

CENTRAL SYNAGOGUE (CONGREGATION AHAWATH CHESED SHAAR HASHOMAYIM), 652
Lexington Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1871, completed 1872; architect
Henry Fernbach.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1309, Lot 56.

On May 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Central Synagogue and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 29). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Central Synagogue is the oldest Jewish House of Worship in continuous service in the State of New York. Although the plan is Gothic in arrangement, this stone Temple is our finest extant example of the Moorish Revival Style in New York City. Dominating the East elevation are two striking octagonal towers, surmounted by globe-shaped domes enhanced by the patina of age. A prominent design element of this imposing facade, is the large handsomely framed and geometrically constructed circular window, centered in the well decorated front wall which connects the two towers. Three double doors separated by slender columns support the round Moorish arches of the main entrance. The long North elevation wall contains six fine stained glass windows with Moorish arches. This facade is accented with a wide band at the second floor, which continues through the tall windows. Below the cornice, at the roof line, is a row of small, handsome corbelled arches adding richness of detail and an interesting play of shadow to the otherwise stark exterior. The central nave rises one story above the low pitched roof of the aisle and contains six small round (clerestory) windows.

In 1846, Central Synagogue, then known as Ahawath Chesed, was founded on Ludlow Street in lower Manhattan. Part of Central Synagogue, was a Congregation named Shaar Hashomayim, whose charter as a religious institution was granted in 1839. Thus, Central Synagogue may be the oldest Reform Congregation in New York.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Central Synagogue has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Central Synagogue is our finest extant example of the Moorish Revival Style in New York City, that it is boldly distinctive in style, striking in appearance and that it contains unusual architectural details, executed in durable materials and that, as the oldest Jewish House of Worship in continuous service in the State of New York, it is housed in a building worthy of its distinguished history.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Central Synagogue, 652 Lexington Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1309, Lot 56, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.