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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

289

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *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 Ansche Chesed Synagogue

other names/site number Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Catholic Church; Mount Neboh Baptist Church

2. Location

street & number 1883 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard [ ] not for publication

city or town New York [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10026

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Ruth L Pierpont DSHPO 4/18/14
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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 W. Beall date of action 6.9.14

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

[X] private
[ ] public-local
[ ] public-State
[ ] public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

[X] building(s)
[ ] district
[ ] site
[ ] structure
[ ] object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	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 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVIALS/ Classical Revival and Byzantine Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Limestone
walls Brick, Terra Cotta, Limestone
roof Asphalt
other

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

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.)

[X] **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.

[X] **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.)

[X] **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

Social History

Period of Significance:

1908 – ca. 1960

Significant Dates:

1908, 1909, 1927, 1931

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Edward I. Shire (architect)

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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	583203	4591207	3	18		
2	18			4	18		

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jason Crowley, edited by Jennifer Betsworth (NY SHPO)

organization _____ date December 30, 2013

street & number 307 12th Street, Apt. 2 telephone 802-233-8744

city or town New York state NY zip code 10026

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 Mount Neboh Baptist Church

street & number 1883 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard telephone _____

city or town New York state NY zip code 10026

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

Narrative Description of Property:

The Ansche Chesed Synagogue, currently known as Mount Neboh Baptist Church, is located at 1883 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard. It occupies the northeast corner of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard, West 114th Street, and Saint Nicholas Avenue. It is located in the Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan in New York City. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard (7th Avenue) is a wide six-lane boulevard with a landscaped median. The block that the synagogue is located on is in the shape of a rhombus due to the diagonal northwestern angle that Saint Nicholas Avenue cuts through Harlem. Each building on the block, including the synagogue, compensates for the unusual shape by having acute angles in the rear elevations of the buildings. The built environment surrounding the synagogue on Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and Saint Nicholas Avenue consists of large six-story apartment buildings and smaller tenement buildings and row houses lining the side streets. The synagogue was constructed adjacent to a Renaissance Revival apartment building, typical of the streetscape. The front elevations of the two buildings touch; however, a narrow alley actually separates the two structures, providing a small degree of ventilation and fire safety. The nominated parcel, which measures 50' by 100' by 50' by 140', is the original lot associated with the building.

Constructed between 1908 and 1909 as a synagogue, the building was later converted into a Roman Catholic church and is now used as a Baptist church. The synagogue is a three-story building on a limestone base faced in Harvard brick in a Flemish bond pattern with limestone and terra-cotta trim. Its exterior design features Classical Revival and Colonial Revival details and Jewish iconography. The interior features a hybrid of revival style influences, including both the neoclassical and Byzantine Revival. The entrance vestibule features classical motifs similar to the exterior design. The main sanctuary features significant Byzantine Revival elements, such as the massive barrel vaulted space and the arched niche where the modern altar is located. Behind the sanctuary is the rear portion of the building, which houses offices on three stories.

During its service as a Jewish synagogue, Roman Catholic Church, and Baptist Church, the building was altered over time to best serve the needs and aesthetic choices of each congregation. A high level of integrity of original historic materials and a variety of religious iconography clearly represents each religious sect that has occupied the space throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Exterior

The building faces west onto Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and abuts the sidewalk. A six-columned limestone portico with Ionic capitols and a carved Decalogue in the pediment extends from the façade. The passage, "To the Glory of God and Brotherhood of Man" was originally carved into the entablature but has since been covered over by a modern sign with the name "Mt. Neboh Baptist Church"; a faint outline of the passage is still exposed. The pediment is trimmed in terra cotta glazed to look like limestone. Two open towers are situated at the northwest and southwest corners. Directly below each tower are round windows surrounded by brick set in a herringbone pattern. Arched openings in each face of the square towers have terra-cotta trim around the arches. Terra cotta pilasters with Ionic capitols articulate the front of the towers. Two vaguely Byzantine Guastavino-tile-domes originally covered each tower topped by metal Stars of David. The domes and stars were removed sometime after 1927 when the synagogue was converted into a Roman Catholic Church;

this eliminated the Byzantine Revival elements from the exterior. Today, limestone urns and terra cotta details serve as the pinnacle of each tower.

Due to the limited space of the lot, the front stairs leading to the porch are situated between the columns of the front portico, creating three separate staircases to the entrance. Photographs taken of the synagogue when it was first completed reveal that the original three sets of double doors have been replaced, most likely by the current congregation. Each doorway features a semicircular lunette with a carved limestone molding with a central keystone. Hand-painted Spanish tiles are set into the brick above each doorway. The Spanish tiles were added during the period that the building served as a Catholic church; they replaced earlier Jewish iconography. The central panel depicts Christopher Columbus setting foot for the first time in the New World. On either side are portraits of King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella of Spain, the patrons of Columbus's explorations. Three windows with flat arches made of stone are located above the tile insets, and two small windows are on either side of the porch.

The south elevation, facing 114th Street, runs the entire length of the block between Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and Saint Nicholas Avenue. Six large arched windows with limestone tracery are the main architectural feature along the 114th Street elevation. Above the arched windows is a terra-cotta beltcourse with a limestone and terra-cotta cornice above. A brick parapet with an alternating pattern of circles and rectangles executed in brick and stone tops the building. Within the circles are bricks lain to create Stars of David and in the rectangles they are lain in a herringbone pattern.

Directly below the south tower, scars in the brick indicate that the window currently in place was once a round window matching those on the front elevation. The window directly below has also replaced an earlier window. A narrower rectangular opening, likely the same as the window below it, has been in-filled with brick about two feet below the existing window.

The rear elevation, along Saint Nicholas Avenue, reveals that the building is in fact three stories on a slightly raised basement. The elevation features a central door with a classical entrance surround and rows of windows on each level. A parapet hides the roof and also provides scale and balance to the austere rear façade. Due to the manner in which Saint Nicholas Avenue cuts diagonally through Harlem, the corner of 114th Street and Saint Nicholas Avenue meet at an acute angle. To adjust to the sharp angle of the street, the south and east corners meet at a concave break in the corner, allowing for both the south and east elevations to maintain proportion in the design.

The rear elevation, on Saint Nicholas Avenue, also features design adjustments to compensate for the rhomboidal shape of the building. In order to achieve a sense of symmetry, five of the six bays are designed on a central axis with the sixth bay slightly recessed with smaller windows. The symmetrical five-bay portion of the rear façade has a central doorway with a stoop leading to a classical Ionic door surround. The pair of double doors is not original, based on historic photos, but match the doors on the front façade and there is a plate glass transom over the door. A "Mount Neboh Baptist Church" sign is attached to the entablature above the doorway.

On either side of the doorway on the first floor are medium-sized double-hung sash windows topped with a limestone lintel and a small narrow window with a brick flat arch with a limestone keystone. The second story has three larger double-hung windows with a decorative arched terra-cotta panel above and limestone tracery around the arch. Small narrow windows flank either side of the three larger windows. The third story, above the cornice of the building, has another row of windows in what appears to be a parapet on the 114th Street side of the building but is really the top floor. The three central windows are small square windows with stone trim flanked by two smaller windows punctuating the brick pattern-work. Between the three larger windows the circle motif found on the side elevation continues. The sixth bay has a small narrow window on each level and rising above the corner of the building is a tall chimney capped with terra cotta.

Interior

The plan of the building is divided into three sections: the vestibule with two front stair towers on either side, the main sanctuary in the middle, and a series of small rooms in the rear. The north stair accesses both the balcony on the second level and a suite of rooms on the third floor. The south stair accesses the balcony and a small room that is only a half a flight of stairs above the second level; this room does not connect to the third floor suite of rooms accessible by the north stair. The sanctuary's soaring height under the barrel-vaulted ceiling encompasses two full stories with an attic space above supporting the ceiling system. The sanctuary is accessible from both the front and rear thirds of the building. The rear third of the building features a winding staircase that connects the basement to the top floor. On each level is a small hall accessing the suite of office rooms as well as the sanctuary balcony on the second level.

Front Rooms

The front vestibule is a wide narrow space faced in painted brick featuring the Flemish-bond pattern seen on the exterior. Three sets of doors with arched transoms leading to the main sanctuary are opposite the entrance doors. The sets of double doors with glass panels in the upper half of each door are modern and likely date to the same era as the exterior door replacements. The ceiling of the vestibule has Guastavino barrel vaulting and square terra cotta tiles cover the floor.

On either side of the vestibule is an arched opening supported by columns topped by Doric capitals with wrought-iron gates securing the openings to the stair halls. Both stairs are curved with stone treads, iron banisters, and wooden railings. At each landing there is a mosaic tile floor. The southern stair leads to the balcony level of the sanctuary and one partial level higher to a small storage area. The northern stair leads to the balcony level and then continues upwards to the top of the tower, which is the third level. At the top landing of the northern stair is a pair of wooden doors with glass panes leading to a suite of rooms – these rooms are located directly behind the pediment of the front portico. A skylight illuminates the central room and a small door on the western wall leads to the crawlspace of the front pediment. Two smaller rooms are located at the southern end of the central room, both with separate doors. The room to the left now serves as a bathroom and the room to the right is a small office.

Sanctuary

The main sanctuary is a double-height rectangular barrel-vaulted space with a U-shaped balcony running along the perimeter of the room. Originally, three rows of pews divided by side aisles occupied the sanctuary. The Catholic congregation replaced the original pews with four new rows, creating a central aisle; the new pews have a similar, simple design. The pews in the balcony are original to the construction of the synagogue and have been preserved. Based on historic photographs, the central portion of the sanctuary ceiling once boasted a massive curved stained-glass skylight. The skylight was primarily geometric in design and featured Jewish symbols; located in the central skylight panel, the most prominent was a figure of two lions holding the Ten Commandments. It is unclear when the stained glass was removed, but the skylight currently has blue Plexiglas panels where the glass was once located. Historic photographs also indicate that the massive arched windows also originally had stained glass but have been replaced with plates of colored glass. Hand-painted Spanish tiles featuring abstract and Christian imagery surround the arches of the windows on the balcony level. These were installed during the conversion from synagogue to Roman Catholic Church. It is likely that the removal of the stained-glass windows and skylight occurred during the Catholic renovations, though the Plexiglas panels are modern. It is likely that the alteration of the stained glass windows was perceived as necessary to remove the Jewish symbols.

A massive arched niche originally housed the *bimah* (the raised platform where the Torah is read), the ark, and organ pipes. A photograph taken in 1910, when the synagogue was newly completed, shows that the arch of the niche was simply framed with a classically inspired ark in the center. Square pilasters now frame the arched niche with Corinthian capitals connecting to a cornice that continues across the rest of the wall at that level. As a 1952 image of the sanctuary demonstrates, these interior renovations were completed when Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (Nuestra Senora de la Milagrosa) converted the synagogue into a Roman Catholic Church.

The niche has been significantly altered since the original Jewish congregation left and currently reflects the uses and tastes of the present Baptist Church. The current arrangement is typical for protestant churches. Where the organ pipes and ark were located, an elevated space for choral risers is now present and wood paneling and a massive brass cross has been installed. To the left of the choir, on the same level, is seating for those leading the service. In front of the choir is a raised semicircular stage for the preacher, immediately to the left of the stage on the floor is where the band equipment is located.

Sanctuary –Balcony Level

At the second level of either stair adjacent the front vestibule is a solid wooden door providing access to the sanctuary balcony. The U-shape of the balcony level provides seating on three sides: rear, left, and right. On each side are three rows of pews set on risers providing better viewing.

On the rear portion balcony level, above the entrance doors to the sanctuary is the former organ loft. Framed by a large arch, this space has been altered to function as a sound booth for Mount Neboh Baptist Church's live-broadcast services. Behind the sound booth, directly above the vestibule, is a long narrow room currently serving as a conference room. The three windows located above the front entrance doors light this room.

Back Office Suites

Accessing the building through the rear entrance on Saint Nicholas Avenue, one enters into a small vestibule area with the same tile flooring as the main entrance. At the top of two steps is a set of glass double doors with a transom window. Through the doors is a small stair hall for the back staircase; next to the stairs a door leads to a room that now serves as a nurse's office with a small bathroom and a fireplace that no longer is utilized. The back stairs accesses the basement, up to the balcony, and continuing up to the offices on the third floor.

Ascending the stairs up to the balcony level, a door leads to the balcony on the south side of the sanctuary. Two other doors on this level lead to a suite of rooms now occupied by the pastor of the church. Due to the rhomboidal shape of the building, the offices are oddly shaped. Each room has a door off the landing; however, they also adjoin one another from interior doors. The third level up has offices of identical layout as the pastor's suite. The top floor of the rear of the building provides access to the attic over the sanctuary via a small hatchway. This level also features a narrow hallway leading to three small rooms of equal size.

Statement of Significance:

Ansche Chesed Synagogue, at 1883 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard in Manhattan, is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Social History as a house of worship associated with the development patterns in the neighborhood of Harlem by Jewish, Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican, and African-American communities. It is the only known surviving house of worship to have served New York City's three largest religious faiths: Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant. Ansche Chesed is locally significant under Criterion C as an example of an intact eclectic Classical Revival synagogue in Harlem. Built in Harlem in 1908-1909 for a wealthy German Jewish congregation, the synagogue was designed by Edward I. Shire, a Beaux-Arts trained Jewish architect. The synagogue is noteworthy for its competent blend of Classical and Colonial Revival elements, Judaic motifs, and Byzantine Revival features in the design of the exterior and interior. As modified by later congregations, the building reflects the architectural and aesthetic preferences of each religious group.

Development of Harlem

The physical landscape of New York City rapidly changed following the Civil War. As large masses of European immigrants inundated Manhattan, primarily below 14th Street, development progressed northward up the island. Nearly forty thousand Jews, of mostly German descent, lived in the downtown area and parts of midtown.[1] The poorest and least acculturated Jewish immigrants lived in the area bounded by Canal, Elm, Mott, and Bayard Streets – the old Jewish quarter once home to New York's most affluent and Americanized German-Jews.[2] For those who could leave the overpopulated downtown district in the 1860s and 1870s, resettlement was limited by the lack of available rapid transportation. Jewish families needed to be able to access their synagogues, temples, schools, and other community centers still located in the Lower East Side. A small group of German Jewish merchants did, however, leave the crowded downtown during the late nineteenth century to relocate in Harlem, a rural village outpost far removed from the city at the time. They established businesses and residences in the section of Harlem north of 110th Street and east of Third Avenue. This early group of merchants marks the migration of Jews from the Lower East Side north to Harlem.[3]

Following the completion of the Second and Third Avenue elevated rail lines in 1879 and 1880, Harlem became less isolated. Between 1880 and 1885 nearly half of East Harlem, south of 125th Street, was developed with tenements, brownstone flats, and private homes.[4] The increase in development in Harlem near the rail line provided an opportunity for better housing with a reasonable commute to downtown. As more Jews relocated to Harlem, businesses followed and new synagogues and schools opened. Due to the development of these institutions, the neighborhood became increasingly attractive to Jews.[5]

[1] Jeffrey S. Gurock, *When Harlem was Jewish 1870-1930* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1979), 6.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid. 7.
[4] Ibid. 15.
[5] Ibid. 22.

With the extension of the 9th Avenue elevated rail line up to 116th Street in the 1890s and the completion of the overhead trolley lines along 116th Street in central Harlem, real estate development boomed.[6] Further, an abundance of jobs in the building industry drew Eastern European Jews out of the Lower East Side and up to Harlem, following the patterns of the earlier migration of German Jews. Overdevelopment in Harlem in the ensuing years saturated the real estate market, creating cheap rents and vacancies. Russian and other Eastern European Jews continued to relocate to Central and East Harlem, attracted by the affordability of the overdeveloped neighborhood. Between 1870 and 1920, Harlem was America's second largest new immigrant Jewish community behind the Lower East Side of Manhattan.[7]

Congregation Ansche Chesed History

Ansche Chesed was founded in 1829 by a group of German, Dutch, and Polish Jews.[8] The group seceded from Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, which had earlier separated from Shearith Israel, also in New York. German Jews dominated membership of Ansche Chesed by the middle of the nineteenth century.[9] The new congregation initially rented space on Grand Street in New York's Lower East Side. It built its first synagogue on Norfolk Street, in the same neighborhood. In 1874, the congregation abandoned the Lower East Side as the influential and wealthy German Jews of Ansche Chesed migrated northward on Manhattan Island, escaping the non-acculturated Jewish immigrants, primarily hailing from Eastern Europe, who flooded the Lower East Side to escape persecution in the Old World.[10] The out-migration of wealthier Jews from the Lower East Side in the second half of the nineteenth century was primarily based on social issues. The earliest generation of Jews, most of German descent, consciously Americanized themselves, adapting to their social surroundings. These residents had established businesses and were able to move to newly developing neighborhoods further north along Manhattan Island when the new waves of Jewish immigrants began settling in their neighborhoods. The assimilated German Jews were also anxious to distance themselves from the poorer, less culturally sophisticated, and more "ethnic" eastern European Jews.

Ansche Chesed relocated to Beekman Place near 50th Street and in 1893 moved north, again, to Harlem. The congregation occupied a building on 112th Street between Lexington and Third Avenues.[11] By 1907, the congregation had outgrown its structure in East Harlem and plans were once again made for the synagogue to

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[6] Ibid. 30.
[7] Miriam Medina, "The ebb and Flow of East Harlem's Ethnic Changes," May 23, 2012, <http://www.thehistorybox.com/ny_city/ebb_flow_east_harlem_changes_article1545b.htm>.
[8] The Amended and Restated By-Laws of Congregation Ansche Chesed, Amended June 2012, <http://www.anschechesed.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=a1efe38c-7ba9-41a5-9092-23cf16884dfe&groupId=10519>.
[9] "Ansche Chesed History,"<http://www.anschechesed.org/web/guest/ac-history>; The current by-laws of Congregation Ansche Chesed indicate that it is a founding member of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Dr. Solomon Schechter, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, brought together twenty-two synagogues in 1913 to establish a cooperative effort to further their common mission: the development and perpetuation of Conservative Judaism. "From the Beginning…The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism," <http://www.uscj.org/Aboutus/OurStructure/History.aspx>.
[10] Joel Berkowitz, "Ohab Zedek History, The Beginning," <http://www.ohabzedek.net/history.aspx>.
[11] Gurock, *When Harlem was Jewish*, 22.

relocate.[12] Following the fashionable development patterns in Harlem, the congregants moved westward to the new townhouses and apartment buildings being constructed in Central Harlem.

Architect, Edward I. Shire

Edward I. Shire designed the synagogue as his second major commission as a professional architect. Shire was born in 1874 in New York City and was educated at City College and Columbia University before receiving his architectural degree from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.[13] Before attending college, Shire also studied at the Hebrew Technical Institute, which was established to give technical training to Jewish boys of limited means.[14] Following his completion at the École in 1900, Shire started his own firm. His first major work was the design of a neo-Federal style townhouse at 121 East 73rd Street in 1906.[15] His next significant commission was the Ansche Chesed Synagogue.

Shire's other designs included numerous residential commissions, commercial, industrial, and educational buildings. In addition, he designed the second Ansche Chesed, a Bzyantine Revival synagogue, in 1927. Shire also designed public and mortuary structures and was involved with interior design. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects and sat on several boards, including the board for the Hebrew Technical Institute in 1924.[16] Edward I. Shire died in 1973 at the age of 99.

Synagogue Design

According to the *New York Times*, plans were filed in March of 1908 for a new Ansche Chesed Synagogue to be built on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 114th Street in Harlem.[17] David A. Cohen, a Russo-Polish Jewish immigrant who came to New York in 1880, owned the land purchased by the congregation. Cohen was typical of many of the Jews migrating to Harlem. He began at the bottom of the economic ladder, worked as a peddler downtown, and soon became a successful entrepreneurial merchant and real estate investor. Cohen purchased several tracts of land in Harlem, including the parcel on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 114th Street in 1900. He sold the land to the affluent German-Jewish Congregation Ansche Chesed for $108,000.[18]

The article describing the proposed structure states that the synagogue would feature an exterior of Harvard brick with limestone trim and seat about 1,200 people with a 400-person Sunday school space.[19] The article also mentions plans for an enclosed glass roof garden for use as a recreation place for children, a feature of the synagogue that was never realized. Isidor Straus, co-owner of Macy's department store and member of the

[12] "New $200,000 Edifice Planned for Large Harlem Congregation," *New York Times*, March 8, 1908.
[13] New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *West Chelsea Historic District Designation Report*, (2008), 104.
[14] Ibid.
[15] New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report*, (1981), 1343.
[16] New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *West Chelsea Historic District Designation Report*, (2008), 104.
[17] "New $200,000 Edifice Planned for Large Harlem Congregation," *New York Times*, March 8, 1908.
[18] Gurock, *When Harlem was Jewish 1870-1930*, 47.
[19] "New $200,000 Edifice Planned for Large Harlem Congregation," *New York Times*, March 8, 1908.

congregation, laid the cornerstone for Ansche Chesed on April 12, 1908.[20] The building was completed to Shire's designs, featuring two domed towers topped with metal Stars of David, a carved Decalogue in the pediment and an inscription in the entablature saying, "To the Glory of God and the Brotherhood of Man." Instead of the trim being finished exclusively in limestone, terra-cotta glazed to resemble limestone was also utilized.

"Harvard" brick, a dark-colored and burnt brick resembling the Colonial-era bricks (so called because they were used throughout Harvard College's campus), was a popular turn-of the-century building material. Contrasted with the pale limestone, these old-looking bricks lend a Colonial Revival touch to the exterior design. Shire coupled the materials with Jewish iconography, both the elegant Decalogue in the pediment and the handsome brickwork for the cornice featuring Stars of David. He finished the exterior with a massive Classical Revival portico. The domes that once capped each tower depart from the Colonial Revival and Classical Revival elements, and add a subtle Romanesque or Byzantine Revival feature. Together, the variety of stylistic motifs, including the well-proportioned classical portico, domes, and elegant stair halls in the vestibule demonstrate Shire's classical training. It also reflects his knowledge of contemporary fashions and ability to blend multiple styles together into one homogenous design.

The sanctuary of Ansche Chesed departs from the Classical Revival of the exterior. Utilizing a heavy rounded-arch form prominent in Byzantine and Romanesque style architecture, Shire infuses two very different architectural styles together in a simplified form. Shire's design for the sanctuary of Ansche Chesed emphasizes sobriety over ostentatious decoration. With the stained glass windows and skylight as the main decorative elements in the sanctuary, the worshippers focus attention towards the Torah Ark.

Shire's choice for a revival design for the exterior follows the trends of his other early commissions. The Colonial Revival movement in architectural design has its earliest roots dating to the late 1870s and early 1880s.[21] Architects began to document the nation's earliest buildings, utilizing the forms and details they witnessed. Mixing elements inspired from historic American architecture with the latest technologies and tastes of the period architects created wholly new architectural styles.[22]

Shire's design for Ansche Chesed drew upon both his Beaux-Arts training and his knowledge of current trends in synagogue design. The École de Beaux-Arts trained architects to model from classical precedents, and emphasized the use of symmetry and classical details and forms. Shire utilized his classical training to design Ansche Chesed's impressive, temple-front façade and elegant vestibule. Beaux-Arts style Neoclassicism had become particularly popular after the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. It is also very likely that the congregation was attracted to the Classical Revival at a time when that style was becoming the popular choice for synagogues after the discovery of classical synagogues in Palestine.[23] Jewish congregations in cities across

[20] "Temple Cornerstone Laid," *New York Times*, April 13, 1908.
[21] Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture, A History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 236.
[22] Ibid.
[23] National Register of Historic Places, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue and Community House, New York City, New York County, New York (90NR00735).

America were choosing the style for their new synagogues and temples and Shire had proven to be a good choice to design a building incorporating the classical styles and elements *en vogue* for the era.

The congregation hired Shire a second time to design their new synagogue when Ansche Chesed relocated to the West End Avenue and 100th Street in 1927. Following the changing trends, the later Ansche Chesed synagogue in the Upper West Side neighborhood of New York City abandoned all Classical Revival elements and chose a completely Byzantine Revival building, both on the exterior and interior. Notably, the main sanctuary of the current synagogue is very similar to his original design in Harlem. A barrel vaulted ceiling with a massive stained-glass skylight and a large arched niche with organ pipes and arc are all present.

Guastavino Vaulting

Guastavino vaults were utilized in the construction of both the tower domes and the ceiling of the main vestibule at Ansche Chesed.[24] The inclusion of the innovative Guastavino vaulting system is significant to the era of construction. Raphael Guastavino immigrated to the United States from Valencia, Spain in the 1880s. He established a construction business in New York City and introduced a Catalan vaulting system known as timbrel vaults.[25] Commonly known as Guastavino vaults today, Guastavino's system utilized thin terra cotta tiles and rapid-hardening Portland cement that was set in multiple woven layers of overlapping tiles. The combination of the layers and adhesion of the mortar creates a laminated shell almost as strong as reinforced concrete. The vaulting system was widely used throughout the United States. Of the nearly 1,000 buildings constructed with Guastavino's tiled vaults, almost half are located in New York City.[26] The popularity of Guastavino's system stems from the low building costs due to fewer materials. The vaults can be constructed without use of wooden scaffolding, and the fireproof qualities of the terra cotta construction also made the system popular in public buildings.[27]

Ansche Chesed Evolution

Ansche Chesed moved with its congregants as they relocated throughout various neighborhoods in Manhattan. When the congregation moved to the then-fashionable Central Harlem in 1908, most of the residents in the area were employed in high-status occupations, including merchants, bankers, and jewelers. According to historian Jeffrey Gurock, nearly one-fourth of the work force in Central Harlem could be classified as holding white-collar jobs.[28] The buildings surrounding the synagogue reflect the upper-middle class demographics in the neighborhood. The avenues are lined with large apartment buildings and the streets feature row houses and a few smaller tenement buildings.

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[24] R. Guastavino Company, *Ansche Chesed Synagogue, 7th Ave. & 114th St., NY* , Avery Drawings and Archives, Columbia University, New York City.
[25] Kris De Decker, "Tiles as a Substitute for Steel: The Art of the Timbrel Vault," *Low-Tech Magazine*, November 12, 2008, <http://www.lowtechmagazine.com/2008/11/tiles-vaults.html>.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Gurock, *When Harlem was Jewish 1870-1930*, 53-54.

Ansche Chesed occupied the synagogue until 1927, when the neighborhood's ethnic demographics shifted and the majority of the congregation had begun moving south into the Upper West Side neighborhood of Manhattan. As early as 1905, Jewish Harlem began to experience the pressures that came with increased in-migration of new groups.[29] African Americans from similar over-crowded areas of Lower Manhattan began relocating to sections of Harlem north of 125th Street. At the same time, the early Jewish neighborhood of East Harlem began transforming into a predominantly Italian and Irish neighborhood; a number of Eastern European Jews also began relocating from the Lower East Side into the neighborhood as well.

Until World War I, Harlem remained an attractive area to Jewish immigrants seeking a more comfortable existence. Due to a shortage of materials and labor during the war, Manhattan, including Harlem, struggled to support the housing demand in the early 1920s.[30] Afterward, Harlem quickly began to transition into an overcrowded and deteriorating neighborhood where a lack of investment and deferred maintenance in older buildings devalued the real estate market. New outlying areas across New York City began to be developed, offering new and modern accommodations attracting able Jewish residents to relocate. The shifting of populations from one neighborhood to another was similar to the early development patterns of nineteenth century Harlem from the Lower East Side. The development of apartment buildings in the Upper West Side – the area between Central and Riverside Parks – in the early twentieth century, marketed towards middle- to upper-middle-class demographics, lured many of Ansche Chesed's wealthy congregants away from Harlem.

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (Nuestro Senora de la Milagrosa)

Congregation Ansche Chesed sold its house of worship in Harlem in July 1927 and purchased a plot of land at the corner of West End Avenue and 100th Street for a new synagogue. A group of Vincentian priests purchased the property and quickly opened it as Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal (Nuestra Senora de la Milagrosa, or simply La Milagrosa), a Spanish-speaking Roman Catholic congregation.[31] Father Gabriel Ginard, a Vincentian priest from Madrid, founded the church to meet the need for Spanish language services in New York City. The name for the church was derived from the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal, the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in Paris, France.

Father Ginard arrived in the United States in 1923. He first taught at a seminary in Germantown, Pennsylvania and then at St. John's University in Brooklyn.[32] While serving in Brooklyn, Father Ginard was asked to give conferences in Spanish to members of the parish, and soon began leading Spanish-language Sunday services and celebrations. Catholic church leaders recognized a serious lack in Spanish language services in the city. Though they had dedicated Our Lady of Esperanza in 1912 to serve as a Spanish-speaking congregation, it had not been as well supported by the local Hispanic community; within a decade, the majority of the congregation

[29] Ibid. 139.
[30] Ibid. 140.
[31] "Synagogue is Sold on 7th Av. Corner," *New York Times*, April 9, 1927.
[32] C.M. John Rybolt, *The American Vincentians: A Popular History of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States 1815-1987* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1988), 283.

was Irish.[33] By the mid-twenties, Catholic leadership began to notice a trend of recent Spanish-speaking Catholic migrants to the city attending other denominations who offered more services. Father Ginard pushed for the creation of a new church. With the arrival of two more Spanish priests in 1927, Father Ginard was able to get permission to establish his own Spanish-speaking parish, La Milagrosa, located in Harlem near the developing Spanish-speaking neighborhood.[34]

Since the United States took possession of Puerto Rico at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Harlem has had a Spanish-speaking community.[35] East Harlem, which is also referred to as Spanish Harlem or El Barrio, is the neighborhood many Puerto Ricans first migrated to in the United States. The neighborhood, first developed by Harlem's earliest Jewish community, had become a tenement district occupied mostly by poor immigrant families of Irish, Italian, and Eastern European descent by the 1890s.[36]

Following both World Wars, Puerto Ricans immigrated to the United States in increasing numbers; at this time, East Harlem became more recognizable as Spanish Harlem. A proud cultural minority, most Puerto Ricans, maintained their traditions and language with only limited acculturation. The stark differences between the Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans and the Irish, Italians, and Jewish communities long-established in East Harlem led to street crime and violence in the neighborhood.[37] Following the incident, the different groups established a level of balance, though turf wars between the Italians and Puerto Ricans continued.

Father Ginard began holding services on June 19, 1927, a month before the sale of the former Ansche Chesed synagogue was completed. The Spanish-speaking community quickly flocked to La Milagrosa. In September, Ginard reported that 2500 people were consistently attending the five Sunday services. The congregation, which was largely made up of new immigrants, had been able to raise $12,000 to make initial modifications to the building. This included fixing the roof, creating six bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a dining room, and modifying the basement for catechism classes. The archdiocese provided the fledgling church with $2,000 for furniture for the sanctuary. Ginard also performed 300 baptisms and 90 marriages in the three months the church had been in operation.[38]

By 1931, the congregation decided to make more substantial modifications to its church. They spent $4,000 on a new altar and $2,800 on "church painting and decoration." This project included the installation of hand-painted tiles with Christian imagery around each of the arched windows on the gallery level of the sanctuary. Similar tile panels, featuring King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, were installed on the façade over each of the

[33] Ibid.; Thomas J. Shelley, *The Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of New York*, 1808-2008 (Strasbourg: Editions du Signe, 2007), 460.
[34] Ibid.; Chancery Correspondence, 1924-1978, Collection 011.001, Parish History Collection Box 8, Folder 1. Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie.
[35] Medina, "The ebb and Flow of East Harlem's Ethnic Changes," 5.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Chancery Correspondence, 1924-1978, Collection 011.001, Parish History Collection Box 8, Folder 1. Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie.; Annual Budget reports, 1928-1970, Collection 021.002, Parish Financial Reports. Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie.

three entrance doors. The congregation also removed the domes on the towers. On the interior, they replaced the stained glass in the sanctuary with simple colored glass panes, framed the arched niche with Neoclassical columns, and installed new benches.[39]

As demand grew, two Spanish-speaking mission chapels were established. The mission chapel of the Holy Agony, established in 1930, was the first Hispanic church in El Barrio. The Vincentians were aided in their efforts by a female religious group, the Helpers of the Holy Souls. A second mission chapel, St. Theresa of Jesus, was founded in 1932 in Washington Heights. Unfortunately, services were discontinued after the chapel burned in 1935. A total of seven priests served La Milagrosa and its two missions.[40]

Over the course of the next several decades, La Milagrosa had become the most important Hispanic church in New York City. By 1952, priests had performed 31, 746 baptisms and 5,841 marriages at the church. A booklet celebrating the parish's 25th anniversary expresses the enthusiasm of both the congregation and church leaders; it notes the need to build a new rectory and a parish school to teach Spanish as well as to create an office that would serve the legal, immigration, and social service needs of the community. However, population changes over the next decade led priests to focus on areas outside of Harlem. By the 1960s, La Milagrosa was becoming ineffective as a center for New York City's Roman Catholic Spanish-speaking community. La Milagrosa closed in 1978 after the Spanish-speaking population began to leave Harlem for other neighborhoods. All services and offices were transferred to its former Spanish-language mission chapel, which had grown into the Church of the Holy Agony; Vincentians continue to staff this church.[41]

Mount Neboh Baptist Church

Until the early twentieth century, African Americans predominantly occupied crowded neighborhoods along Manhattan's west side, including parts of Greenwich Village, the Tenderloin and Hell's Kitchen. African Americans initially struggled to secure a safe and healthy location to establish a progressive life. Real estate groups that developed the Upper West Side and Harlem had set covenants preventing African Americans from renting, fearing their presence would lower real estate values.[42]

In an effort to fill vacancies left by the outmigration of Harlem's Jewish community in the 1920s, developers and landlords began to allow African Americans to rent and purchase properties in the neighborhood. As African Americans from the west side began moving north, there was also an influx of African Americans migrating to New York City from the rural south. Flocking to the city in search of work, many African

[39] Annual Budget reports, 1928-1970, Collection 021.002, Parish Financial Reports. Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie; Leandro Mayoral, C.M., "Algo sobre Nuestra Iglesia 'La Milagrosa,' "Album Commemorativo" (New York: Parroquia La Milagrosa, 1952). Collection 011.002, Parish Journals and Publications, Box 4, Folder 5. Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie.
[40] Shelley, *The Bicentennial History*, 460-461.
[41] Mayoral, C.M., "Album Commemorativo."
[42] Medina, "The ebb and Flow of East Harlem's Ethnic Changes," 147.

Americans migrated to Harlem's neighborhoods. Historian Jeffrey Gurock notes that in the 1920s, New York City witnessed a 115 percent net population increase of African Americans.[43]

The first generation of Harlem's new African American community in the interwar years has been historicized as a cultural and literary Golden Age. Migrants from the rural south infused new cultural and religious ideas to the city. Centered on an increasingly deteriorating neighborhood, the 1920s was the era of the Harlem Renaissance, when black writers, musicians, and artists resided in the area and produced some of twentieth century America's greatest works. As the demographics of the neighborhood continued to change, buildings were converted to create new churches, schools, and community centers.

Mount Neboh Baptist Church was established in 1937 in Harlem; the first church was located at 2365 Eighth Avenue.[44] In the 1970s the congregation moved to a location at 304 West 127th Street. In 1979, it relocated to the former Ansche Chesed Synagogue when Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal sold the building.[45] In the 1990s, Mount Neboh renovated the sanctuary; these changes are visible today. In 2007, the church also made exterior renovations and repaired some of the deteriorating terra cotta.[46]

Conclusion – One Building, Three Faiths

Writer David Dunlap notes in his *New York Times* article, "Vestiges of Harlem's Jewish Past," that the Ansche Chesed Synagogue is one of only two known religious buildings to serve New York City's three major faiths: Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant. The only other house of worship in New York City with this distinction was Saint Ann's Armenian Catholic Cathedral at East 12th Street (no longer extant).[47] The original section of St. Ann's was constructed in 1847 to serve as the 12th Street Baptist Church. It was converted into Temple Emanu-El synagogue in 1856.[48] The Jewish congregation left the space in 1868, and in 1870 it became Saint Ann's Roman Catholic Church and eventually evolved into the Cathedral of the Armenian Catholic Church.[49] In 2004,

[43] Gurock, *When Harlem was Jewish 1870-1930*, 149.
[44] Mount Neboh Baptist Church, "Church History – 75 Years and Counting," <http://www.mountneboh.org/Pages/AboutUs.aspx>.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] David W. Dunlap, "Vestiges of Harlem's Jewish Past," *New York Times*, June 7, 2002.
[48] "St. Ann Armenian Rite Cathedral," <http://www.nycago.org/organs/nyc/html/StAnnArmenianRiteCathedral.html>.
[49] Ibid.

the Archdiocese of New York closed the church and sold the property to a developer.[50] The church was demolished and a New York University dormitory was constructed on the site.

Harlem has seen many transformations in its long history, from a rural farming region, to a major Jewish neighborhood at the turn-of-the twentieth century, and ultimately to a predominantly African American enclave throughout the remainder of the century. The Ansche Chesed Synagogue, as modified by Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Catholic Church and Mount Neboh Baptist Church, includes features marking its use by three different faiths. As the surrounding neighborhood evolved and transformed, the building followed suit to meet the needs of the community that occupied the space. The historic significance of the site is both its successful architectural design, produced by the very active New York City architect, Edward I. Shire, and also the visible signs of its role as a house of worship for three of New York City's major religions: Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

[50] "Historic N.Y. Church May Close Doors," *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 2004.

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Verbal Boundary Description

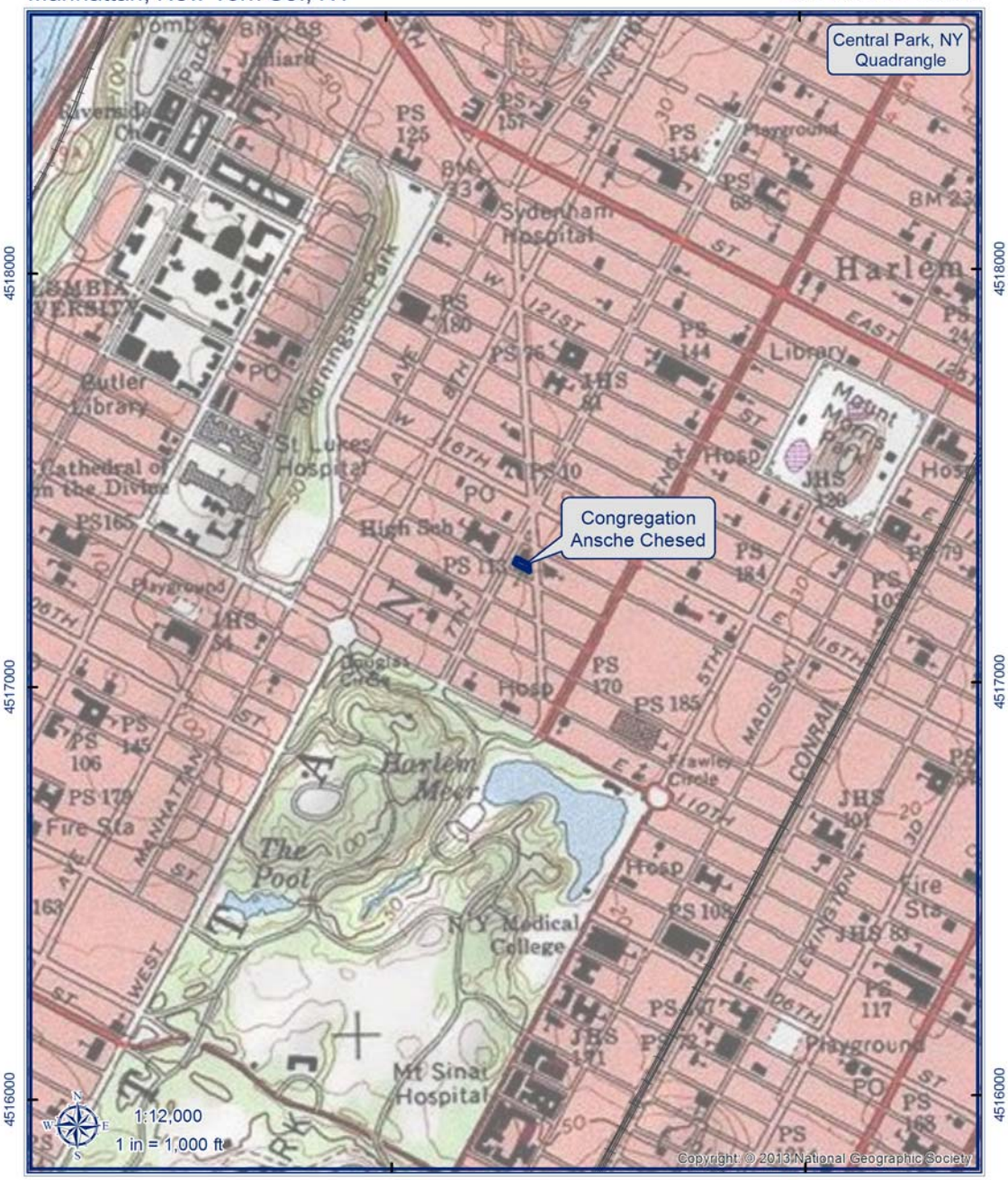
The boundary for this nomination is shown as a heavy black line on the accompanying map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary incorporates the entire lot on which the Ansche Chesed Synagogue has historically been located.

Congregation Ansche Chesed
Manhattan, New York Co., NY

1883 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd.
New York, NY 10026



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

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Congregation Ansche Chesed

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

Congregation Ansche Chesed
Manhattan, New York Co., NY
1883 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd.
New York, NY 10026
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Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter
Feet
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Congregation Ansche Chesed
Tax Parcel Data:
NYC PLUTO
http://www.nyc.gov/

Additional Information

Photo Log

Name of Property:	Ansche Chesed Synagogue
City:	New York City
County:	New York
State:	NY
Name of Photographer:	Jason Crowley
Date of Photographs:	September 2013
Location of Original Digital Files:	NY SHPO

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0001
Façade and south elevation, facing northeast

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0002
Façade, facing east

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0003
Rear (east) elevation, facing west

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0004
Rear (east) and south elevation, facing southwest

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0005
North stair in vestibule, facing north

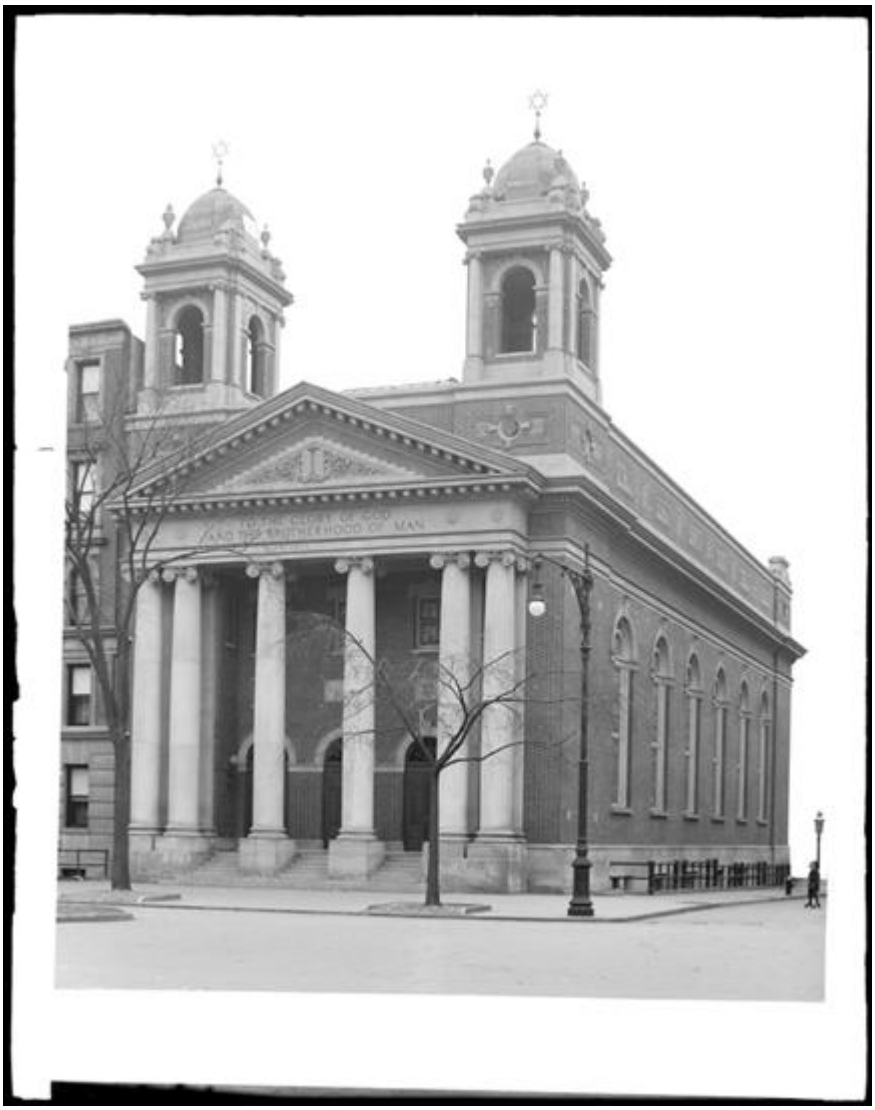
NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0006
Sanctuary, facing east

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0007
Sanctuary ceiling, facing east

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0008
Sanctuary, facing west

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0009
Sanctuary, detail of north windows, facing north

NY_NewYorkCo_AnscheChesed_0010
Sanctuary, detail of Spanish tilework, facing north



Façade and South Elevation, Ansche Chesed, 1910, Museum of the City of New York Digital Collection

Sanctuary, Ansche Chesed, 1910, Museum of the City of New York Digital Collection

Interior, La Milagrosa, “Album Commemorativo,” 1952, New York City Archdiocese archives

MT. NEBOH BAPTIST CHURCH
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MT. NEBOH BAPTIST CHURCH

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Holy Bible