913, the B'nai Israel Association purchased a small lot and built a one-story brick synagogue. Both synagogue and cemetery are significant under the theme of religion because they represent the transition of the small Jewish presence in Thomasville before the Civil War to a vital Jewish community by the middle of the 20th century.

B'nai Israel Synagogue and Cemetery are among the few pre-World War II synagogues and Jewish cemeteries built in Georgia. B'nai Israel Synagogue is significant in the area of architecture because its Romanesque Revival design is representative of synagogues built throughout the rural South, although Sherah Israel in Macon is the only other synagogue built in the Romanesque Revival style in the state. Synagogues in Georgia were built beginning in 1870 in a variety of styles, including Classical Revival and Gothic Revival. The first decades of the 20th century represent a period of transition in synagogue design in Georgia in which the Moorish style, popular from the early 1870s, was being supplanted by Neoclassicism, especially in the larger synagogues in cities such as Macon and Atlanta. Most newly arrived Eastern European congregations built smaller, plain synagogues or refitted an abandoned church buildings.

Additionally, B'nai Israel Synagogue is the most intact example of the few surviving pre-World War II Orthodox synagogues in Georgia. These synagogues were built by Eastern European Jews arriving between 1881 and 1920. That the first synagogue built in Thomasville was Orthodox suggests the strength of the Eastern European arrivals and the apparent decline of the older German Jewish population, perhaps in response to earlier episodes of anti-Semitism. (By 1900, most established German Jewish communities in Georgia followed Reform practices.) Architectural features that illustrate the practices of the Orthodox service include the orientation of the bimah and the presence of the gallery segregating men and women during worship.

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National Register Criteria

A and C.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

The B'nai Israel synagogue is a religious property that meets Criteria Consideration A because it draws its primary significance from its architectural design and its historical associations with the Jewish community in South Georgia. The B'nai Israel cemetery meets Criteria Consideration D because it draws its primary significance from its layout, the distinctive designs of the burial markers and its historical association with the Jewish community in South Georgia.

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Period of significance (justification)

The 1909-1947 period of significance begins with the establishment of the Jewish cemetery and ends with the last historic-period burials in 1947. Included within this period is the construction of the synagogue and its historic use as a house of worship. During this period, the synagogue and cemetery attained the characteristics that qualify them for listing in the National Register.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

The synagogue and cemetery are the only contributing resources associated with this nomination. There are no noncontributing resources located on the property.

Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)

The first Jews in Georgia arrived in Savannah in 1733, the year the colony was founded. The Jews of Thomasville, Georgia, came during the Antebellum Era (1820-1865). They emigrated from Europe, entering the United States in New York and Savannah. Drawn by the potential for economic gain, they arrived just as Thomasville and Thomas County were being formed.

Jews were attracted to Thomasville and South Georgia because there existed business opportunities that were not present in areas that had been settled earlier. Census records show the Jewish population increasing with general population of Thomasville. From 1825 to 1860, one-third of the population were slaves. The population for 1830 was 3299; in 1840, it was 6,766; in 1850, it was 10,103; and in 1860, the population was 10,766. The population of Thomasville in 1880 was 12,213 blacks and 8,384 whites.

In 1832, a town by-law was passed stating "Be it ordained that no person shall sell goods within the limits of this town without first obtaining a license from the commissioner of the town for which they will pay five dollars per day and in case of neglect shall forfeit and pay the sum of ten dollars for each offense." Prior to the passage of this ordinance, the Jewish peddlers would ride into town and sell their linens, scarves, towels, table cloths, dry goods, pillow cases, bonnets, fabric patterns, that they carried on their wagons. They would stop at the farms and sell their goods until they made enough money to open up their own store in town. This by-law was used to protect local merchants from the competition offered by the peddlers.

Between 1840 and 1850, there was one and possibly two Jewish merchants in Thomasville. During the early 1860s, the population was reached 10,766, and included approximately 37 merchants, 20 percent of whom were Jewish. The prominent Jewish merchants were the Wolff Brothers, Rubitscheck Brothers, and the Schiff Brothers. In the years following the Civil War, the number of

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Thomasville's Jewish merchants increased to 40 percent of the city's overall merchant population. The Kubitscheck and the Wolff Brothers were among the most successful Jewish merchants during this period.

At this time the Jewish community was beginning to expand. More and more Jewish settlers were bringing members of their families and friends. The types of business that were owned and operated by the Jewish merchants of Thomasville ranged from a wide variety of retail, department, millinery, furniture, dry goods stores. Additional businesses included real estate, grocery, insurance, shoe sales, jobbing businesses, shoe repair, and clothing shops. Most of these stores were located on East and West Jackson streets.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Thomasville had among the highest levels of anti-Semitism in the region; more than the cities of Macon, Albany, and Valdosta, according to Historian Louis Schmier. On August 30, 1862, a group of prominent Thomasville and Thomas County residents met at the Thomas County Court House to denounce the city's Jewish merchants and traders. William Gas Ponder, a wealthy slave trader led the anti-Jewish rally. T. J. Wombwell, a journalist from Thomasville Weekly Times, served as secretary and James L. Seward, a former Congressman and state representative, spoke briefly to the crowd. The crowd condemned the Jews, claiming that they were passing counterfeit bills, engaging in speculation, and that they held no allegiance to the Confederacy. A resolution was passed that gave the Jews ten days to leave Thomasville or face expulsion. The resolution also prohibited Jewish newcomers from settling in Thomasville. The people who attended the rally established a Committee of Vigilance to inquire into the manner of dealing with the local German Jews. The committee was also empowered to investigate the possible acts of extortion and counterfeiting by the Jews. Three Jewish families relocated to Savannah.

However, despite the denunciations of the Jews, there is no evidence to suggest that the community carried out the larger share of its threats. In fact, Jews in Thomasville continued to purchase land and buildings, operate their stores, and participate in social events and civic duties throughout the war. They fought in the Confederate Army and supported the Southern causes.

In 1874, the Jewish community decided to establish a formal place of worship. Prior to this time, the small number of Jews in Thomasville were provided a traveling rabbi who would visit and perform services in someone's home or rented hall. In 1874, Lodge 207 of the B'nai B'rith was organized and the Masonic Lodge was used for meetings. By 1880, the first synagogue was in operation, utilizing the second floor of the Thomasville library on Crawford Street. Jay Hirschinger conducted services and other ceremonies and Hebrew classes were taught.

Beginning in the early 1900s, the Jewish population of Thomasville increased significantly as Eastern European Jews emigrated to the United States to escape religious persecution in Russia. A society

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

called the "Congregation Sons of Israel of Thomasville, Georgia," was formed. They had three classes of membership in the society. They had members paying one dollar a month, patrons paying two dollars a month and donors, paying five dollars a month. Every Jew in Thomasville was eligible for membership. On March 26, 1905, they decided it was necessary to have religious services on the Sabbath and holidays and that provisions be made for the proper instruction of the Hebrew faith for their children.

The large Jewish community in Thomasville necessitated the establishment of a Jewish cemetery. Forty Jews had been buried in a section of Laurel Hill Cemetery in Thomasville, which had become too small to meet the needs of the community. More importantly, the Jews needed a cemetery that conformed with Orthodox burial practices. On April 4, 1909, the B'Nai Israel Cemetery was established on Vine Street. The cemetery consisted of lots 41,42 and 43. Simon Steyerman purchased the three lots for \$325.00. The cemetery, originally designated for Orthodox members, served the entire region and now admits Reform Jews. The cemetery measured 250 by 250 feet. In 1989, the city extended one end of the cemetery by 25 feet, increasing its size to 250 by 275 feet.

On January 25, 1913, B'nai Israel Association, incorporated by the State of Georgia, acquired the lot at 210 Crawford Street for the construction of a synagogue. The parcel cost \$850.00 and measured 55 x 100 feet. On March 29, 1913, the cornerstone was laid in a ceremony attended by Thomasville Mayor Roscoe Luke and a convention of Woodmen of the World. On August 18, 1913, the synagogue was dedicated. The Torah was carried in a procession lead by the Thomasville band from the library, where the congregation had previously met for worship, to the new synagogue. Weekly Sabbath services and special services were performed at the Orthodox synagogue.

In 1925, the membership of B'nai Israel peaked with 35 members (families), over 100 people. The membership rolls and Jewish population of Thomasville have since declined. As Georgia began to urbanize, Jews, especially the later generations, moved to larger cities, such as Atlanta, or even Chicago and New York. Typically, children of Jewish merchants in South Georgia have not continued to operate family businesses.

B'nai Israel's rabbi retired after World War II and the congregation has since been served by a visiting Reform rabbi from Tallahassee, Florida. Services are conducted on a periodic basis.

9. Major Bibliographic References

Brooks, Richard Michael. Historic Property Information Form. April 1994. On file at the Division of Historic Preservation, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia, with supplemental information.

Schmier, Louis. "Hello! Peddler Man! Hello!" in Jerrell H. Shopner and Linda V. Ellsworth, ed., Ethnic Minorities in Gulf Coast Society Pensacola, Fla.: Historic Pensacola Preservation Board, 1979.

_____. "Notes and Documents on the 1862 Expulsion of Jews from Thomasville, Georgia," American Jewish Archives, 32 (April 1980), 9-22.

Rosenberg, Herman. "Thomasville Jewish Community History," [1992]. Thomas County Public Library, Thomasville, Ga.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): (x) N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested**
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued**
date issued:
- 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 #**

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office**
- Other State Agency**
- Federal agency**
- Local government**
- University**
- Other, Specify Repository:**

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.2 acres

UTM References

A) Zone 17 Easting 214270 Northing 3416800
B) Zone 17 Easting 215180 Northing 3415100

Verbal Boundary Description

The property boundary is indicated by a heavy black line on the attached map, drawn to scale.

Boundary Justification

The B'nai Israel Synagogue and Cemetery includes two discontinuous elements. The Jewish cemetery located at the northeast outskirts of Thomasville and the synagogue on South Crawford Street, although about one mile apart, are historically linked to each other and to the development of the Jewish community in Thomasville and South Georgia. The synagogue, for example, would not have been built before the establishment of a consecrated burial place.

The boundary of the synagogue is defined by the original property boundary, which matches the current legal boundary. The current legal boundary of the cemetery includes 6,250 square feet added in 1989. Both the synagogue and cemetery retain a high level of historic integrity.

11. Form Prepared By

State Historic Preservation Office

name/title Steven H. Moffson, Architectural Historian
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
street & number 500 The Healey Building, 57 Forsyth Street
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303
telephone (404) 656-2840 **date** June 16, 1997

Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable) () not applicable

name/title Richard Michael Brooks, Intern
organization Thomasville Landmarks, Inc.
street and number P. O. Box 1285
city or town Thomasville **state** Georgia **zip code** 31799
telephone (912) 226-6016
 consultant
 regional development center preservation planner
 other:

(HPD form version 02-24-97)

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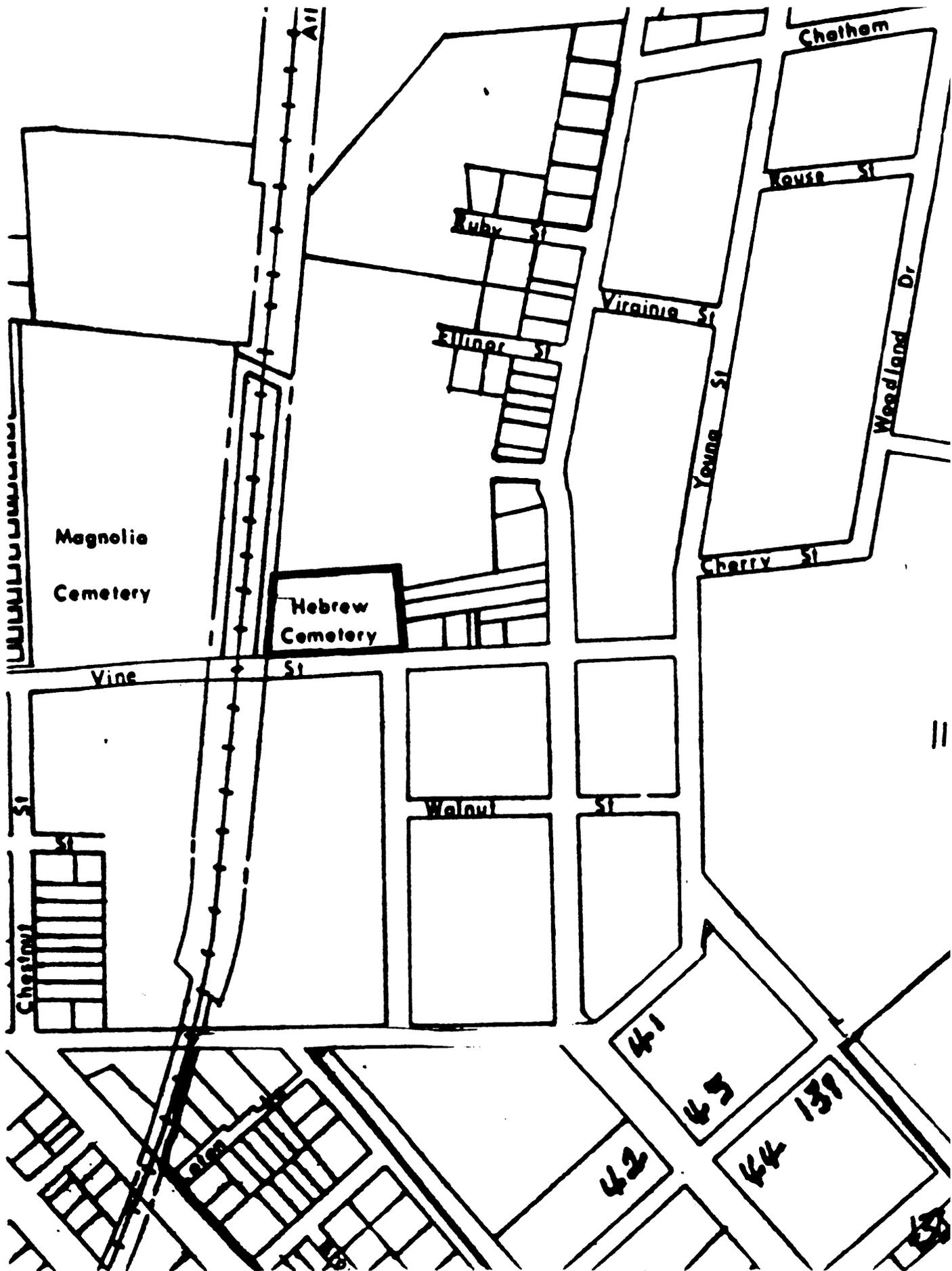
**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

Name of Property: B'nai Israel Synagogue and Cemetery
City or Vicinity: Thomasville
County: Thomas
State: Georgia
Photographer: James R. Lockhart
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: April 1997

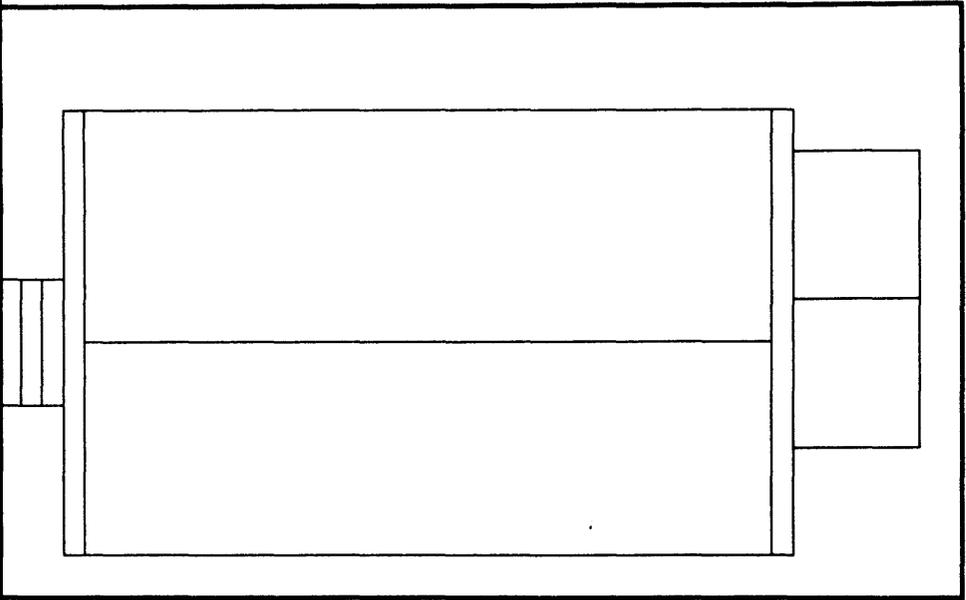
Description of Photograph(s):

1. B'nai Israel Synagogue, photographer facing north.
2. B'nai Israel Synagogue, main facade detail, photographer facing southwest.
3. B'nai Israel Synagogue, photographer facing south.
4. B'nai Israel Synagogue, photographer facing north.
5. B'nai Israel Synagogue, interior, entrance vestibule, photographer facing southeast.
6. B'nai Israel Synagogue, interior, sanctuary, photographer facing southwest.
7. B'nai Israel Synagogue, interior, sanctuary, photographer facing southwest.
8. B'nai Israel Synagogue, interior, sanctuary, photographer facing notheast.
9. B'nai Israel Synagogue, interior, sanctuary, photographer facing northwest.
10. B'nai Israel Cemetery, photographer facing north.
11. B'nai Israel Cemetery, photographer facing west.
12. B'nai Israel Cemetery, photographer facing southwest.
13. B'nai Israel Cemetery, photographer facing southwest.
14. B'nai Israel Cemetery, photographer facing north.
11. B'nai Israel Cemetery, photographer facing west.



B'nai Israel Cemetery
Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia
Boundary Map/Sketch Map
Scale: 1" = approximately 250'

55' - 0"

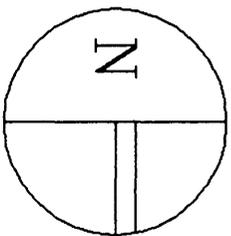


SITE PLAN

B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
210 SOUTH CRAWFORD STREET
THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA

DRAWN BY RICHARD M. BROOKS

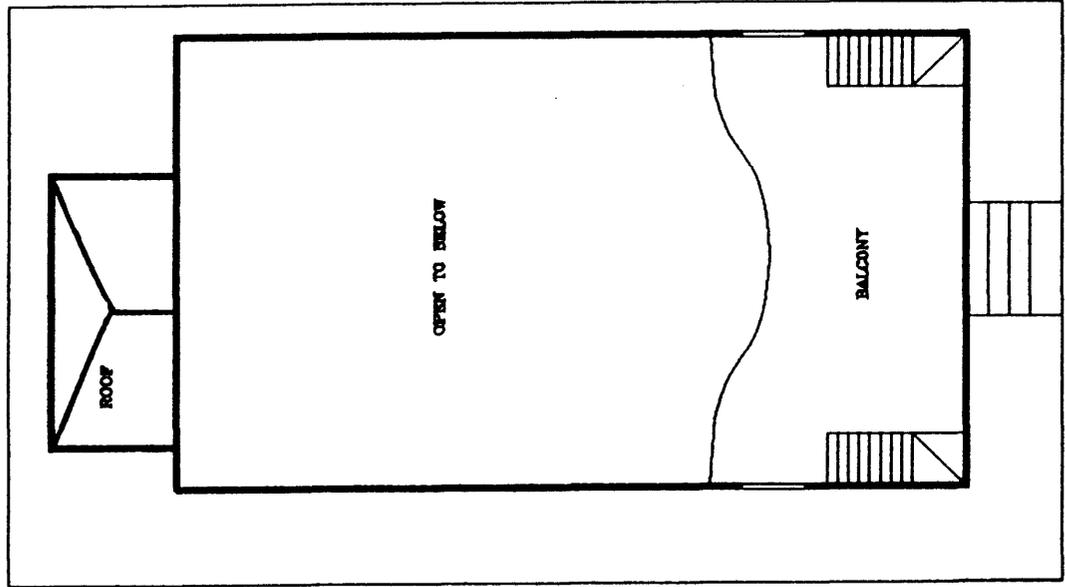
100' - 0"



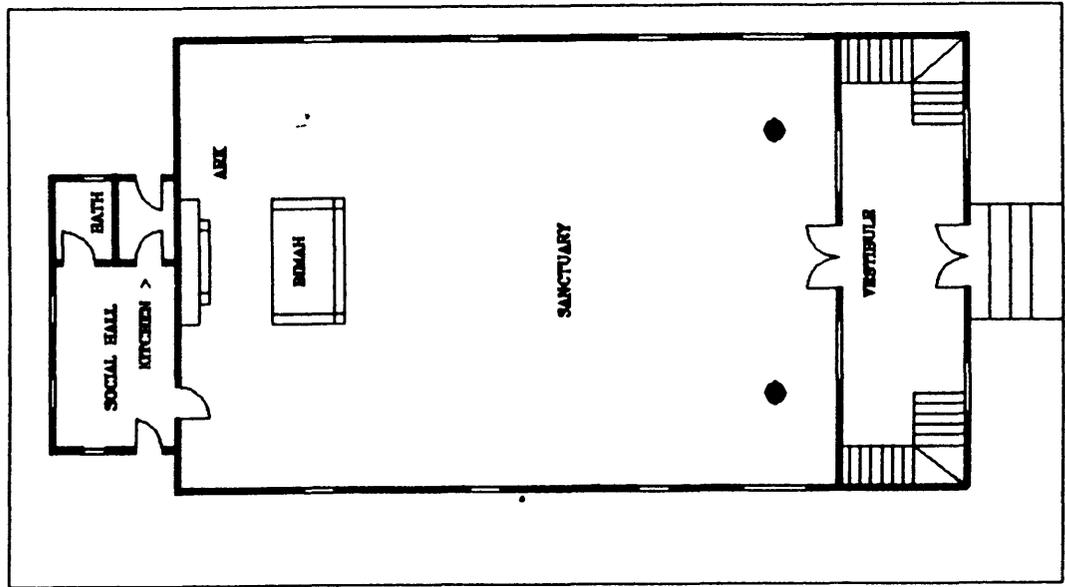
SOUTH CRAWFORD STREET

B'nai Israel Synagogue
Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia
Site Plan
No Scale

B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
 210 SOUTH CRAWFORD STREET
 THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA
 DRAWN BY RICHARD M. BROOKS



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

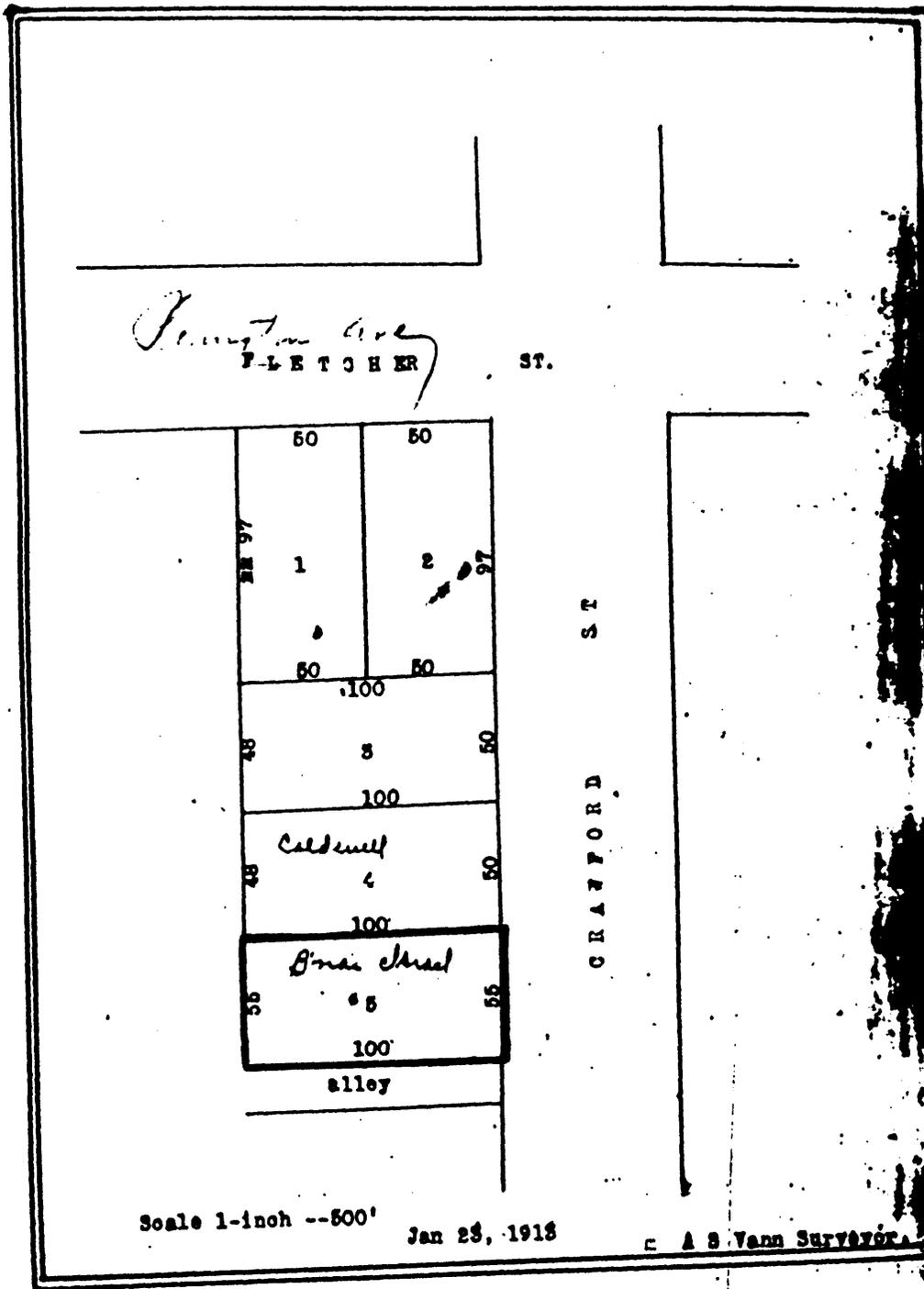
EXISTING
 SITE IS AS
 FOLLOWED:
 55' x 100'

B'nai Israel Synagogue
Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia
Floor Plan
No Scale



BOOK
3D

PG 304



B'nai Israel Synagogue
Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia
National Register Boundary Map
Scale: 1" = approximately 75'

Recorded Jan, 27th, 1918.

North



John G. Vann

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

The Jewish cemetery in Thomasville was established several years before the city's Jews built a synagogue because Jewish custom places emphasis on burial in consecrated ground. Jewish cemeteries are surrounded by a wall or fence and, most importantly, contain only Jewish internments. The bodies are prepared for burial without preservatives or any material that will not decompose. Coffins, for example, are made of wood and assembled with wood pegs rather than nails. The graves are often oriented to the east. Cemeteries existed in Atlanta, Savannah, and Macon that served Jews in outlying areas. The cemetery in Thomasville served as a burial place for Jews in Thomasville and throughout South Georgia.