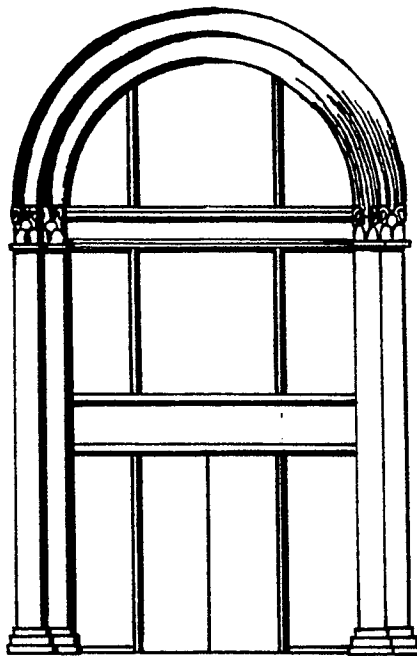


**CONGREGATION BETH JACOB  
311 WASHINGTON AVENUE**

**HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION REPORT**



Prepared by  
City of Miami Beach  
Department of Historic Preservation and Urban Design

July 1992

## I. REQUEST

At its June 4, 1992 meeting, the Historic Preservation Board approved a preliminary review of the nominated site and voted to direct staff to prepare this designation report in accordance with Section 19-5(A) of the Zoning Ordinance.

## II. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic/Current Name: Congregation Beth Jacob  
Address: 311 Washington Avenue  
(301-317 Washington Avenue)  
Legal Description: Lot 9, 10 and 11, Block 7, Ocean Beach  
Subdivision Plat Book 7, Page 38 of the  
Public Records of Dade County, Florida  
Present Owner: Congregation Beth Jacob  
Present Occupant: Congregation Beth Jacob  
Present Use: Synagogue, Social Hall and Garden  
Present Zoning: RPS-3 (Residential-Medium High Intensity)  
Tax Folio: 02-4203-003-0920

## III. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The information included in the Statement of Significance is taken from the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, filed in July, 1980.

### A. Historical

The Beth Jacob Social Hall and Synagogue, built in 1929 and 1936 respectively, are significant as the first religious structures of the Orthodox Jewish Congregation of Miami Beach. The building of the synagogue satisfied an urgent need of the small Jewish community consisting of residents and winter visitors who had first established themselves on Miami Beach in 1915. It also established that the Jewish people were accepted and were a permanent part of the resident population of the City. Prior to this, Jews had been denied permission to build a synagogue and had, at first, ferried to religious services at the Zion Congregation on the Miami mainland. When Orthodox Jews, who could not travel on the Sabbath and High Holidays, joined the Miami Beach Congregation, they had to hold their services in the Royal Apartments, 221 Collins Avenue. Almost every Jew who was a permanent resident between 1927 and 1932 was a financial contributor to the building funds of the Beth Jacob Synagogue. Among the early members of the Congregation were the first physician on the beach, Dr. Max Dobrin and his wife Lois Dobrin, who was the first professional worker for Jewish agencies.

Baron de Hirsch Meyer, founder of the Miami Beach Federal Savings and Loan Association, and later vice-mayor of the City of Miami Beach and a trustee and benefactor of the University of Miami, was also of the congregation. So too, was the Weiss family, commemorated in the park named after Rose Weiss.

In 1936, the Synagogue, known as the Beth Jacob Congregation, was moved into an adjacent new and larger building. The original structure was turned into the "Beth Jacob Social Hall" which today serves the community in a ritual capacity on week days in the summer. The new Synagogue was designed by Henry Hohauser, one of the foremost architects of the Art Deco style in Miami in the 1930s.

The initial role of the Synagogue as the religious and social center of the Jewish community, soon developed into being also the Jewish cultural center. A Hebrew school was established, lectures, scholars and cantors were invited and distinguished members of the rabbinical community visited the Synagogue and a mikvah (a ritual bath for women) was built.

#### B. Architectural

The original Beth Jacob Congregation building, now the Social Hall, was erected in 1929, designed by architect H. Frasser Rose. The building, faced in stucco, has a rectangular plan two stories high and has a gable roof, end to front. The front elevation, facing west, has a water table approximately ten feet high in rusticated stucco, which extends out on both sides of the building ending in two arched openings.

The central entrance consists of three double doors of simple, vertical panels and large iron hinges of spanish style. The doors are raised five steps, the steps flanked by pylons. Above the doors, an aluminum canopy was added, but the vertical thrust of the entrance openings is continued to the second level by windows with semi-circular arched heads. These windows, originally casement type, are now aluminum framed plate glass. On each side of these central windows is a circular stained glass window. The top of the facade has a contemporary plaque reading "Beth Jacob Social Hall, 5689-1929." Above, the facade is crowned by the Tablets with the Ten Commandments.

Inside, the main Hall is two stories in height. Alterations are limited to suspended fluorescent lights and the air conditioning system, paneled off above the vestibule. An addition of concrete block to the east was done in 1946, containing offices and meeting rooms. Windows on the side elevation are all original, flat ransomed double hung sash, except for arched casements in the vestibule space and modern jalousies in the rear addition.

The present Beth Jacob Congregation was built in 1936, the design of Henry Hohausser, one of the most prominent architects in Miami Beach at the time. This is a fine example of religious architecture, strongly relying on the Art Deco style for its decorative details.

This building is sensitive to the design of the older one, as it maintains the basic massing, scale, setback and materials. The front elevation has the same gable end treatment as its neighbor, but the height is increased by the extension of a continuous parapet. The two story rectangular plan is treated in a very classical, symmetrical composition. The front elevation has a large central arched opening, flanked by a smaller arched window.

The central double door has inset panels, highlighting the Star of David as main decoration. The main entrance is elevated and fronted by ten steps surfaced in tile which is approached from three sides. Above the door is a large arched stained glass window, depicting a scene of symbolism of Jewish religion and history. The entrance is flanked by coupled fluted pilasters of cast stone, topped by composite capitals, the fluting continues in the arch. Above, contemporary Tablets top the gable end. Remaining are parts of the original light fixtures and stair railings.

The side elevation is also symmetrically composed, through the fenestration and the flat parapet, which rises and curves at the center. This central portion has a slight forward projection. The building is crowned at the "crossing" by a shallow dome mounted in an octagonal drum, all sheathed in copper. Each side of the drum has an octagonal stained glass window with a central Star of David.

The rear elevation is also a symmetrical composition with windows flanking the central projecting beam. Above this projection, a semi-circular stained glass window depicts the Menorah.

The fenestration is one of the most striking features of the design. The tall, slender arched window openings are divided into three parts - the lower portion is an operable double hung sash windows. Above, a spandrel panel of cast stone has an Art Deco bas relief design of stylized acanthus leaves flanking a central Star of David. The second story window is fixed glass. All windows are stained glass. A continuous string course around the building provides the springing for the arches of all the upper windows.

Inside, the floor of the Congregation slopes down. The ceiling is a shallow barrel vault. Fine Art Deco chandeliers hang from the ceiling, the largest one suspended from the top of the dome.

Minor alterations include the front entrance canopy in 1947, and the air conditioning unit, which although visible from the front, has ductwork, which by running along the north elevation in the narrow space between the two buildings, is almost concealed.

North of the present Social Hall is a memorial park dedicated to Anne Frank. The park, which is part of the three-lot parcel owned by Congregation Beth Jacob, includes trees donated by members and area residents. The park is surrounded by a low chainlink fence.

#### **IV. RELATION TO ORDINANCE CRITERIA**

In accordance with Section 19-5(b) of the Zoning Ordinance, eligibility for designation is determined on the basis of compliance with listed criteria. The first level is referred to as Mandatory Criteria, which is required of all nominated sites or districts. The second level is referred to as Review Criteria which requires compliance with at least one of the several listed criteria. The proposed historic site is eligible for designation as it complies with the criteria as outlined below.

##### **A. Mandatory Criteria**

##### **Integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and association.**

Staff finds the nominated site to be in conformance with the mandatory criteria for the following reasons:

1. The nominated site has been individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980.
2. The nominated site contains the original structures, in their original location, still in use for their original purpose. Minor alterations over time have not significantly affected the original appearance of the structures or their relation to the surrounding neighborhood.
3. There are significant materials and quality workmanship present in the nominated site including stucco surfaces, decorative use of stone and metal, architectural features and stained glass. In addition, the nominated sites contain significant interior features such as original light fixture, marble bema or pulpit, friezes and other decorative features. The memorial park contains numerous trees.
4. The nominated site is closely associated with the development of the Jewish community in Miami Beach. As the first synagogue, Beth Jacob became the focus of the religious and social lives of the early Jewish residents. The synagogue is also associated with several persons significant in the early history of Miami Beach, including Dr. and Mrs. Max Dobrin

(first physician on Miami Beach), Baron de Hirsch Meyer (founder of Miami Beach Federal Savings and Loan Association) and the Weiss family (one of the first Jewish families to settle in Miami Beach).

**B. Review Criteria**

Analysis indicates that the nominated site is in compliance with the following review criteria:

1. **Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.** The nominated site includes the first synagogue built in Miami Beach and represents the beginning of the Jewish community in Miami Beach.
2. **Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.** The nominated site is associated with nearly all Jewish residents/visitors in Miami Beach during the earliest period of the City's history. Prominent residents involved in the development of the synagogue include Dr. and Mrs. Max Dobrin, Baron de Hirsch Meyer and the Weiss family.
3. **Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.** The nominated site contains two significant structures, the present social hall built in 1929 and the present synagogue built in 1936. Both structures are representative of the architectural styles popular in Miami Beach during the time period of its greatest growth and development. The Social Hall is representative of the Mediterranean influence on early Miami Beach architecture of a water table in rusticated stucco, arched windows and gable roof. The Synagogue is a fine example of religious architecture with classical features which is strongly influenced by the Art Deco style predominant in Miami Beach in the 1930s and 1940s.
4. **Possess high artistic values.** The nominated site evidences high artistic value in its architectural forms, architectural details, decorative features including light fixtures, friezes, stone and metal work and stained glass windows.
5. **Represent the work of a master.** The Synagogue was designed by architect Henry Hohausser. Mr. Hohausser is generally regarded as one of the most prominent and influential architect in Miami Beach during the 1930s and 1940s. He is responsible for over 100 buildings remaining in the Miami Beach Architectural (Art Deco) District - more than any other individual architect.

## V. PLANNING CONTEXT

### A. Present Trends and Conditions

During the last decade, the population of Orthodox Jews in southern Miami Beach has been declining. Changing demographics in the neighborhood have shown a decrease in the once predominant elderly Jewish population and an increase in younger hispanic residents. Beth Jacob is one of few synagogues which has remained opened as others have been converted to new uses. Beth Jacob is in the process of securing grants for the rehabilitation of its buildings for itself and new tenant "Mosaic", a museum of jewish life and history. This will preserve an important social focus in this rapidly changing neighborhood.

### B. Conservation Objectives

Historic designation would compliment the efforts currently underway to maintain the original synagogue structure for its original use and encourage a compatible new use, a Jewish museum, in the present synagogue.

Historic Site Designation will aid in the achievement of several important goals:

1. Preserve the character and architectural integrity of these historic buildings for future generations;
2. Protect the historic buildings, streetscape and open space from inappropriate or undesirable alterations;
3. Encourage and support important focus of a rapidly changing neighborhood.

## VI. HPUD DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

1. **Criteria for Designation:** Staff finds the nominated site is in compliance with the Mandatory Criteria and Review Criteria (numbers 1-5) as listed in Section 19-5(B) of the Zoning Ordinance.
2. **Boundaries:** Staff recommends the historic site boundaries include all contiguous property owned by Congregation Beth Jacob including Lots 9, 10 and 11 of Block 7, Ocean Beach Sub-Division.
3. **Areas Subject to Review:** All building elevations and all public interior areas. This does not include administrative offices, mechanical/electrical rooms, storage and service areas. Also, subject to review shall be the memorial park on Lot 11.

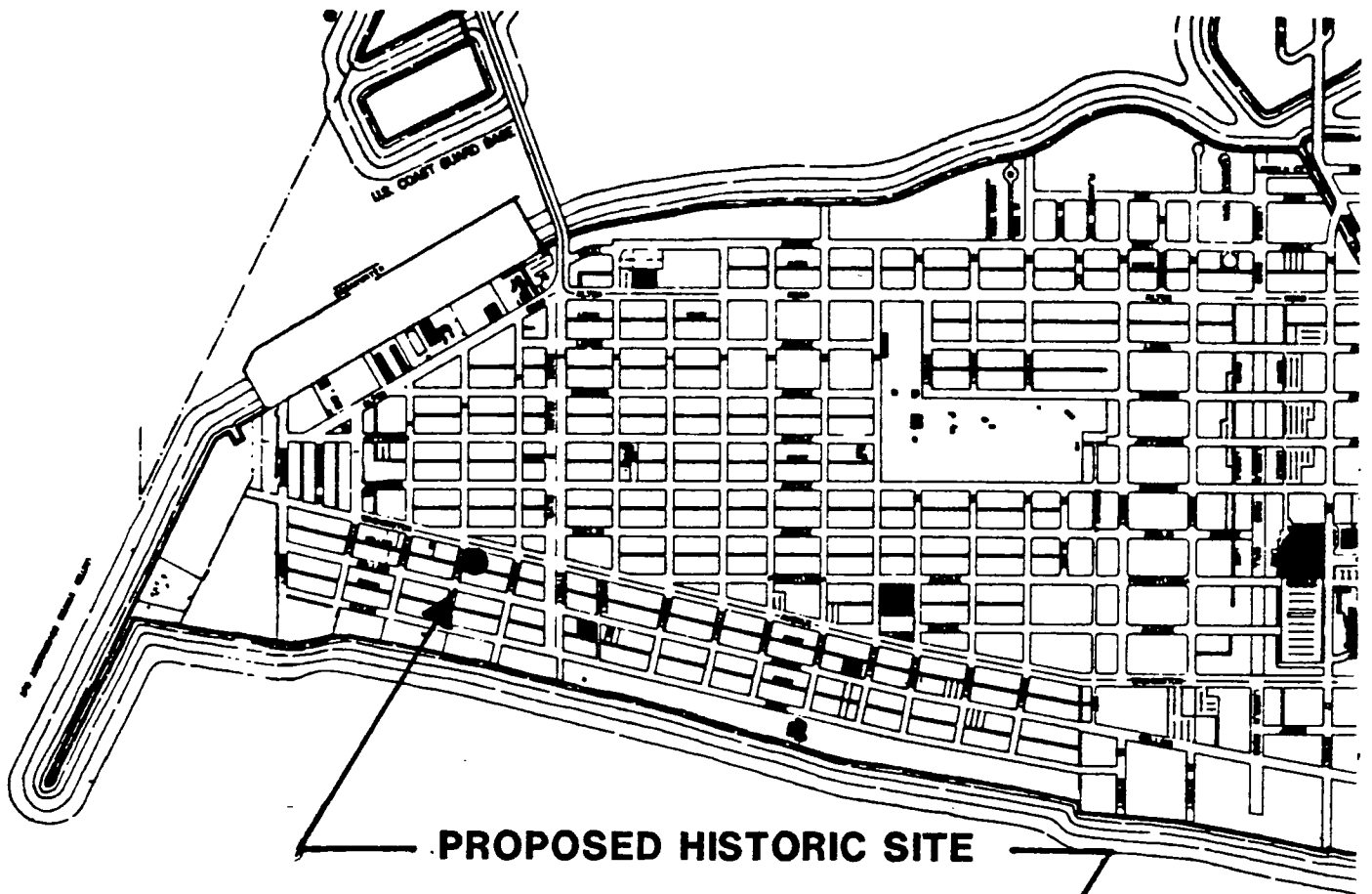
4. **Review Guidelines:** Staff recommends the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings as amended, as the standards for review of any project within the nominated site.

#### REFERENCES

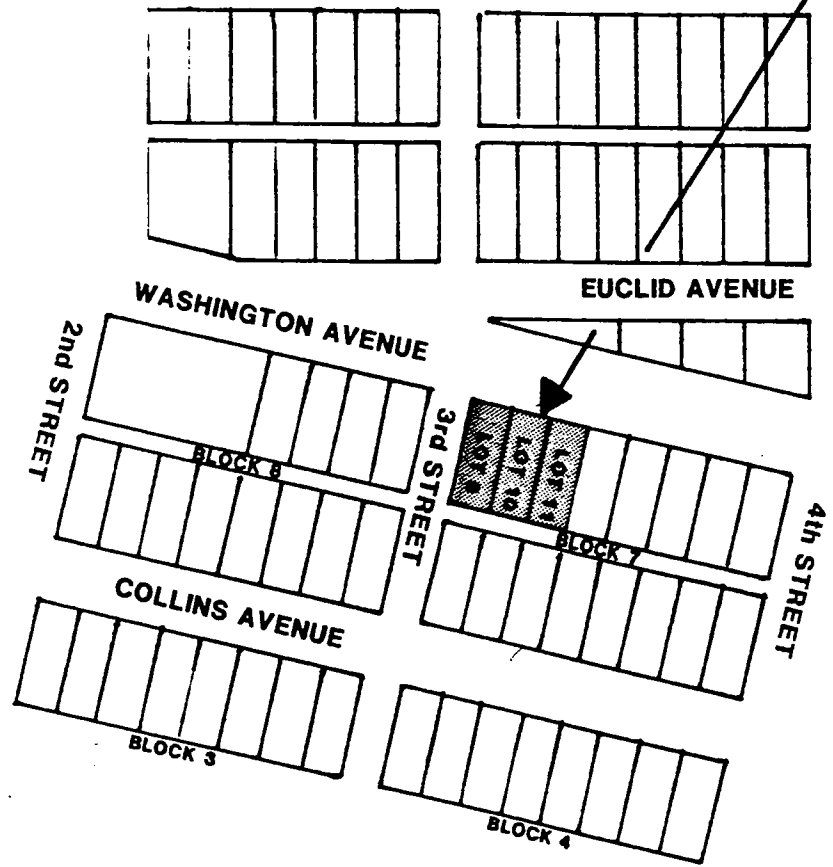
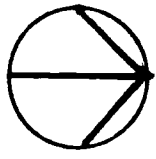
Kirby, Elizabeth A.; "Beth Jacob Social Hall and Congregation"; National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form; United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service; July 28, 1980.

Rodriguez, Ivan (Reporter); "Beth Jacob Social Hall and Congregation"; Florida Master Site File No. 8Da950; State of Florida, Department of State.

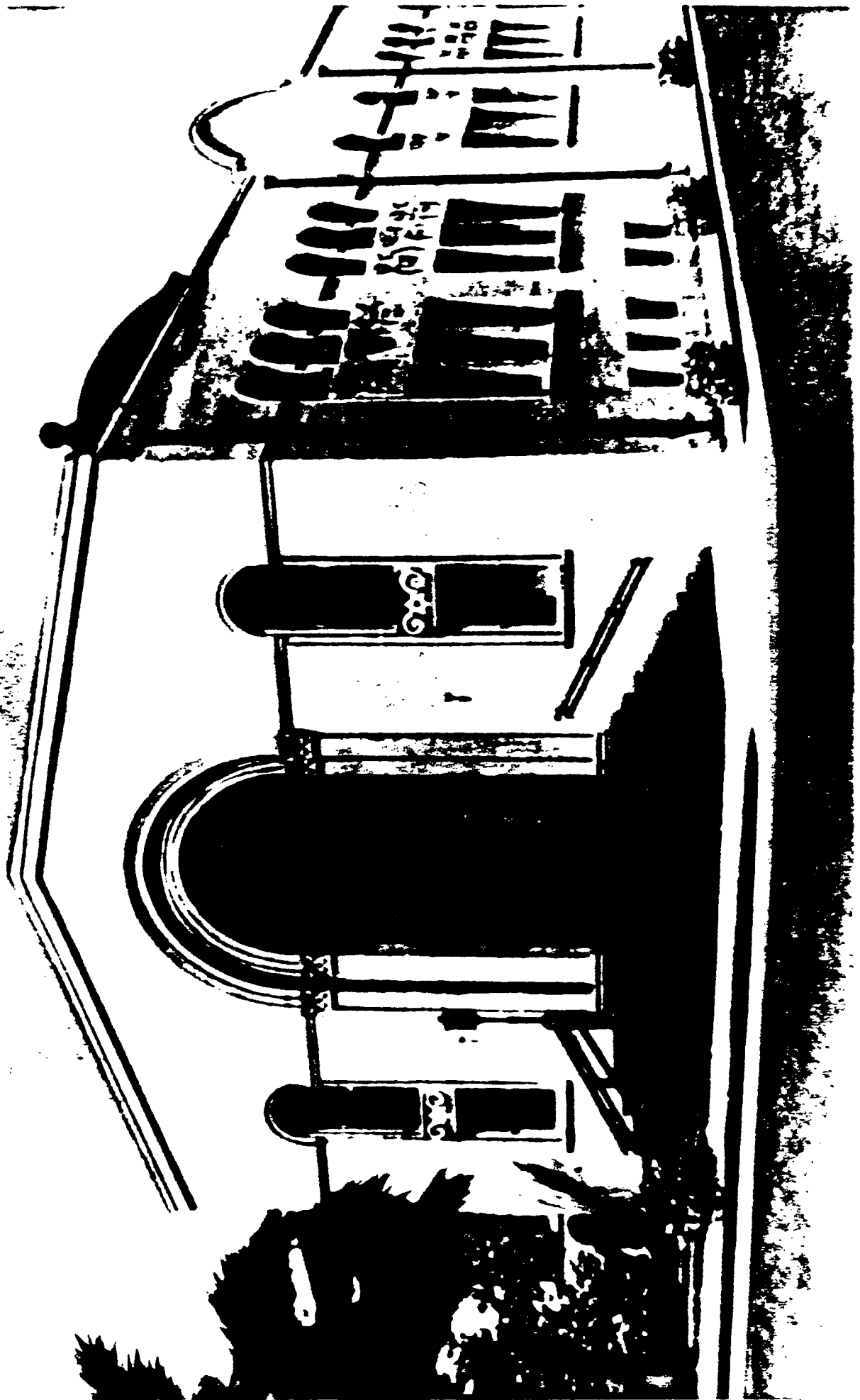




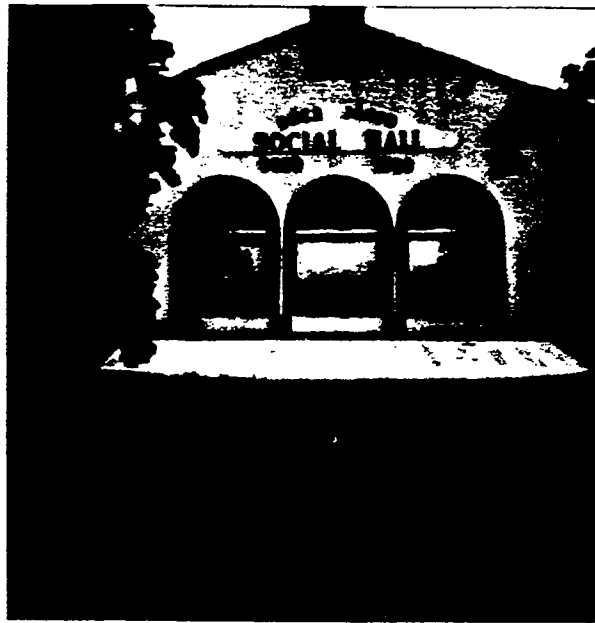
**PROPOSED HISTORIC SITE**



CONGREGATION BETH JACOB, MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA—KM26



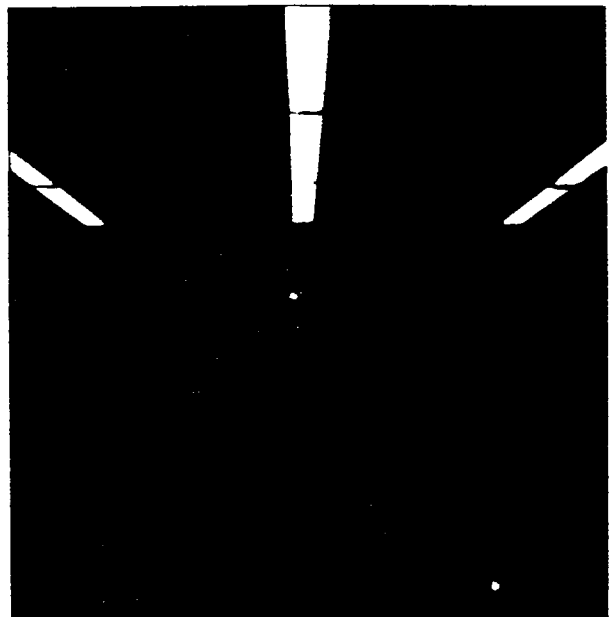
Synagogue Structure c.1940



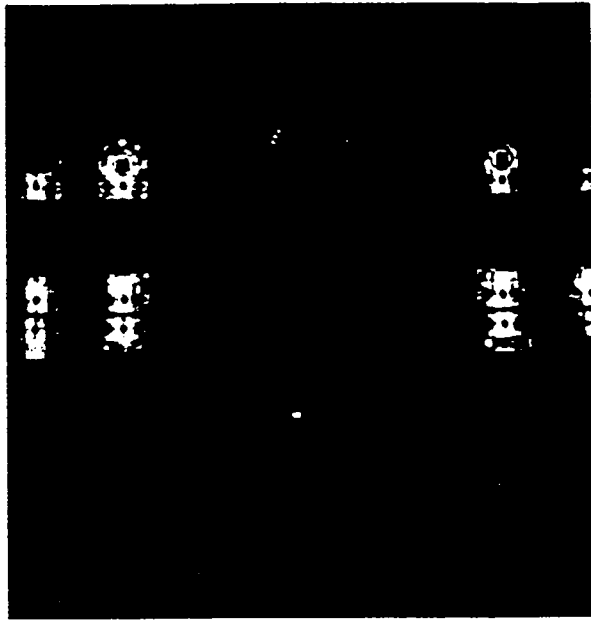
Social Hall- West Elevation



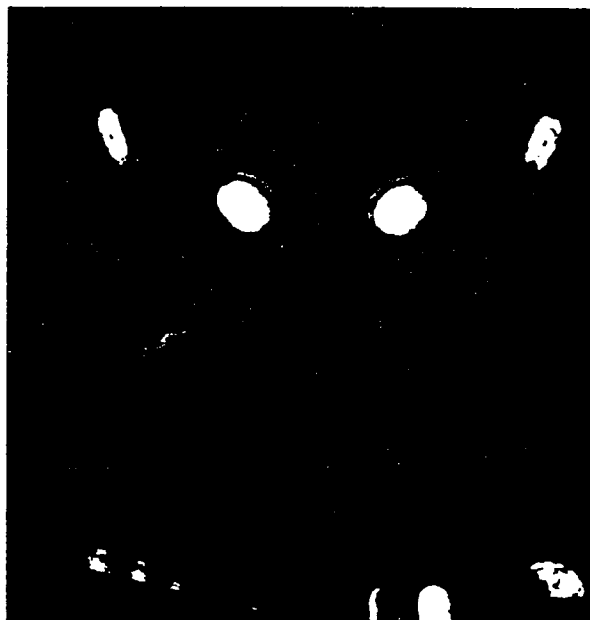
Social Hall- Interior



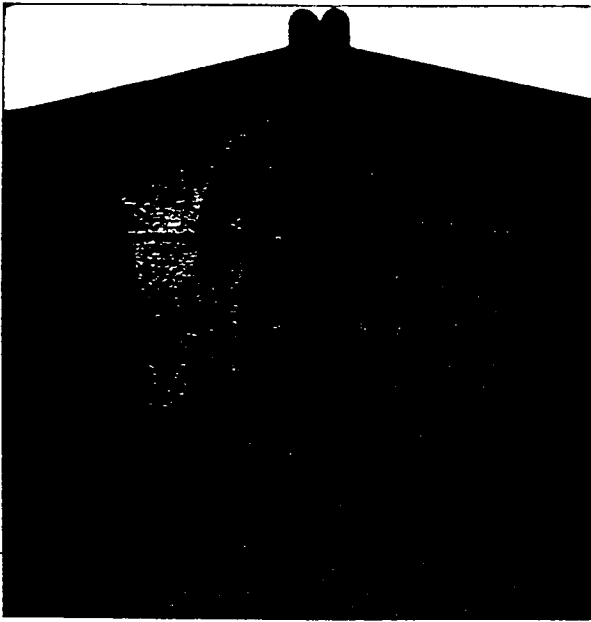
Social Hall- Interior



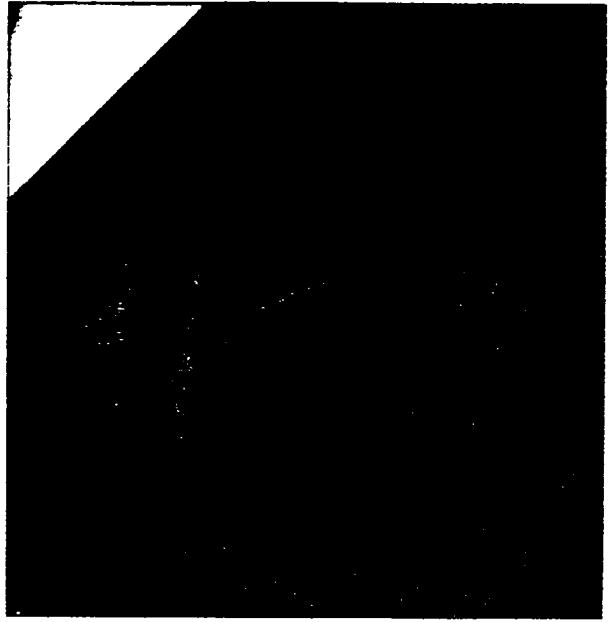
Synagogue- Interior



Synagogue- Interior



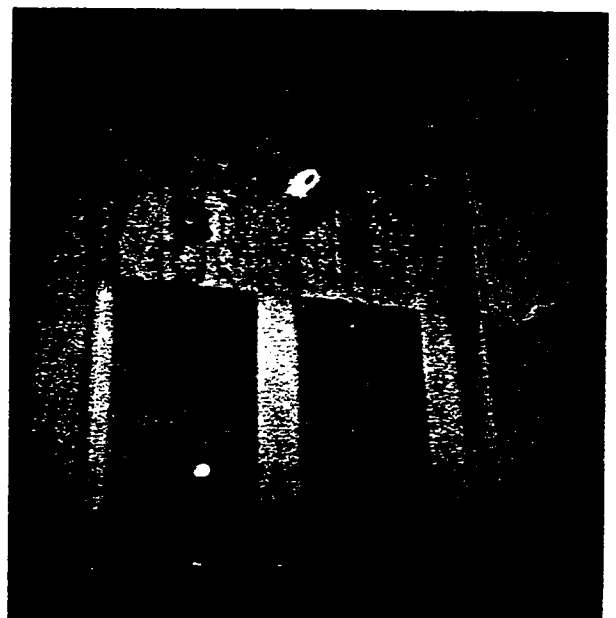
Synagogue- West Elevation



Synagogue- Entry detail



Synagogue- South Elevation



South Elevation- detail