

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
February 10, 1987; Designation List 187  
LP-1440

ANSHE SLONIM SYNAGOGUE (originally Anshe Chesed Synagogue), 172-176 Norfolk Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1849-50; architect Alexander Saeltzler.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 355, Lot 41.

On June 14, 1983, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Anshe Slonim Synagogue (originally Anshe Chesed Synagogue), and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 15). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission has received several letters in favor of this designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The building at 172-176 Norfolk Street is the oldest surviving structure built as a synagogue in New York City. Constructed in 1849-50, it was commissioned for Congregation Anshe Chesed, the third Jewish congregation to be established in New York. This large and influential congregation was also the second group in New York to embrace the Jewish Reform movement. The first of numerous congregations to locate on New York's Lower East Side, Anshe Chesed employed Alexander Saeltzler, a German architect who also designed the original Astor Library, to create a large and impressive Gothic style synagogue building. Despite the ravages of time to the building, its graceful arches and delicate tracery continue to enhance this historic neighborhood with remembrances of other, more prosperous times.

#### The Jewish Community in New York

The first Jews arrived in the Dutch colony of Nieuw Amsterdam in 1654, coming from Brazil in an abortive attempt to get to Holland.<sup>1</sup> Deceived by a ship's captain and deposited in an unfriendly environment, this small group of travelers had to rely on their endurance and ingenuity to get them through the first winter. By spring, official notification arrived from the Dutch West India Company (which included many influential Dutch Jews among its shareholders), granting them permission to stay, against the will of Peter Stuyvesant. Gradually, the Jews received some rights of citizenship, but these did not include the right to publicly practice their religion. With England's occupation of New York, their political as well as religious

rights were widened. Around 1682<sup>2</sup>, the first Jewish congregation in New York was established, Congregation Shearith Israel or Remnant of Israel.

Their fairly slow population growth shows that Jews did not rush to immigrate to the New World. By the beginning of the eighteenth century there were still fewer than 100 Jews in New York. Those who did come to America however, were creating Jewish population centers in a variety of cities, including Newport, Philadelphia, Richmond, Savannah, and Charleston. Charleston's first congregation was established in 1749, while Newport's was started in the mid-1750s.<sup>3</sup>

Only in 1729, seventy-five years after their first arrival in the colony, did the Jews of New York feel secure enough politically to build their first synagogue building. This small masonry structure 35 feet square and 21 feet high, with tall arched windows and a pyramidal roof, was located on Mill Street (now William Street). This served the congregation until 1818, when population growth necessitated its enlargement. Due to the fall of Napoleon, a large wave of immigrants came to New York between 1815 and 1825, increasing the city's Jewish population significantly.

The Jews who came during this period were mostly from Central Europe and were known as Ashkenazim. The original Jewish settlers were of Spanish origin and were known as Sephardim. While there was no basic divergence of religious belief between the two groups, there was a difference in customs, in rituals, and in pronunciation of the Hebrew language. In the early years of the community, however, it was considered of utmost importance to present a united front to the rest of the world, no matter what differences existed. The Sephardim, as the earlier settlers, were considered the established group, and were somewhat more assimilated and more affluent than the newly arriving Ashkenazim. With the large influx of Ashkenazim in the years between 1815 and 1825, the differences between the groups could no longer be kept under cover. In 1825, after several attempts at reconciliation, a group of German and Polish Jews broke away from Congregation Shearith Israel to form Congregation B'nai Jeshurun. This defection proved to be a turning point for New York's Jewish community as it was followed by many others in rapid succession. The third group to break away was Congregation Anshe Chesed, formed in 1828, by Jews from Germany, Poland and Holland. The next few years saw the formation of Congregation Ohabey Zedeck in 1835, Shaarey Zedeck and Shaarey Hashamayim in 1839, Rodeph Shalom in 1842, Beth Israel, in 1843 and Shaarey Tefilah in 1845. By 1860, there were approximately 27 synagogues in New York, most of which had resulted from divisions within existing synagogues. These new synagogues were formed primarily because of the desire to worship with fellow countrymen using common rituals, but there were also political differences and different interpretations of religious law and customs which led to these divisions. During this period the Jewish population increased tremendously, rising from 400 in 1812, to 10,000 in 1846 to 60,000 in 1880.<sup>4</sup>

#### Anshe Chesed Congregation

Anshe Chesed, the name of the third New York congregation to be established, means in Hebrew, "People of Kindness." The members of this new organization were mostly recent immigrants, extremely traditional in their religious beliefs, and in general, of a low social and economic

status. Most of the membership lived in the area of Chatham Square. In 1828, they rented a room in which to hold services, at 202 1/2 Grand Street, making this the first Jewish congregation to locate on the Lower East Side. By 1836, more space was necessary and they rented a large room over the New York Dispensary located at White and Centre Streets. Further expansion was called for in 1842, and the congregation purchased a small Quaker Meeting House at 38 Henry Street to convert to a synagogue. The congregation continued to grow, and throughout the 1850s it had the largest membership of any synagogue in the country.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of Anshe Chesed in the community was reflected in its leadership during this period. When American congregations were first formed, they were often led by laymen in the congregation. Some congregations hired a professional leader of services, or hazzan (when one was available). It was not until the 1840s, however, that the first ministers with rabbinical ordination began to arrive in this country, all coming from Germany. The first rabbi to settle in New York was Leo Merzbacher who, from 1843 to 1845, served as a preacher and teacher at Anshe Chesed.<sup>6</sup> New York's second rabbi was Dr. Max Lilienthal, arriving here in 1845 from Munich, "with a brilliant reputation established abroad."<sup>7</sup> For two years he was rabbi of three New York German Jewish synagogues, Anshe Chesed, Rodeph Shalom, and Shaarey Hashamayim, alternating the location of his preaching each week. After this group employment ended, he stayed on at Anshe Chesed.

Well-trained hazzanim started arriving in New York in the late 1840s. Among the first of them was Rev. Leon Sternberger of Warsaw who came in 1849, to serve as hazzan at Anshe Chesed. In addition to enhancing the service with his own beautiful voice, Sternberger organized a choir, which gave added prestige to his synagogue.<sup>8</sup>

#### Anshe Chesed and the Reform Movement in America

Congregation Anshe Chesed was the second New York congregation to embrace the Jewish Reform movement. Although this new way of thinking had been gaining popularity in Germany since the early nineteenth century, it was slower to take hold in this country. While a few individuals in various communities had advocated reform, the native movement in America started in Charleston, around 1824. Not much happened however, until the arrival in the 1830s of a German-Jewish minister, which sparked the movement toward change.<sup>9</sup>

In New York, in 1844, a group calling itself the "Cultus Society" was formed to promote changes in the form of Jewish worship. There was a desire "to permit the Jews 'to occupy a position of greater respect among our fellow-citizens,' to enable Jews to worship with greater devotion, and, finally, to attach to themselves the rising generation of young people."<sup>10</sup> By 1845, this group became Congregation Emanu-El, the first Reform congregation in New York, changes in the ritual and customs came very slowly. Most of the old traditions were kept, but a choir was introduced, as well as a few German hymns and an English (or German) sermon for the purpose of educating the laity about Jewish issues. The main purpose of these changes was to create a more orderly and decorous service, along the lines of Christian worship. By 1847, when Emanu-El moved to new quarters,

more drastic reforms were introduced and during the next fifteen years major changes took place in this congregation. These modifications allowed men and women to sit together during the service, eliminated the need for men to wear hats and prayer shawls, and abandoned traditional dietary laws, among others.<sup>11</sup>

After 1847, when Emanu-El started moving more forcefully toward reform, its influence in the Jewish community grew. Even though Anshe Chesed remained the largest Jewish congregation in New York during the 1850s, it continued to lose members to Emanu-El. In order to keep its large and wealthy membership, the leadership of Anshe Chesed felt that it was necessary to give in to certain demands for reform. With the opening of its new building on Norfolk Street, certain changes were introduced, making it officially the second congregation in New York to be classified as Reform. Traditionally, the hazzan stood in the center of the congregants during the service, with the membership arrayed to either side of him. At the new Anshe Chesed building the hazzan's desk was in front of his congregation and he turned to face the membership. In addition, a choir composed of both men and women was introduced to "beautify" the service. However, men and women still sat in different locations as indicated by the presence of the women's gallery in the Norfolk Street building. Nonetheless, changes came very slowly and with some difficulty to this congregation. There was a faction that wanted more rapid movement toward reform, and others, like Dr. Jonah Bondy who was hired as rabbi in 1858, who wanted only enough change to keep Judaism alive in the modern world.<sup>12</sup> Later, in 1865, the current rabbi Dr. Mielziner, tried to institute more reforms but conservative members of the congregation blocked these moves with court intervention. It was not until 1869 that the congregation finally took major steps toward reform by adopting the use of an organ and instituting family pews, with everyone sitting together.<sup>13</sup>

Anshe Chesed, through its course of gradual and mild reforms, remained a vibrant congregation in its Norfolk Street synagogue until 1874. At that time Congregation Anshe Chesed merged with another group, Adas Jeshurun to form Temple Beth El. This new congregation built its own synagogue at Lexington Avenue and 63rd Street, as its membership had, by that time, generally left the Lower East Side. In 1891, they built a larger and more imposing edifice on Fifth Avenue and 76th Street. The rivalry between Anshe Chesed and Temple Emanu-El was finally settled in 1927 when Temple Beth El became a part of Temple Emanu-El, a congregation which is one of the largest in the world today.

#### Anshe Chesed's Norfolk Street Synagogue

Membership increased steadily after Anshe Chesed moved to its building on Henry Street in 1842, creating continuous space problems. Well before the congregation moved to the Norfolk Street building, their religious school had to be housed in a separate building on Clinton Street. Discussions of possible building sites were taking place among the board of trustees of the congregation by 1848.<sup>14</sup> Finally, in April 1849, Congregation Anshe Chesed purchased three lots on the east side of Norfolk Street, between Stanton and Houston Streets, for \$10,500 for their new synagogue building. Ironically, considering his less than enthusiastic welcome for the Jews

when they first arrived on these shores, these lots on Norfolk Street were originally part of the estate of Peter Stuyvesant.<sup>15</sup>

Soon after the purchase, architects Blesch & Eidlitz were engaged to make some preliminary plans and drawings for the new building. However, by February 1849, other architects were being considered to draw up the final plans, notably Alexander Saeltzer. During a vote which occurred in February 1849, Saeltzer won the commission, perhaps because of a lower bid.<sup>16</sup>

The records of the Board of Trustees of Congregation Anshe Chesed indicate that they were deeply involved in the planning process for the new synagogue.<sup>17</sup> Their concerns ranged from a gas lighting fixture to iron shutters for the casement windows. Existing records show nothing, however, of what direction Saeltzer received from the board as to the style of the building's design. The architect was required to be present at numerous meetings, for consultation and discussion. Throughout the planning process, Saeltzer was called on to find ways of reducing costs (a constant problem for the congregation).

Anshe Chesed's new building on Norfolk Street was formally opened and consecrated on May 16, 1850, with much ceremony. Invited guests included the mayor of New York, as well as several members of the Common Council and numerous Christian clergymen. The Jewish, as well as the lay press, gave the new building much praise. The sanctuary, seating 700 men on the ground floor and 500 in the women's gallery was, at the time, the largest in New York.

The building's Gothic Revival style was the first and among the more elaborate of numerous examples of this style to be built in New York over the next several years. A contemporary description noted that the German Gothic style in which it was built was new to New York, but it was common "in the country from which it had received its denomination," with "many of the details of this erection being copied from the world-renowned Cathedral of Cologne."<sup>18</sup> The comparison noted in the latter comment is somewhat dubious and may be based on the fact that the building's architect was German.

#### Synagogue Design

Synagogues, throughout the world and over time, have generally taken on architectural features and styles similar to other ecclesiastical buildings in the countries where they are located. There is a Romanesque synagogue in Worms which dates to c.1100 and a Gothic one in Prague which is from the 12th or 13th century. In St. Petersburg, there is a synagogue which looks like a Russian Greek Church, while in Jerusalem, a synagogue resembles a mosque. The Sephardic synagogue in Amsterdam, built between 1671 and 1675, adapted a classical basilica form from Protestant church architecture, as did the Temple at Charenton, near Paris. The Great Synagogue of London, built in 1790, shows the influence of Sir Christopher Wren in its form, embellished by decoration in the style of the Adam brothers. As one authority noted, "The fact is, there is no distinctly Jewish architecture—it is eclectic and it varies with the environment."<sup>19</sup>

There were times, during the less than happy periods in Jewish history, when there was an intentional disregard for the external appearance of a synagogue. In European ghettos, synagogues were often small, unobtrusive buildings facing interior courtyards, for their proprietors did not want them to stand out. The religious requirements for synagogue design, as well as any architectural and artistic exuberance, centered on the interior rather than the exterior of the building. Before the nineteenth century, even in places and periods when Jews enjoyed a comparative freedom, there was a tendency to "suppress any features that might distinguish them [their houses of worship] from neighboring houses, and to render them as inconspicuous as possible."<sup>20</sup> It was only more recently, from the nineteenth century onward, when Jews felt more secure and less persecuted, that they dared to make their religious buildings more obvious and specific architectural styles became important.

### Synagogue Design in America

In 1849, when the Norfolk Street synagogue was being designed, there were only a handful of other buildings to provide a precedent for what a synagogue should look like in this country. Congregations often met in rented rooms, or took over buildings which had been constructed as churches. Those buildings that were built as synagogues prior to this one were generally simple structures, usually designed to follow the prevailing styles of the day in the rest of the community. The earliest synagogues were, of course, the simplest. The original 1729 Mill Street Synagogue for Shearith Israel in New York was a square masonry building with round-arched windows and a pyramidal roof. In 1817-18 this building was enlarged to measure 35 by 58 feet and its brick facades were covered with stucco but it remained a simple, essentially style-less building. The Touro Synagogue, built in 1762-63 in Newport, Rhode Island, was a simple, Georgian design, with two tiers of round-arched windows separated by a belt course, a hipped roof and a small entrance portico supported on Ionic columns. The first synagogue for the Beth Elohim congregation in Charleston, South Carolina, was built in 1794 and was in the style of a typical Georgian church with a pitched roof crowned by a two-tiered octagonal lantern.<sup>21</sup>

During the nineteenth century, when numerous architectural styles became popular and different revival styles became acceptable for different types of buildings, synagogues followed this trend. Early in the century, when excavations and research brought Greek Revival forms and the ideals they represented to America, some communities decided to incorporate this style in their synagogue designs. In 1826, New York's second congregation, B'nai Jeshurun, acquired a former church building, built in 1824. Basically a Greek Revival style structure with a portico supported by four columns, its pitched roof was surmounted by a square, turreted Gothic steeple. Although the congregation did not build this building itself, it was content to use the structure in the form in which it was acquired. Only the inside was renovated to conform to the requirements of the Jewish religion.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Congregation Shearith Israel, not to be outdone by the newer B'nai Jeshurun, decided to move to a "more eligible situation." Their larger masonry building in the Greek Revival style was dedicated in 1834 on Crosby Street.<sup>23</sup> In Cincinnati, another Greek Revival style synagogue was constructed in 1836 for Congregation Bene Israel. This one had a set of stone steps leading to a portico supported by Doric columns. When

Charleston's first synagogue was destroyed by fire in 1841, it was replaced by a classical Greek temple with a "six-column Theseum portico" and a low double-pitched roof, designed by Cyrus Warner.<sup>24</sup>

In Baltimore, the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, incorporated in 1830, dedicated their own Greek Revival style synagogue in 1845. This American synagogue was the first to use the Shield of David (or six-pointed Star of David), which appeared here in a circular window over the ark, as well as in two smaller circular windows on the front facade. This symbol, which has ancient associations with Greece and Spain, as well as with Islamic and Christian art of the Middle Ages, was first definitely identified as a Mogen David or Shield of David on the flag of the Jewish community of Prague, displayed in 1527.<sup>25</sup> Since that time it has become a popular Jewish symbol, appearing on all types of decorative and ceremonial Jewish objects.

The Romanesque Revival style was represented by a number of synagogues built in the 1840s and 1850s, including the Har Sinai synagogue in Baltimore (1846) and, in New York, the Wooster Street synagogue for Congregation Shaarey Tefila, built in 1847 by architects Blesch & Eidlitz.<sup>26</sup>

Synagogues were even built in the Egyptian Revival style. In Philadelphia, William Strickland designed a building in 1825 for Congregation Mikveh Israel with battered window and door frames, among other Egyptian motifs. In 1849, Thomas U. Walter, Strickland's student, designed his own version of the Egyptian Revival for Congregation Beth Israel.<sup>27</sup>

Later in the century, other popular architectural styles were adopted by synagogue architects and adapted to fit the special needs of these buildings. At one point Moorish became a popular style since it derived from the East, from the same general location as the Jews. Many Moorish synagogues were designed by gentiles in what they perceived as the "correct" synagogue style.<sup>28</sup>

Gothic forms were also popular for synagogue buildings, at first glance an unlikely trend since Gothic is so closely associated with Christianity. So many Jewish congregations had, however, in expanding to new quarters, taken over old church buildings, changing only the interior spaces, that they had quite gotten used to the style and it was as acceptable as any other in their eyes.<sup>29</sup> B'nai Yeshurun, an Orthodox congregation in Cincinnati, was the first actually to build a Gothic style synagogue building. Their house of worship, built in 1848, was a simple squarish structure which was given a Gothic cast through the use of wall buttresses and pointed side portals. San Francisco's first two synagogues, both constructed in 1844, had Gothic elements consisting of pointed arches, buttresses and pinnacles.<sup>30</sup>

Thus when the Anshe Chesed congregation built its Gothic structure on Norfolk Street, there was nothing amiss. In fact, the contemporary press described the new building in glowing terms, noting that, the building "evinces the progressive feeling of the age; and adds yet another proof to the many heretofore shown of the irrepressible desire of the people of Israel to raise and dedicate fanes [sic] worthy of the God they worship."<sup>31</sup>

An unusual architectural element in this building was its clearly differentiated side towers, which here received a more fully developed treatment than had been seen before. In previous synagogues, the stairwells used to reach the women's galleries had been integrated into the corners or some other part of the building. At Anshe Chesed they are fully expressed as projecting towers, flanking the main section of the building.<sup>32</sup> This separate, articulated stair hall was to become a standard element in synagogues of many styles in the following years. At Anshe Chesed, these twin towers were originally topped by concave pyramidal roofs crowned by finials, giving exceptional height to the building. This idea was in accordance with Jewish law which prescribed that the synagogue building be the highest structure in the town. Through the years, this principle could not always be adhered to, but attempts were made to do so whenever possible.

#### Alexander Saeltzer

The architect who designed this Norfolk Street building, Alexander Saeltzer, first appeared in New York directories in 1844, listed with Edward Saeltzer.<sup>33</sup> Contemporary accounts note that Alexander was from Berlin. Edward Saeltzer, however, was born in Eisenach, Germany and studied with Frederich von Gartner in Munich.<sup>34</sup> Beyond this, little is known of Saeltzer's background. It is possible that he was also trained in Germany, or that his relative Edward was the trained member of the team and he trained Alexander. Between 1850 and 1879, Saeltzer's name appears without Edward in the New York directories, with a few gaps and numerous changes of addresses. There are also reports that he helped design the Mills house in Millbrae, California, in 1869-70 with Frederick Diaper.<sup>35</sup> Since there is a gap in the directory listings under Saeltzer's name between 1867 and 1872, this relocation seems possible.

Despite the lack of knowledge about him, Saeltzer must have been a respected architect, since he won several large and important commissions, and obviously had enough work to support himself for many years. Besides this synagogue building, Saeltzer won the competition to design the Astor Library on Lafayette Street (now the Public Theatre) in 1851.<sup>36</sup> This building has been called "one of the purest examples of Rundbogenstil architecture in America."<sup>37</sup> Saeltzer was also responsible for the design of the Academy of Music on Irving Place (1854).<sup>38</sup>

#### Later History of the Norfolk Street Building

When Anshe Chesed no longer needed the building on Norfolk Street, it was sold to Congregation Shaari Rachmim.<sup>39</sup> This group maintained ownership from 1873 until 1886 when it sold the building to the First Hungarian Congregation Oheb Zedek.<sup>40</sup> This congregation later moved to the Upper West Side and sold the building, in 1921, to Congregation Sheveth Achim Anshe Slonim which was the last Jewish congregation to occupy it.<sup>41</sup> With dwindling membership and financial resources, as well as a drastically different neighborhood, this congregation abandoned the synagogue in 1974. Vandals and the effects of time and weather have taken their toll on the building, but it is presently being used again, this time as an artist's workspace, and it continues to provide a sense of history and grace to the neighborhood.



### Description

The Anshe Chesed synagogue is 70 feet wide on Norfolk Street and 95 feet deep. Built of brick and covered with stucco, the tripartite front facade is all that is visible from the street. The building is constructed on a raised brick basement with a brownstone water table separating it from the rest of the building.

Two projecting, buttressed, square towers flank the central section. Originally three stories high and capped by concave pyramidal roofs, these towers have been truncated above the second story. They are pierced by a tall lancet window at each floor level. These windows have been filled with cinder block, but the remains of trefoil tracery and moldings surround the original openings. A small, modern brick guard house has been built in front of the southernmost tower.

A broad flight of stairs, reaching across the front from one tower to the other, leads up to the recessed central section. Here three doors on the first floor are surmounted by three windows on the second story. All openings are topped by pointed arches; the center arch is more elaborate than those on the sides. The original paneled doors with their arched, glass overdoors have been sealed. What remains visible are parts of the moldings around the doors showing engaged columns with foliate capitals. Emphasis on the larger, center door has been created by crowning it with a large triangular-shaped molding which reaches up almost to the second floor level. Flanked by thin pinnacles, this triangular area is embellished by a large Mogen David or Shield of David which shows sockets where electric lights once shone. The windows of the second story echo the door openings below: a large, central window is flanked by two smaller ones. Each pointed-arch opening is topped by a concave triangular molding finished by pinnacles. The windows, which once carried delicate tracery with trefoil designs, have been broken or sealed.

The central section of the building is topped by a pointed gable which carries the remains of a foliate cornice. Piercing the cornice and flanking the top point of the molding above the central window are two small round windows.

### Conclusion

The Gothic style building at 172-176 Norfolk Street remains as New York's oldest extant synagogue building, having been in use for religious purposes for 124 years. Constructed in 1849-50 for the third established Jewish congregation in New York, Congregation Anshe Chesed, this building housed New York's largest congregation as it evolved into the second group in this city to embrace the Reform movement. With Anshe Chesed's move uptown, the building housed several more Jewish congregations before its abandonment in 1974. Now in use for a non-religious purpose, the building serves as a reminder of the active and vibrant Jewish community which once filled the streets of New York's Lower East Side.

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## NOTES

1. This brief, early history of New York's Jews was compiled from: Gerald Wolfe, The Synagogues of New York 's Lower East Side (New York: Washington Mews Books, 1978), pp.4-15, "New York City," in The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, 8 (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969), pp177-180, Hyman B. Grinstein, The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654-1860 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945),pp -57, "New York City," in Encyclopedia Judaica, 12 (Jerusalem: Encyclopedia Judaica, 1971), pp.1062-1075, and Dorothy Dubin, Extant Manhattan Synagogues Organized Before the Civil War, typescript Master's thesis for Historic Preservation Program, Columbia University, 1983.
2. Wolfe says this was the date while the Encyclopedia Judaica, 12, p.1063 says the congregation was organized in 1695.
3. Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, 15, p.591, and 5, p.356.
4. The Jewish Communal Register of New York City, 1917-1918 (New York: Kehillah [Jewish Community] of New York City, 1918), pp.87-88.
5. Grinstein, p.51.
6. Grinstein, pp.89-90.
7. Max J. Kohler, "The German Jewish Migration to America," in Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, 9 (1901), p.99.
8. Grinstein, p.95.
9. Grinstein, p.353.
10. Grinstein, pp.354.
11. Grinstein, pp.354-359.
12. Grinstein, pp.363-365.
13. "History of Beth El Congregation," in The American Hebrew, 48 (September 18, 1891), p.158.
14. Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Congregation Anshe Chesed, 1848-1850, in the possession of Temple Emanu-El, New York.
15. Liber 519, p.208.
16. There are two sets of handwritten records from Congregation Anshe Chesed dating from this period, both in the archives of Temple Emanu-El. An English version of the minutes of the Board of Trustees notes a payment of \$25 to Blesch & Eidlitz on July 19, 1849 for plans and drawings for the new synagogue. A second set of records is handwritten in German script and is titled Protokoll Buch, covering

the period 12 November 1848 to 6 July 1850. This is the record of the "Committee of 25 Men" which seems to have been the arena for the more important decisions of the congregation. However, because it is written in the German "Fraktur" script (not printed), the book is difficult to read and understand and the conclusions made here are open to correction.

17. Minutes of the Board of Trustees
18. The Great Metropolis or New York Almanac for 1850, (New York: H. Wilson, 1850), p.66.
19. Dr. Abraham S. Isaacs, "The Story of the Synagogue," in The Menorah 42 (March, 1907), pp.117-123.
20. William G. Tachau, "The Architecture of the Synagogue," in The American Jewish Yearbook 5687, 28 (September 9, 1926-September 26, 1927), p.183.
21. Rachel Wischnitzer, Synagogue Architecture in the United States (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), p.20.
22. Wischnitzer, p.26.
23. Wischnitzer, p.29.
24. Wischnitzer, pp.33-39.
25. Wischnitzer, pp.39-41.
26. Wischnitzer, pp.42-43.
27. Wischnitzer, pp.28-31, p.46.
28. Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein, "The Problem of Synagogue Architecture," in Commentary, 3 (March, 1947), pp.233-241. .
29. Two Hundred Years of American Synagogue Architecture, an exhibit at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, (Waltham, Mass.: The American Jewish Historical Society, 1976), p.12.
30. Wischnitzer, pp.50-52.
31. "The New Synagogue, Norfolk Street, New York," in The Asmonean (May 3, 1850), p.12, c.3.
32. Wischnitzer, p.52.
33. Dennis Steadman Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City 1840-1900,(NewYork: Commisttee for the Preservation of Architectural Records,1979), pp.66-67.
34. Kathleen Curran, "The Rundbogenstil and the Romanesque Revival in Germany and Their Effleuresence in America, circa 1844-1864," Doctoral dissertation, University of Delaware, 1986.

35. This information was supplied by Joy Kestenbaum who has made a study of Saeltzer, as yet unpublished.
36. I. N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island 1498-1909, 5 (New York: Arno Press, 1967), p.1818.
37. Curran, p.4.
38. Wischnitzer, p.53.
39. Liber 1244, p.535.
40. Liber 1972, p.51.
41. Liber 3229, p.191.

## 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 Anshe Slonim Synagogue (originally Anshe Chesed) 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, the Anshe Slonim Synagogue building at 172-176 Norfolk Street, constructed in 1849-50, is the oldest surviving synagogue building in New York City; that this building was among the earliest structures built for use as a synagogue in New York; that it was built for New York's third established Jewish congregation, Anshe Chesed; that this congregation was influential in New York's Jewish community and had the largest membership of any such group in New York during the 1850s; that it was the second congregation in New York to embrace the Jewish Reform movement; that this large, Gothic-style building was designed by the German architect Alexander Saeltzer, who designed other important buildings in New York, including the original Astor Library; that the use of the Gothic style for this building was reflective of the eclectic architectural styles common to other nineteenth century buildings in America.

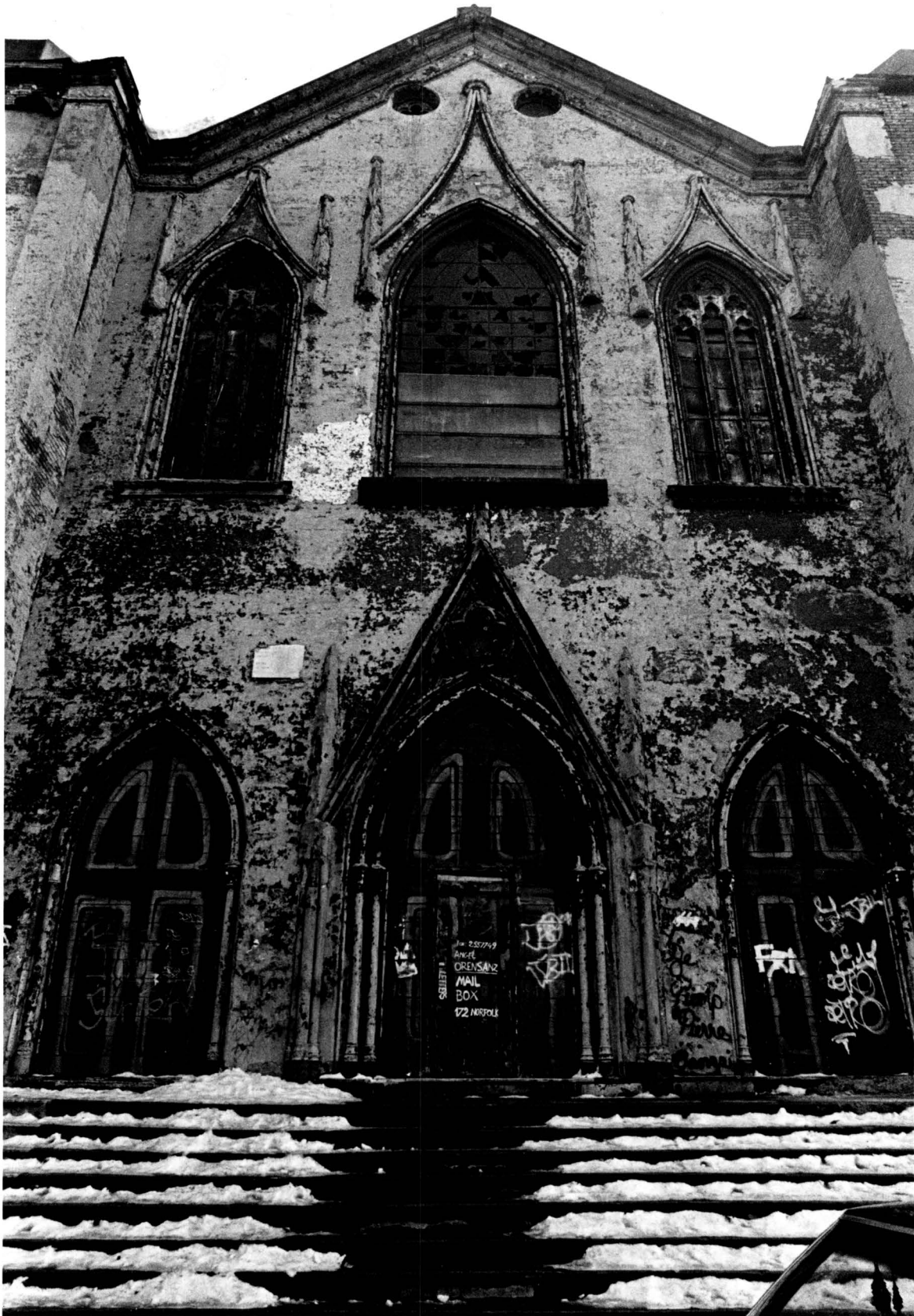
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Anshe Slonim Synagogue, 172-176 Norfolk Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 355, Lot 41, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ANSHE SLONIM SYNAGOGUE  
Front Facade



ANSHE SLONIM SYNAGOGUE

172-176 Norfolk Street

Manhattan

Built: 1849-50

Architect:

Alexander Saeltzer

Photo by:  
Carl Forster, 1987



ANSHE SLONIM SYNAGOGUE

Window Detail