

ADDRESS: 3135-49 W MONTGOMERY AVE

Proposal: Construct 14 townhouses

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: 3135-49 Montgomery Ave LLC

Applicant: Carey Jackson Yonce, CANNO Design

History: 1907; Temple Beth Israel; Sauer & Hahn; Demolished after roof collapse in 2020

Individual Designation: 7/14/1993

District Designation: None

Staff Contact: Jon Farnham, jon.farnham@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to construct 14 townhouses on a vacant site. The Historical Commission designated the property in July 1993 for the synagogue building that stood on the site. The synagogue, Temple Beth Israel, was designed by the architectural firm of Sauer & Hahn and completed in 1907. The large domed roof of the building collapsed in 2020. The Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I) declared the building Imminently Dangerous on 1 August 2020 and then demolished the building to abate the public safety hazard in late 2020. At the time, L&I reported to the Historical Commission that the framing of the collapsed roof was pushing outward on the exterior walls of the synagogue along Morris Street and Montgomery Avenue and the remaining building needed to be demolished immediately in the interest of public safety. Since the demolition, the staff suggested that the property owner apply to have the designation of the site rescinded because the resource has been lost but the owner has not submitted such an application to date. The application must be reviewed because the site remains designated, but there are no historic resources at the site for the Commission to protect.

The application proposes to construct 14 townhouses on the empty lot. The Historical Commission and advisory Architectural Committee are charged with applying the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties to building permit applications. The Standards assert that new construction should be compatible with the site and its environment. Given that no historic resources exist at the site and that the site is not in a historic district listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, there is no basis for the Historical Commission and Architectural Committee to assess the compatibility of the proposed new townhouses with the site and its environment. The Historical Commission should decline to review the application on its merits and simply approve it as submitted.

SCOPE OF WORK:

- Construct 14 townhouses.

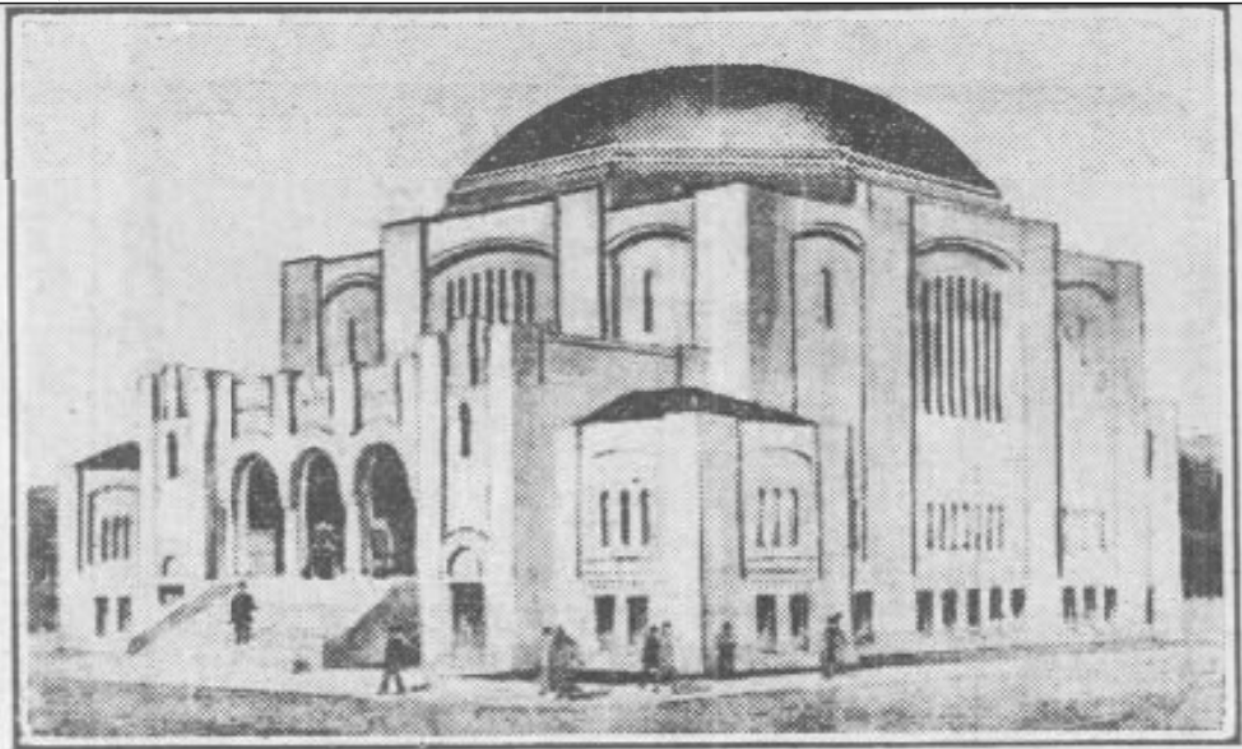
STANDARDS FOR REVIEW:

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines include:

- *Standard 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*
 - The Historical Commission and Architectural Committee have no basis for judging the differentiation and compatibility of the townhouses with their site and environment because no historic resources have been identified at the site or in its environment.

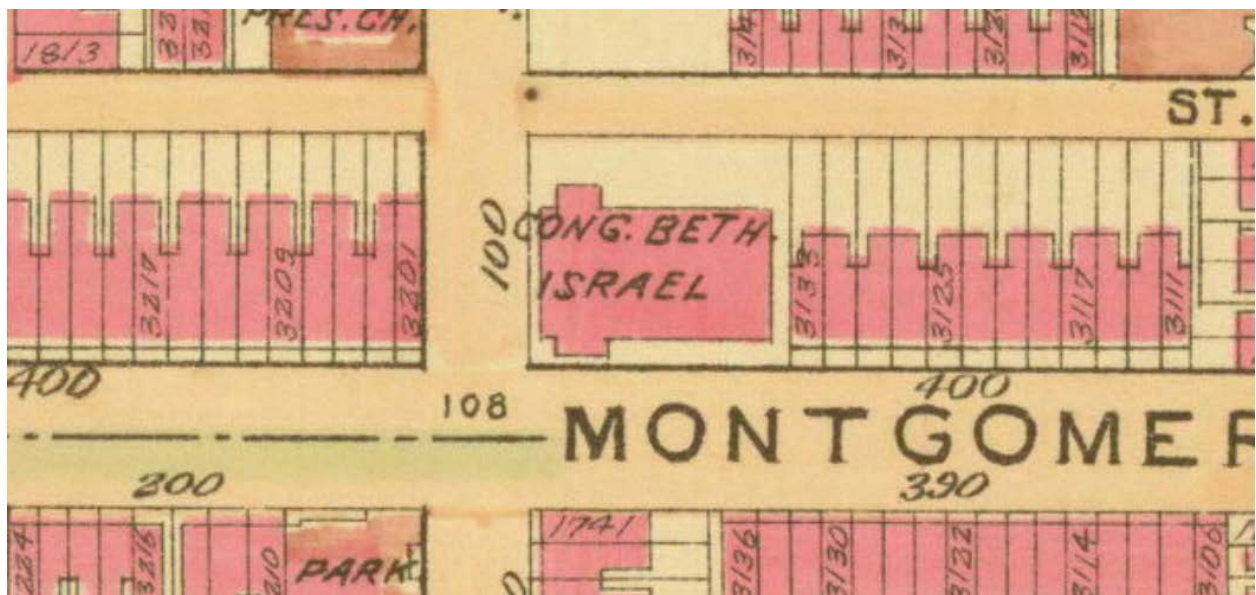
STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Approval.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION:

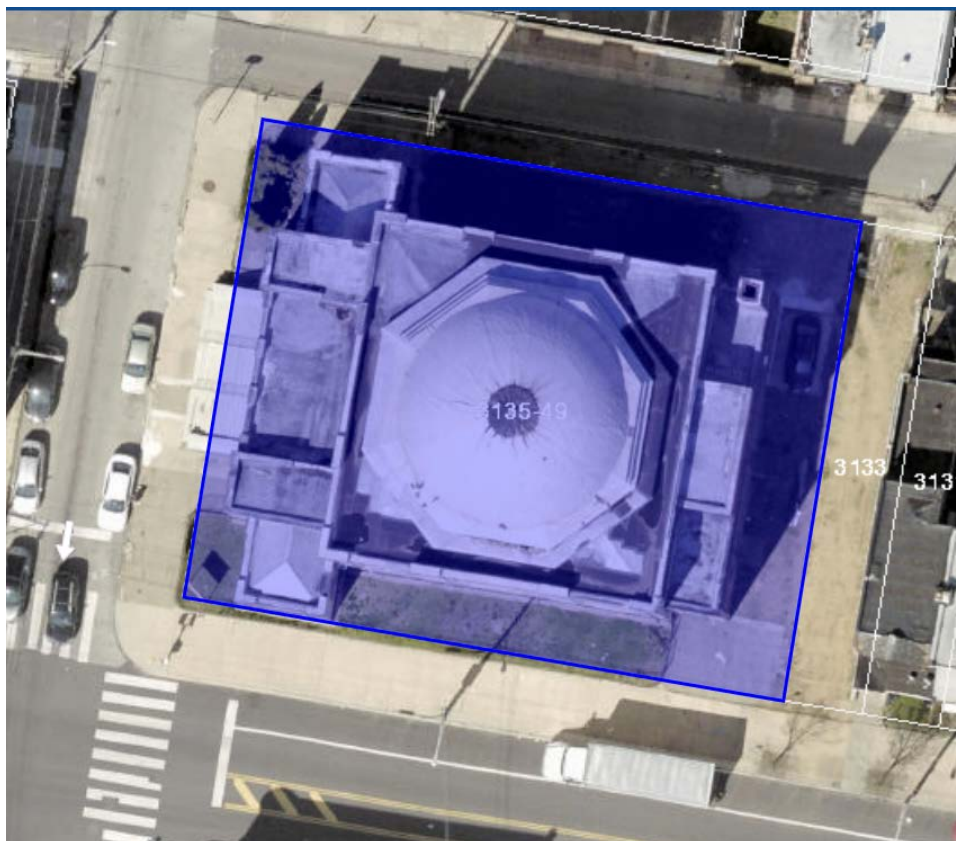


NEW BETH ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE

Inquirer, May 4, 1907



G.W. Bromley and Co., Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1910.



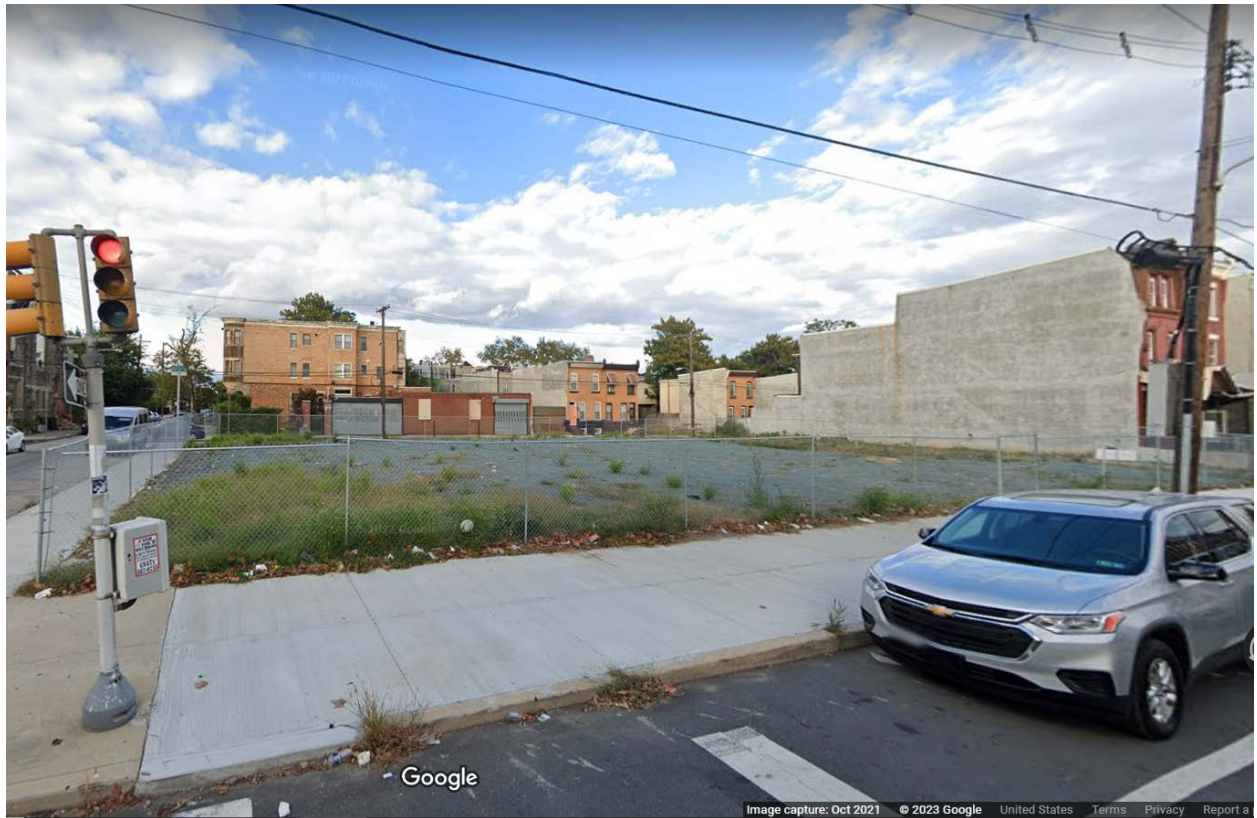
Aerial photograph showing the site with the building intact, 2020.



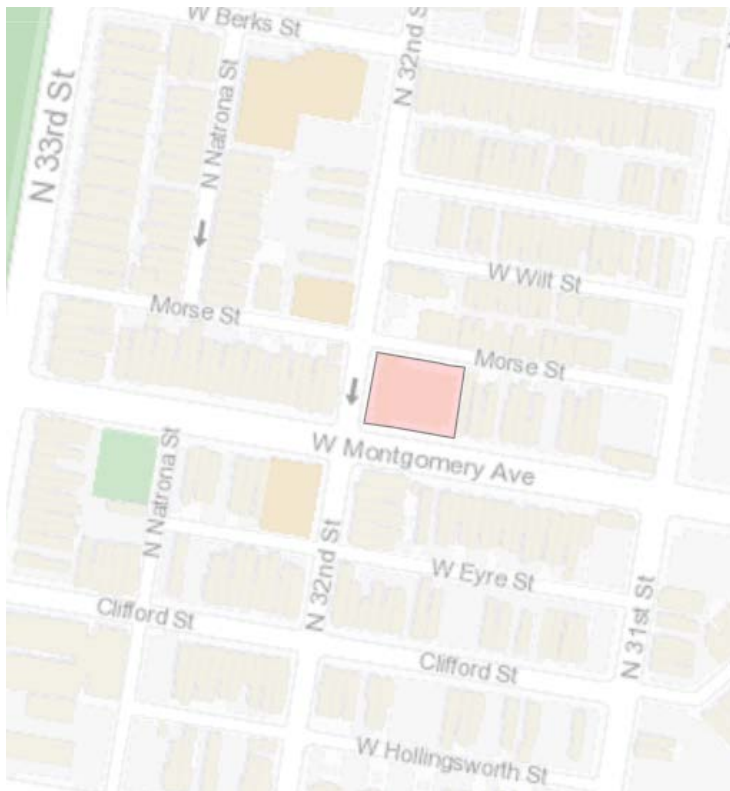
Aerial photograph showing the site cleared in 2022.



L&I photographs showing dome collapsed into the interior.



Cleared site at 3135-49 W. Montgomery Avenue in October 2021.



Map with properties listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places shown in pink.

3135-49 W. Montgomery Ave
Philadelphia Historical Commission
February 2023/March 2023

CANN O design

109 SOUTH 13TH STREET 2ND FLR PHILADELPHIA PA 19107 . www.CANNODESIGN.COM . 215.977.7075

February 2nd, 2023

Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

RE: 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue

Members of the Staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission,

Please find enclosed our proposal for the new construction of (14) single-family townhomes at 3135 West Montgomery Avenue. The property owner is 3135-49 Montgomery Ave LLC.

The site was formerly home to the Beth Israel Temple, built circa 1909 and designed by Frank Hahn. The structure was heavily damaged due to a collapse of its large signature dome. As a result of the collapse, the temple was approved to be demolished in 2019. The site is currently fully cleared and vacant.

We are proposing the construction of (14) single-family townhomes on the site. The homes are to be (3) stories, with a single shared drive aisle and will each have a garage with space for (2) cars. We have received zoning approval for the project at this point in time, including the approval of variances to the dimensional standards of the zoning code, and the inclusion of roof access structures. These structures are provided for maintenance access only and would not be immediately visible from the immediate surrounding streets as they are pulled in from the lot lines and slope toward the center of the lot.

In the design of the homes and particularly their primary facades, we have been sensitive to the material fabric of the adjacent homes in the neighborhood. We are proposing coursed cast stone at the ground floor, with limestone heads and sills, black window frames throughout and red brick at the upper floors. The cast stone creates a distinguished street presence and provides an aesthetic break on the facades that aligns with porch-line along the street. Note that these homes are built to the property line.

We look forward to your review of our proposal.

Sincerely,

Carey Jackson Yonce

Principal
carey@cannodesign.com

3135 WEST MONTGOMERY AVENUE

ZONING PERMITS IN HAND
(14) SINGLE FAMILY TOWNHOMES
(3) STORIES
(2) CAR PARKING PER HOME
SHARED DRIVE AISLE
PRIVATE REAR DECKS





Location of site at the former location of the Beth Israel Temple.



Beth Israel Temple, prior to its 2019 demolition following a substantial roof collapse.



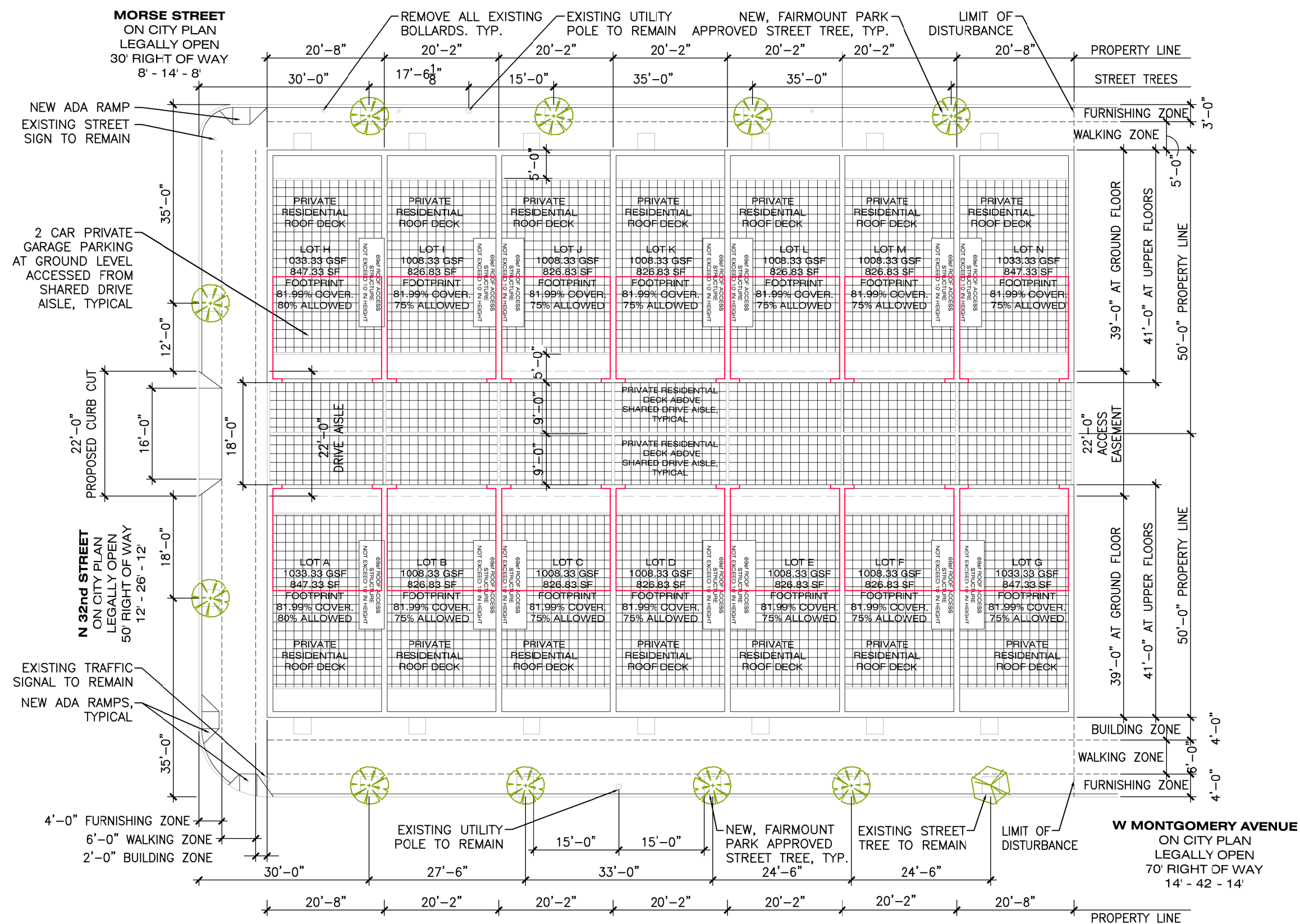
The site in 2022 following the demolition of the Temple and clearing of the site.
From the corner of North 32nd Street and Montgomery Avenue.



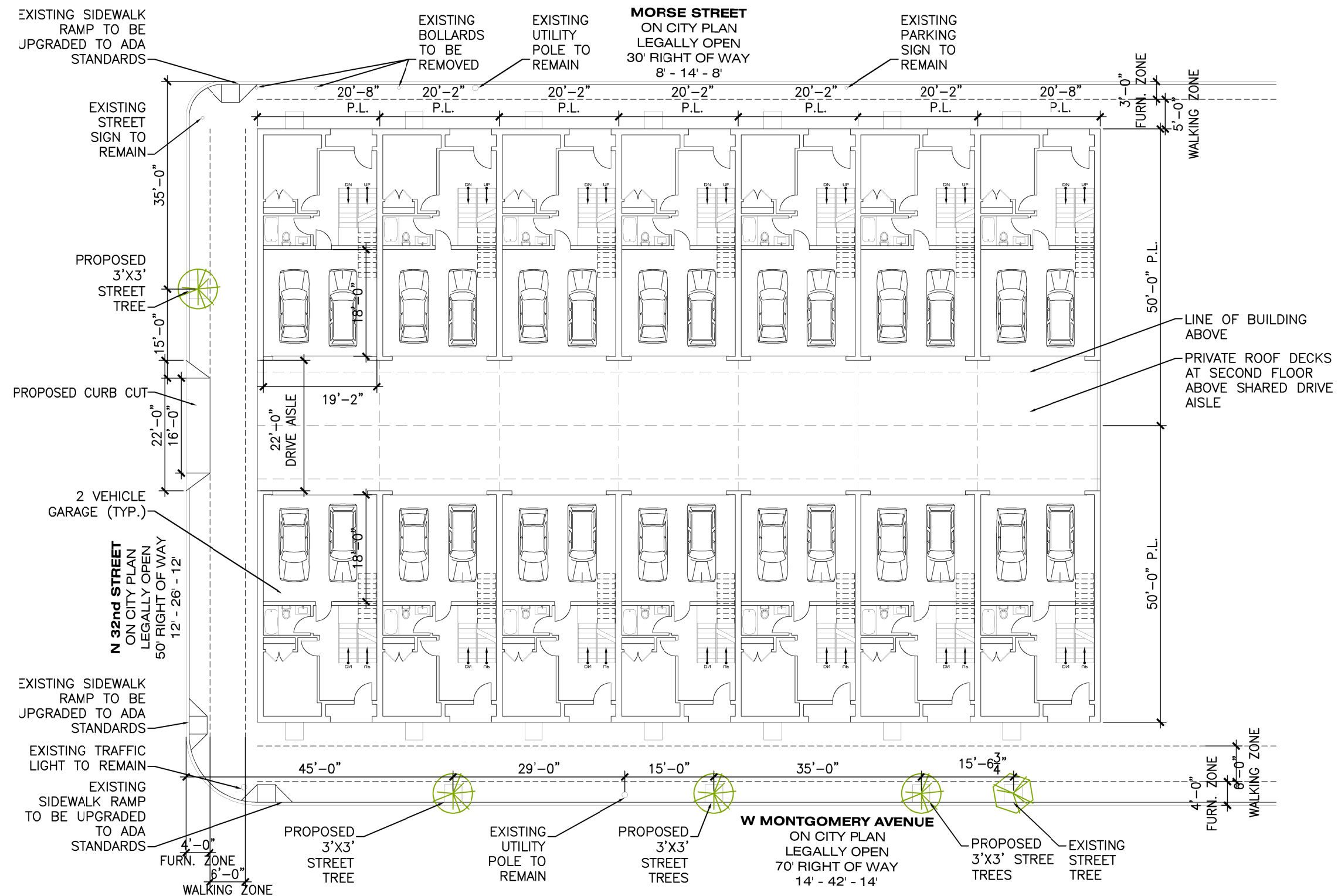
Montgomery Avenue, proposed site to the right, demonstrating scale and adjacent condition(s).



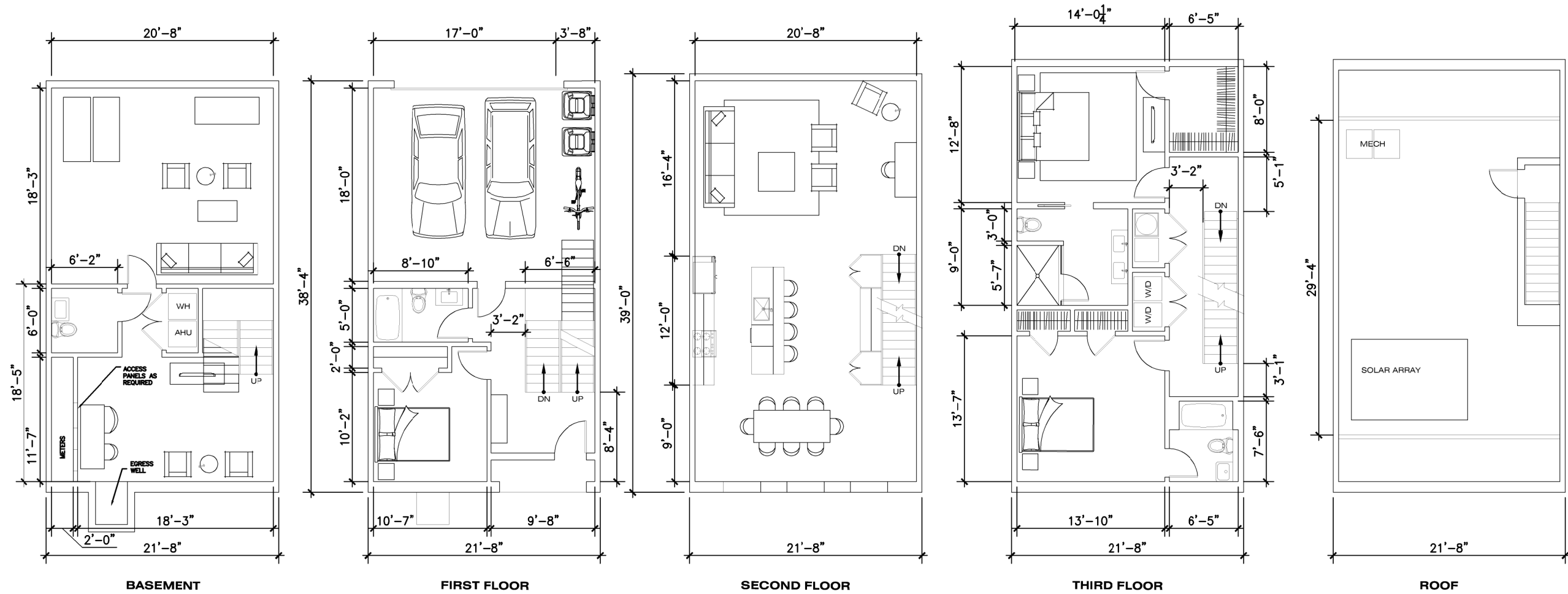
The cleared site in 2022 showing adjacent three-story single family residential buildings along both Montgomery Avenue and Morse Streets. Note that the temple was approximately (4) stories in height.



Approved site plan with parking at ground floor highlighted.



Ground floor plan.



Typical floor plan.

LOT LINE SUBDIVISION AND CONSTRUCTION OF (14) SINGLE-FAMILY TOWNHOMES 3133-3135 W. MONTGOMERY AVE. PHILADELPHIA, PA 19121

WILLIAMS - MONTGOMERY TOWNHOMES

OWNER:
Paul Street Real Estate LLC
5400 EADOM ST
PHILADELPHIA PA 19137

ARCHITECT:
CANNOdesign, LLC
109 South 13th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215-977-7075

OPA#: 772177000
NEW CONSTRUCTION
ZONING
SEPTEMBER 29, 2021



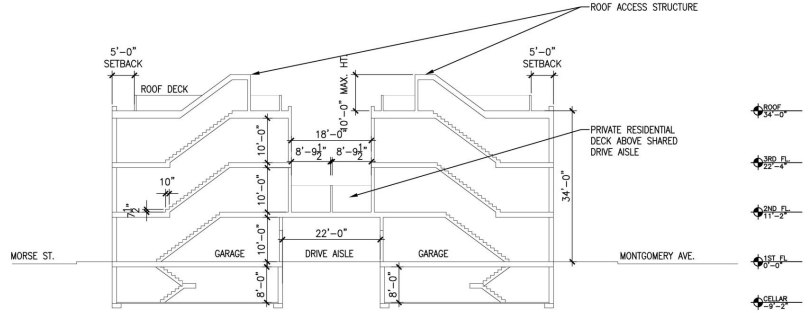
LOOKING WEST ON W. MONTGOMERY AVE.

CORNER OF W. MONTGOMERY AVE & N. 32ND ST.



CORNER OF N. 32ND ST. & MORSE ST.

LOOKING WEST ON MORSE ST.



G1 ZONING MAP

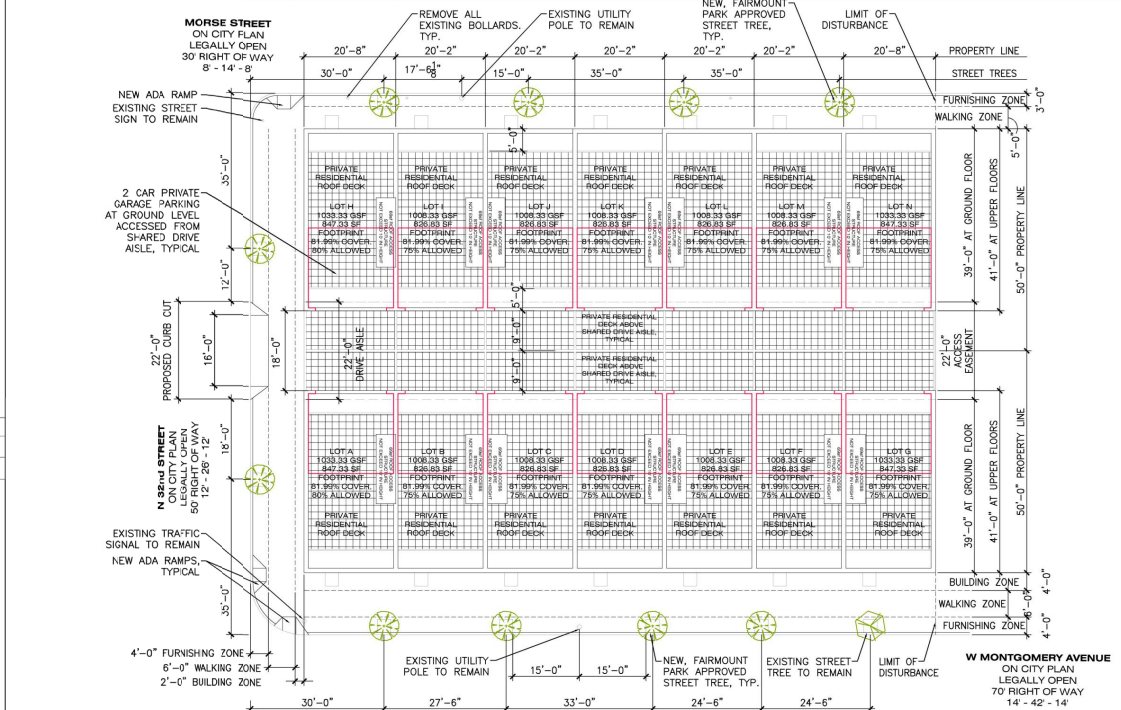
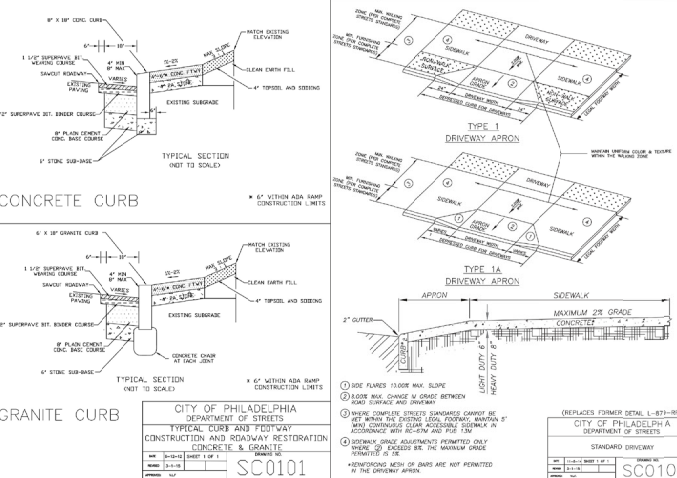
G3 STREET VIEWS

G8 SECTION

N.T.S.

N.T.S.

N.T.S.



A6 SITE PLAN

1/15" = 1'-0"

GENERAL NOTES

For lots C through I:

Per 14-701(1)(d)(.1), the City Planning Commission has determined that:

W Montgomery Avenue is the primary street;
Opposite of W Montgomery Street is the rear;
not applicable Street is the rear street

Applied Electronically by: DAVID FECTEAU
October 27, 2021

PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

For lots J through P:

Per 14-701(1)(d)(.1), the City Planning Commission has determined that:

Morse Street is the primary street;
Opposite of Morse Street is the rear;
not applicable Street is the rear street

Applied Electronically by: DAVID FECTEAU
October 27, 2021

PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

| ZONING SUMMARY | | | |
|--|-------|--|---|
| DISTRICT NAME | RSA-5 | PROVIDED | CONFORMING/ NONCONFORMING |
| DISTRICT AND LOT DIMENSIONS | | | |
| MIN. LOT WIDTH | FT. | 16'-0" | 20'-10" |
| MIN. LOT AREA | SF | 1440 SF | END LOTS - 1066.66 SF INT. LOTS - 1041.66 SF |
| MIN. OCCUPIED AREA | % | INT. - 75% CORNER 80% | INT. LOTS - 78% CORNER LOTS - 78% |
| YARDS | | | |
| FRONT YARD DEPTH (MIN.) | FT | W. MONTGOMERY AVE. - 13'-0" MORSE ST. - 0' | W. MONTGOMERY AVE. - 0' MORSE ST. - 0' |
| MIN. REAR YARD DEPTH | FT | 9'-0" | 9'-0" |
| HEIGHT | | | |
| MAX. HEIGHT | FT | 35'-0" | 34'-0" |
| PARKING | | 28 SPACES PROVIDED IN PRIVATE GARAGES ACCESSED OFF OF A SHARED DRIVE AISLE | CONFORMING |
| OVERLAYS NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION OVERLAY DISTRICT - STRAWBERRY MANSION ZONE 3 | | | |

| | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| ZONING REVISIONS | 2021.10.18 |
| ZONING SUBMISSION | 2021.10.07 |
| No. REVISIONS/SUBMISSIONS | Date |

WILLIAMS TOWNHOMES
3135-49 West Montgomery Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19121

CANNOdesign
109 SOUTH 13TH STREET 2ND FLR
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107

Drawing Title
ZONING SUBMISSION

Seal
Drawn NC Project No.
Checked GC/CJY CAD File No.
Reviewed Drawing No.
Date
Scale

Z-1

Approved zoning permit.

Montgomery Avenue Townhomes:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT C) | ZP-2022-009732 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT D) | ZP-2022-009736 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT E) | ZP-2022-009776 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT F) | ZP-2022-009778 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT G) | ZP-2022-009779 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT H) | ZP-2022-009780 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT I) | ZP-2022-009781 |

Morse Street Townhomes:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT J) | ZP-2022-009783 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT K) | ZP-2022-009788 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT L) | ZP-2022-009789 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT M) | ZP-2022-009790 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT N) | ZP-2022-009791 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT O) | ZP-2022-009793 |
| 3135 W. Montgomery Avenue (LOT P) | ZP-2022-009863 |

Subdivided address listing and associated zoning permits for new construction.



Detailed elevation of Montgomery Avenue townhomes; intent is for Morse Street to match.

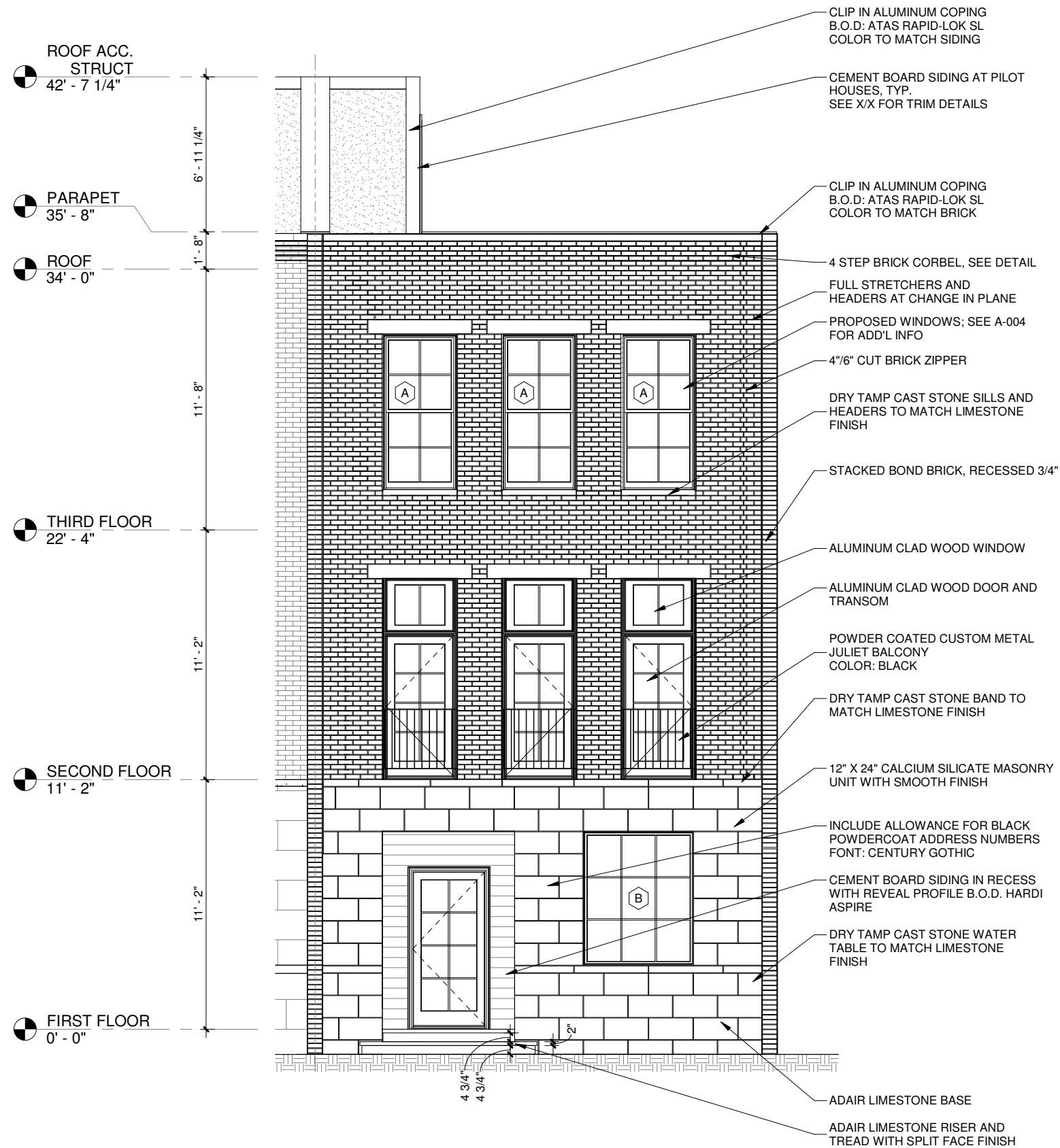
CLIP IN ALUMINUM COPING
B.O.D: ATAS RAPID-LOK SL COPING
COLOR TO MATCH BRICK

RUNNING BOND FIELD BRICK

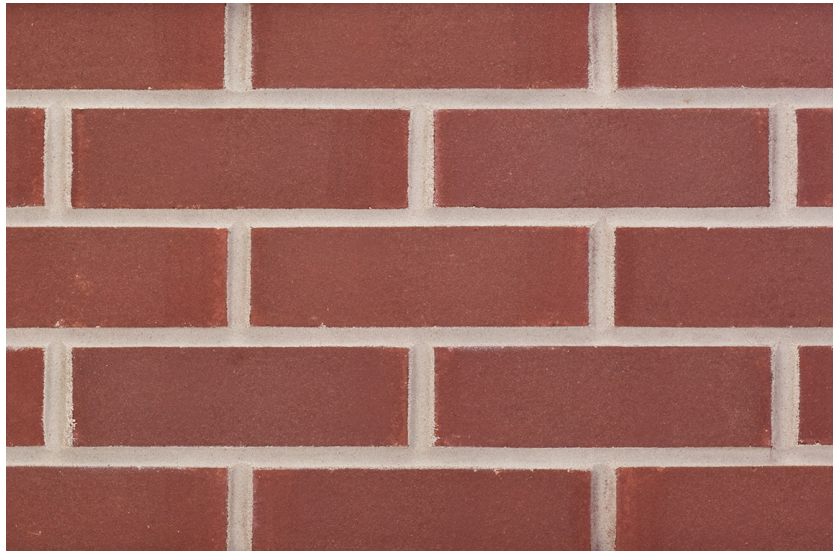
ALUMINUM-CLAD WOOD WINDOWS
SEE A-004 FOR ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION



Detailed elevation of Montgomery Avenue townhomes; intent is for Morse Street to match.



Enlarged detail of individual home elevation.



Red Brick, Smooth Finish



Black window frames; at brick and at siding



Custom Cast Stone



Cement Board Siding at Rear of Home(s), Night Gray Finish

Material palette



Proposed homes from Montgomery Avenue; note that the homes fronting Morse Street will be identical.



Proposed homes from the corner of Montgomery Avenue and North 32nd Street

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

FOR PHC USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1. NAME

HISTORIC

Temple Beth Israel

AND/OR COMMON

Christian Love Baptist Church

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER

1801 North 32nd Street

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE | |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL | <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL | <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | | ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Christian Love Baptist Church - John Carr

STREET AND NUMBER

3135-49 West Montgomery Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE

Pennsylvania

ZIP CODE

19121

5. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All that certain lot or piece of ground situate on the east side of 32nd Street between Montgomery Avenue and Morse Street containing in front or breadth on the said 32nd Street 100 feet and extending of that width in length or depth eastward between the north side of Montgomery Avenue and the South side of Morse Street 126 feet.

Being 3135-39 West Montgomery Avenue

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form

DATE

January 30, 1985

☐ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Bureau For Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN

Harrisburg,

STATE

Pennsylvania

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

- ☐ EXCELLENT ☐ DETERIORATED
☒ GOOD ☐ RUINS
☐ FAIR ☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

- ☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

- ☒ ORIGINAL SITE

☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Beth Israel Synagogue stands on the northeast corner of 32nd Street and Montgomery Avenue in the Strawberry Mansion section of North Philadelphia. The buff-colored brick sides of this two-story building face 32nd Street and Montgomery Avenue. The walls, articulated with pylons and inset registers give the building a strong vertical emphasis. The less visible north and east facades are constructed of red brick. The entrance to the building faces 32nd Street.

The building is composed of a larger two-story cubical auditorium behind a one-story projecting entrance pavilion. A flight of sixteen stairs rises to a three-bay entryway. At this entryway corbelled brick arches rest on four engaged columns. This arrangement forms three arched openings that lead to the main doors of the building. The outermost bays of this pavilion contain stair towers leading to a balcony in the main sanctuary. These symmetrical bays contain metal and glass doors on the ground level and long lancet windows at the second story. Five flat brick piers divide the entryway into equal sections and break above the top of the parapet. Two identical one-story wings flank the entry pavilion and contain doors at the ground floor. The cornerstone of the building displays the Jewish date 5667, corresponding to 1907, the construction date of the building. Above, three lancet windows pierce blind segmental arches.

The silver-domed auditorium block rises one-story above the entry pavilion. Here, austere walls are articulated by brick piers that organize the facades into three sections each containing a shallow arched reveal. At the second floor level lancet windows break through the wall with a single window in each of the outer bays, and a row of seven windows in the larger central sections. The building is capped by a shallow silver-colored dome.

The utilitarian red brick northern facade echoes the fenestration of the southern facade. The raised basement is lit by segmentally arched 1/1 double hung windows arranged in a 3-5-3 pattern. Lancet windows light the first floor and are arranged in groupings of 5-7-5. At the second floor level, longer lancet windows are arranged in a 1-7-1 pattern. The easternmost bay of this facade contains a door at ground level, with windows on each level lighting a stair tower.

7. DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | | CHECK ONE | CHECK ONE |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED | | |

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7. Description - continuation

The eastern or rear facade of the building has a door at ground level and randomly arranged segmentally arched 1/1 double hung windows.

On the interior, the basement contains a rectangular auditorium with a stage at the eastern end. Five small rooms flank the auditorium on each side and provide office, classroom, and kitchen space.

The interior of the main sanctuary is a box capped by a pendentive domed roof and short barrel vaults at each side of the building. Together, the dome and the barrel vaults form a Greek Cross roof plan. Four columns with cushion capitols support the pendentive dome. The barrel vaults rest on the supports of the dome on one side and on floating capitols attached to the walls of the sanctuary on the other. Two of these floating cushion capitols flank the *bimah*, and hold sculpted *menorahs* in relief.

Seating consists of rows of wooden pews decorated with carved Stars of David on their sides. These pews face the *bimah*, situated at the eastern wall. In 1920 Beth Israel added a balcony to the sanctuary, accessible by a stair at the northwest corner of the building. On the southern, northern, and western sides of the building the balcony provides rows of additional seating. The balcony above the *bimah*, accessible from a stair at the southeast corner of the sanctuary, provides space for the organ loft.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

- ☐ PREHISTORIC
☐ 1601-1700
☐ 1701-1800
☐ 1801-1850
☐ 1851-1900
☒ 1901-1950
☐ 1951-

- ☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC
☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC
☐ AGRICULTURE
☒ ARCHITECTURE
☐ ART
☐ COMMERCE
☐ COMMUNICATIONS

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE - CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

- ☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING
☐ CONSERVATION
☐ ECONOMICS
☐ EDUCATION
☐ ENGINEERING
☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
☐ INDUSTRY
☐ INVENTION

- ☐ LANDSCAPE
☐ ARCHITECTURE
☐ LAW
☐ LITERATURE
☐ MILITARY
☐ MUSIC
☐ PHILOSOPHY
☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

- ☒ RELIGION
☐ SCIENCE
☐ SCULPTURE
☐ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
☐ THEATER
☐ TRANSPORTATION
☐ OTHER (Specify) _____

SPECIFIC DATES

1907

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Sauer & Hahn

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Beth Israel Synagogue building possesses significance as a rare and early example of Beaux-Arts/Byzantine Revival synagogue architecture in Philadelphia, as the work of the important Philadelphia architecture firm of Sauer and Hahn and in association with the development of the Strawberry Mansion section of Philadelphia. The building has added importance as the third home of Congregation Beth Israel, the third oldest Jewish congregation in Philadelphia.

Architectural Style

Jewish tradition does not require any particular place for a congregation to meet, and a simple room often serves the purpose. The architecture and siting of European synagogues was historically a function of discriminatory governmental regulations. Restrictions on education precluded the possibility of Jewish architects. Into the 19th century, no particular architectural style was recognized as particularly suited to Jewish religious worship.

In the American colonies, free of most of these restrictions, Jews constructed their houses of worship in various contemporary styles. For example, a colonial era synagogue appeared in the Georgian style (Touro Synagogue, Newport, R.I., 1763). After 1800, examples appeared in the various revival styles, including Egyptian (Mikve Israel, Philadelphia, 1782), Greek (Beth Elohim, Charlestown, S.C., 1841) and Gothic (B'nai Yeshurun, Cincinnati, 1848). Romanesque Revival synagogues first appeared in the 1840s (e.g. Wooster Street, New York, 1847), inspired by German prototypes.¹

In the first half of the 19th century an "oriental revival" began in Europe. This interest in India and Islamic art began in

¹T.U. Walter's Beth Israel (Philadelphia, 1848) was the last example of an Egyptian Revival synagogue constructed. In 1860 Mikve Israel replaced their Egyptian Revival synagogue with architect John MacArthur's design in the popular mid-century *Rundbogenstil*.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

10. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE

Ira Kauderer

ORGANIZATION

Philadelphia Historical Commission

DATE

January 1993

STREET AND NUMBER

1401 Arch Street, Suite 1301

TELEPHONE

686-4543

CITY OR TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE

PA

England. The most important early English oriental design, Brighton Palace, was begun in 1818 and published in 1838. In that same year Gottfried Semper designed the interior of the synagogue in Dresden, Germany, with a Moorish interior based on the Alhambra of 11th century Spain. Semper was an "association-
alist," who believed that each building type should have a distinctive, historically motivated style. His choice of Moorish for this synagogue was published in 1847 and soon became widely known.

In the United States, Philadelphia's German-Jewish congregation, Kenneseth Israel, built a new synagogue at 6th and Brown Streets in 1864. This building was so similar to one constructed in Kassel, Germany in 1839, designed in the *Rundbogenstil*, or round arch style, that it seems likely that the European synagogue was used as a model. The Philadelphia synagogue, however, had a new feature: bulbous cupolas on the stair towers and on the corner pinnacles. Architectural historian Rachel Wischnitzer has contended that "[w]ith this feature Kenneseth Israel in Philadelphia started the Moorish vogue in synagogue building in the United States."²

From the mid-19th century into the first decades of the 20th century, many architects believed, as did Semper, that as an Eastern, exotic and non-Christian style, Moorish was appropriate for Jewish religious buildings. The popularity of the style for synagogues in Philadelphia is evinced by several important examples including Fraser, Furness and Hewitt's Rodeph Shalom of 1870 (demolished), J. Franklin Stuckert's Adath Jeshurun of 1886, and Sugarman, Hess and Berger's B'nai Jeshurun of 1924.

Moorish was not the only oriental style that found expression in synagogue buildings. The Byzantine style gained popularity after the turn of the century, and retained its appeal until World War II. Byzantine architecture refers to the style that evolved in the Eastern part of the collapsing Roman Empire in the sixth century. Constantinople was the capital city of the Eastern Empire, and its architectural flowering resulted from the efforts of emperor Justinian.

The Byzantine style is associated with churches which are characterized by central pendentive domes, round arches, and elaborate columns. Rich, polychromatic decorative elements are also often included. The most famous example of the style is the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople of 532 C.E. That building was constructed as a church by Justinian, but was later converted into a mosque.

² Rachel Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States*, (Philadelphia, 1955), p. 67.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

10. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE

Ira Kauderer

ORGANIZATION

Philadelphia Historical Commission

STREET AND NUMBER

1401 Arch Street, Suite 1301

CITY OR TOWN

Philadelphia

DATE

January 1993

TELEPHONE

686-4543

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By the turn of the 20th century at least two divergent theoretical strains supported the use of the Byzantine style in synagogue architecture. First, like Moorish, the Byzantine style had Eastern roots. At the same time, examples could be found in Italy and France, giving the style a legitimate European position as well. Since this reflected the situation of European Jews, architects motivated by romanticism or associationalism found as much basis for a Byzantine synagogue as a Moorish one.

A second theoretical strain brought the architect of Beth Israel, Andrew J. Sauer, to the Byzantine style. Sauer arrived at it not through historical inquiry, but instead in a manner consistent with his Beaux-Arts training. Sauer believed that the Jews, finally emancipated, should find an individualized mode of architectural expression. He disfavored adapting existing styles to synagogue design. He wrote "To have Classical, Moorish or Gothic design when all have been submitted and used by the Christian, places the Jew in a very discreditable and unwarranted position."³ Given the popularity of Moorish at the turn of the century, it is not surprising that he commented specifically on that style. "Many synagogues today have been built of Moorish style, and it seems to have been a very unfortunate move. The greatest delicacy of feeling for both form and color is needed to preserve the beauty of Moorish architecture. The curiously shaped domes, towers and misapplied horse-shoe arches, turrets and pinnacles have often resulted, presenting in many cases a grotesque appearance, rather than the dignity and simplicity that should have been retained."⁴

Two major factors informed Sauer's synagogue design. First, Sauer adhered to the major tenet of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, that the form of a building should reflect its function. He asserted, "Originality worth having is that which issues unconsciously from the frank and well informed treatment of the material by the artist...The primary principal of architecture as instructed by the foremost school, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, of Paris, signified that the character of the building should at once tell the story of its use. To portray clearly is architectural poetry, prophecy, and religion all in one."⁵ At Beth Israel, exterior organization clearly reflects the three major functions of the building; the main sanctuary, entry hall and raised basement auditorium/classroom story.

Secondly, Sauer believed that architects should look to the Torah to create a new "Judaic Architecture." Beth Israel's

³ Jewish Exponent, March 29, 1907, p. 8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

design appears to have resulted in part from the expression of those elements discussed in the Torah that satisfied programmatic requirements.

Sauer wrote that the Torah states that the Holy of Holies in Solomon's ancient Temple had equal measurements of height, length and breadth, and that "the cube or square had reference to fulfillment." He added that the Jewish nature of a synagogue could be expressed by the use of symbols like the Menorah and *Magen David*, or six-pointed star, in addition to the required Ark and Perpetual Light. Sauer also noted the modern requirements of such a building including "abundant light, good acoustics, large seating capacity, and comfort for all worshipers." He concluded,

Let us retain if possible the form of the cube for the plan, thereby symbolizing the fulfillment; embellish and modernize this form within certain limitations, surmount it with a dome to ensure good light and give the dignity and grandeur of the primitive temples which were all located on the highest points of the city. The entrances may be in the form of one grand triumphal arch and in its parts symbolize the religious history and inspire into each Israelite who passes through its gates the feeling that the chosen race is and will be triumphant.⁶

Sauer's resulting design, which appears Byzantine in form, satisfied all of the requirements that he asserted a modern synagogue should possess. His choice of the Greek Cross plan avoided the great distance created in basilican religious buildings, bringing congregants closer to the *bimah* and improving acoustics. The shallow arms of the cross held seating, and provided a natural space for a gallery, which the congregation eventually hired Frank Hahn to design in 1920. Above, the use of the pendentive dome opened up sight-lines from all points in the auditorium. Furthermore, Sauer designed the dome to facilitate a feeling of awe, reverence and deep devotion that he believed was missing in most "modern" synagogue buildings.

Sauer applied Jewish symbols at the interior of the building. Stars of David surmounted the Ark and adorn the ends of the wooden benches in the sanctuary. Menorahs adorned both the cushion and floating capitals around the *bimah*.

Consistent with Sauer's conception of the siting of "primitive Temples," he designed Beth Israel so that congregants

⁶ Ibid.

must ascend to the synagogue. One accesses the main auditorium block by mounting a wide stair and passing through a tripartite triumphal arch.

The design of the synagogue was also affected by the decision of the congregation to adopt the ritual of reformed Judaism. Under the dome, the auditorium was able to hold uninterrupted rows of seats since adherents of the Reform movement had removed the *bimah* from the center of the room. Other innovations included the introduction of an organ loft, (musical instruments are prohibited in traditional synagogues), family seating (Beth Israel's loft was never for women only) and a social center with classrooms in the basement story.

Though the design that resulted from Sauer's historical/functionalist approach appears Byzantine, the architect never acknowledged adapting the form or vocabulary of that historical style in his work. In fact, while Sauer noted that there was historic precedent for a Byzantine synagogue, he urged the abandonment of borrowed styles in favor of the development of an architecture which was distinctively characteristic of a Jewish place of worship. To understand Sauer's seemingly ingenuous claim of originality, one must place the appearance of his design for Beth Israel in historical context.

Throughout the last half of the 19th century, designers and critics erroneously applied the term Byzantine to numerous Moorish synagogue designs. Late in the century the term was imprecisely used to describe synagogues that were actually Romanesque Revival, though with central domes and triumphal arches. The first "massive, smooth-walled, low domed modernized Byzantine synagogue design" was published in Germany in 1902.⁷ In the United States, Wischnitzer has noted that the trend away from Romanesque expressionism and towards "greater clarity and quietness" did not become characteristic of synagogue architecture until the 1920s.⁸ In its clear expression of geometric volumes sheathed in walls with austere planar surfaces and vertical emphases, Sauer's Beth Israel of 1907 could be seen as something original, unprecedented and progressive, especially in the United States.

Sauer and Hahn

The Beth Israel Synagogue possesses significance as a major

⁷ see, *Der Architect VII*, (1902), p. 7.

⁸ See, e.g., Alfred Alschuler's Temple Isaiah, Chicago, and Charles Greco's Tifereth Israel, Cleveland, both of 1924, both published in Wischnitzer's, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States*, pp. 111 and 113.

work of the important turn of the century architecture firm of Sauer and Hahn.

Andrew J. Sauer was born in Philadelphia in 1878. Sauer trained as an architect at the Franklin Institute Drawing School (1892-95) and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (1902-03). Sauer also studied architecture at the New York Beaux-Arts Society, where he won a diploma of honorary mention. In Philadelphia, Sauer became an active member of the T-Square Club Atelier. That club awarded him the second Walter Cope Prize in 1905 for the best architectural suggestion for civic improvement. Sauer's winning entry was a design for "A Recreation Park and Pier in the Delaware River Front." His prize included a trip to Europe where he furthered his study of architecture.

Upon his return to the United States Sauer established his architectural practice. Within a year he associated with Frank E. Hahn to form the firm of Sauer and Hahn in 1905.

Frank E. Hahn was born in Philadelphia in 1879, the son of Henry and Clara Hahn. Hahn's parents were important leaders in the 19th century Philadelphia Jewish community and in Philadelphia's civic affairs. Hahn attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering degree in 1900. From 1900-2 Hahn worked with the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company on designs for the Market-Frankford Elevated Railway. As district engineer for Detroit's Trussed Concrete Steel Company from 1903-4, Hahn produced structural designs for Atlantic City's Marlborough-Blenheim and Traymore Hotels as well as for Philadelphia's Bulletin Building.

During his early years as an engineer, Hahn, like Sauer, attended the T-Square Club Atelier. At the time, distinguished graduates of Paris's Ecole des Beaux-Arts like Paul A. Davis, III and Paul P. Cret dominated the Club. Exposure to these architects provided Hahn with a thorough knowledge of the principles of Beaux-Arts design.

Hahn joined Sauer in partnership in 1905. While Sauer concentrated on architectural design, Hahn's responsibilities to the firm centered on business management and engineering.

The patronage of their practice together, which endured until 1915, apparently stemmed in great part from family connections.⁹ Sauer's father emigrated to the United States from Germany in 1864 and became closely connected with Philadelphia's

⁹. Sauer and Hahn probably received the Beth Israel commission through Hahn family connections. A family with Frank Hahn's mother's name, the Heimans, were leaders in the congregation as early as the 1870s. The connection of the Hahn family to Beth Israel is also supported by the fact that when the congregation needed an architect in 1920, after Sauer and Hahn separated, they chose Hahn to design the work.

German-American manufacturing interests. This combined with Hahn's expertise in engineering enabled the firm to specialize in reinforced concrete factory and power plant designs. The Diamond Textile Machine Company at American and Luzerne Streets of 1912, the Metzger Loft Building at 13th and Cherry of 1914, and the Schmidt Building at 327 Arch Street of 1916, are notable examples of these designs. The firm also produced numerous suburban villas in various styles for the owners of these factories including the Steppacher residence in Meadowbrook, Pennsylvania of 1910 and the Fassnacht residence at Hatboro, Pennsylvania of 1911.

The Hahn family's involvement in Philadelphia's German-Jewish community was likely the basis for the firm's designing buildings for the Jewish community. In addition to Beth Israel Synagogue, constructed in 1907, Sauer and Hahn designed the Yiddish Theater in 1906, a synagogue for the Jewish Foster Home in 1914 and the Young Mens Hebrew Association building at 1616 Master Street in that same year. Other commissions, such as the Peoples Trust Company Building at 1133 Arch Street (demolished), probably arose from connections within the Jewish community.¹⁰

Sauer and Hahn also produced designs for several notable motion picture theaters. Examples of their theater work includes the Orpheum Theater of 1912, the Wilt. Street and Tioga Theaters of 1915 and the Yiddish Theater of 1906, previously mentioned.

Designs for speculative real estate developments in a period of rapid residential growth in Philadelphia round out the Sauer and Hahn portfolio. Examples of this work include the dwellings on the 7100 and 7200 blocks of Cresheim Road of 1909, and the apartment buildings designed for prolific North Philadelphia developer John Stafford at 1719-1725 North 33rd Street of the same year.

After the dissolution of their firm in 1915, Sauer worked independently until his death in 1946. In these years he continued to produce the types of buildings that he was known for in partnership. His later work included Congregation Beth El Synagogue at 11-19 South 63rd Street of 1926 and numerous industrial loft buildings in Center City and West Philadelphia.

Hahn worked independently until 1927, and then formed a short-lived partnership with S. Brian Baylinson. Though he worked on his own for much of the rest of his career, Hahn collaborated with Aaron Colish from 1947 until 1962, the year of his death. Notable Hahn designs after the Sauer and Hahn

¹⁰. Advertisements in the *Jewish Exponent* for Peoples Trust Company list several officers of Beth Israel as officers of the bank.

partnership dissolved include the Young Men's Hebrew Association Building at Broad and Pine (with Paul Cret) and the Associated Talmud Torah Building at 330 South 9th Street (at Pine Street) both of 1923, the Warwick Hotel at 17th and Locust Streets of 1925, and the Westbury Apartment Building (with S. Baylinson) at 15th and Spruce of 1928.

Strawberry Mansion

The Beth Israel synagogue building possesses added significance in its association with the history of the Strawberry Mansion section of Philadelphia.

Strawberry Mansion takes its name from the late 18th century classical revival house that stands at Dauphin Street and Edgely Drive. The area around the mansion remained largely undeveloped into the second half of the 19th century. At that time, several forces combined to drastically alter the character and development trends of Strawberry Mansion.

In 1868 Fairmount Park was established, making 33rd Street the western boundary of the neighborhood. Speculators recognized the value of park-side land and atlases show the subdivision of property facing the park on 33rd Street north of Montgomery Avenue as early as 1875. In 1864 the Pennsylvania Railroad built tracks connecting western Pennsylvania and New York trains. These tracks created a southern boundary to the section. To the north, below Mt. Vernon Cemetery, Lehigh Avenue formed a northern border which intersected with the neighborhood's eastern border, 29th Street.

Transportation played an integral role in the development of Strawberry Mansion. As early as 1859 a horse-car line ran diagonally through the neighborhood on Ridge Avenue. Slow and relatively expensive, these horse-cars were not suitable for commuters. Limited rowhouse development did take place, however, along the car lines in the 1870s and 1880s.

In 1894 the street car lines were electrified. It was then that development intensified. In the following two decades developers constructed virtually all of Strawberry Mansion's housing stock, which consists entirely of speculative rowhouses.

These physical changes in the neighborhood reflected important demographic changes. In 1880 the population of Strawberry Mansion stood at 1,800. "Forty per cent of the heads of households were foreign born, with Germans predominating."¹¹ More than half of the male heads of households were craftsmen.

¹¹ W. Cutler and H. Gillette, ed., The Divided Metropolis, Social and Spatial Dimensions of Philadelphia, 1800-1975 (Westport, Connecticut, 1980), p.201.

Since there were practically no jobs in the neighborhood, the population relied on public transportation "which provided not only linear service to the central business district but also crosstown service to Kensington and other parts of North Philadelphia."¹²

A contemporary observer newspaper columnist noted the development of Strawberry Mansion with favor. The author of "Young Man, Go Uptown, The Advantages of the Northwestern Part of the City," peppered his article with epithets about the new section:

The wide territory between Broad Street and the Park developed in a manner to bring the discomforts of the old city into strong relief...The man who wants to live on the hither side of the Schuylkill and doesn't buy or build his house within a half-mile of the Park is either henpecked or a snob...Columbia Avenue just by the Park is as handsome and attractive a street as the soul of any man who is engaged upon the great problem "how to be happy on two thousand a year could wish."

This author added,

Perhaps the people most favored by the conditions in the northwestern part of the city are the working men who can obtain houses on the fringes of the Park. There are many such houses and they have trees, awnings and porches and modern improvements which no doubt would have seemed sinful luxury to the Pilgrim fathers.¹³

Consistent with this text, drawings that accompanied this article pictured a row of Queen Anne style "clerk's houses" on Columbia Avenue along with "workman's houses" on Dauphin Street.

Statistics show that a massive demographic upheaval took place in Strawberry Mansion after the turn of the 20th century. In 1900, late 19th century patterns persisted in the neighborhood. Twenty-five per cent of the heads of households were foreign born, still mostly from Germany and Ireland. By 1929, however, historians report that at least 80 per cent of the names listed in city directories for Strawberry Mansion were Jewish. While thirty-eight per cent of the heads of households were foreign born, however, these immigrants were mostly Jews from Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the population of Strawberry

¹² Ibid., p. 202.

¹³ The Times, October 8, 1893, p.17.

Mansion had risen from 1800 in 1890 to 27,335 in 1930.

Several factors contributed to these great changes within the neighborhood. In 1881 a rash of pogroms spread throughout Russia, Poland and Romania. Within twenty years 600,000 Jews fled to America. 60,000 of this number settled in Philadelphia. Many of these immigrants were skilled in the needle trades or had experience peddling. Initially, then, it was important for them to find inexpensive housing within walking distance of the sweatshops that centered around lower Market street, and the retailers and wholesalers around South Street. The aging housing in the area between Lombard Street and Washington Avenue, Second to Sixth Streets, satisfied these needs and became the initial area of settlement for Russian Jewish immigrants.

Within a generation, contemporary observers noted the economic success of a segment of the immigrant community. For these successful Jews,

[I]t was no longer a question to live near the workplace and store or to save car fare or to come early to the shop. They already had capital, gained in the last few years through manufacturing or wholesale stores and the demand to live comfortably and quietly motivated wealthier Jews to move to more beautiful, comfortable and quieter sections of the city.

The more beautiful and healthier section around Fairmount Park in northwest Philadelphia drew the attention of the well to do class of Jews and they began to move to Strawberry Mansion and West Philadelphia. In two years time there was created around there a "higher ghetto" consisting of 400 wealthy Jewish families. The reform synagogue Beth Israel Temple, one of the most beautiful Temples in the City, was built and smaller orthodox synagogues were founded nearby.¹⁴

It appears then, that the same factors that drew the Western Europeans to Strawberry Mansion before 1900 encouraged Eastern European Jews to settle the area after the turn of the century. About the early residents of the area a historian has written, "Since there were no jobs within walking distance and no local stop for the railroad, the entire neighborhood was dependent on one mode of transportation. Consequently, it was settled by a fairly narrow group: families...of modest prosperity having sufficient income and job security to take on the cost of new but

¹⁴ The Philadelphia Jewish American, May 8, 1908, pp. 1-2. (In Yiddish).

inexpensive housing."¹⁵ This statement is equally true for the Eastern European Jews who displaced the Western European group after 1900.

Though Jews from Southwark began to settle in Strawberry Mansion soon after the turn of the century, initially, the community's institutions remained in South Philadelphia. Beth Israel was the first synagogue to relocate to the new section in 1907. Contemporary accounts noted, "The enterprising spirit of the congregation in establishing itself in a new locality, far from the other synagogues of the city, is evidently destined to meet with a responsive welcome on the part of many residents of the northwest section, which contains a large Jewish population at the present time; a population that will continue to grow as time passes."¹⁶

In 1915 congregation B'nai Jeshurun constructed Strawberry Mansion's second major synagogue, in the Moorish style, on a prominent site on 33rd Street between Diamond Street and Susquehanna Avenue. Establishment and relocation of synagogues and Jewish social service agencies to the section continued in the following decades. In 1951 eight synagogues served area residents along with Jewish schools and an important shopping district centered on Ridge Avenue. In that year the total population of Strawberry Mansion stood at 35,000.

Strawberry Mansion once again experienced major demographic change in the years after World War II. The network of street car lines that once made the neighborhood easily accessible to most city neighborhoods did not serve the vast new areas opened to residential and commercial development by the automobile after the war. Increased prosperity resulting from wartime employment combined with the use of the GI Bill enabled Jewish residents from Strawberry Mansion to move to newer sections of the city, then accessible by automobile.

Congregation Beth Israel

Beth Israel synagogue possesses added importance as the former home of the third oldest Jewish congregation in Philadelphia. By 1840, the Jewish residents of Philadelphia had established two synagogues, Mikveh Israel and Rodeph Shalom. Because the former congregation followed the Sephardic rite, and the latter followed German tradition that was considered "too distant" from that of Beth Israel's founders, the new congregation was established. In contrast to Philadelphia's first two congregations, Beth Israel followed "Polish and German

¹⁵ The Divided Metropolis, p. 206.

¹⁶ Jewish Exponent, May 17, 1907, p. 4.

customs...conducted on the principle of the Great Synagogue in London."¹⁷

Beth Israel hired architect Thomas U. Walter to design their first synagogue building. The congregation constructed the resulting Egyptian Revival design in 1848 at Fourth and Crown Streets, in the vicinity of the two existing synagogues.

By 1893 Beth Israel's growing congregation required added space. The congregation purchased the former North Baptist Church, on North Eighth Street below Jefferson, which it remodelled and occupied until 1907. At that time the continued growth and movement of the community to Strawberry Mansion warranted a second move, this time to 32nd Street and Montgomery Avenue.

The move to Strawberry Mansion was a landmark in the religious life of that community. Contemporary accounts record that thousands attended the dedication ceremonies. Dignitaries from other important Philadelphia congregations addressed the crowd, along with Mayor Reyburn.

As early as the 1930s, however, Beth Israel began to loose congregants as the Jewish population began to move to Oak Lane and Germantown. Though the synagogue's religious school opened a branch in Germantown, it did not move with its congregation. By the late 1950s, the outmigration of Jews from the area was virtually complete. Beth Israel sold their building to the Lyons Memorial United Holy Church of America in 1957.¹⁸

After several intermediate moves in the Overbrook section of Philadelphia, Beth Israel merged with congregation Beth Zion to form Congregation Beth Zion-Beth Israel. Beth Zion-Beth Israel is located at 18th and Spruce Streets in Center City Philadelphia.

Conclusion

The Beth Israel synagogue possesses significance for its progressive use of the Beaux-Arts/Byzantine Revival style, for its design by the important Philadelphia architecture firm of Sauer and Hahn and in association with the development of Philadelphia's Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. The building has added importance as the third home of Beth Israel, Philadelphia's third oldest Jewish congregation.

¹⁷ 1840 broadside cited in, S. Belle Cohn and Esther M. Klein, *Congregation Beth Israel, 100th Anniversary Number*, November 1940. (Unpublished, available at Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center).

¹⁸ In 1989 that congregation sold the building to the Christian Love Baptist Church, the current occupants.

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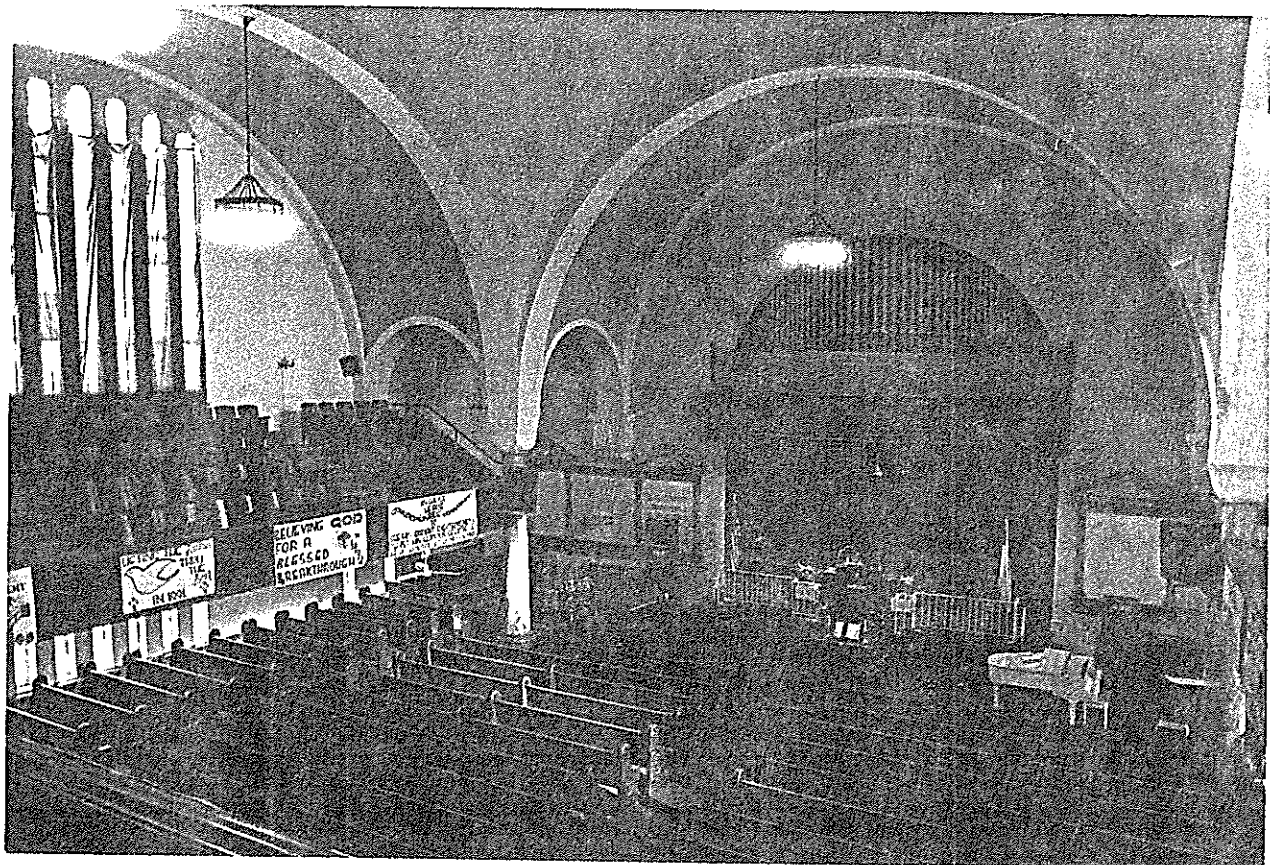
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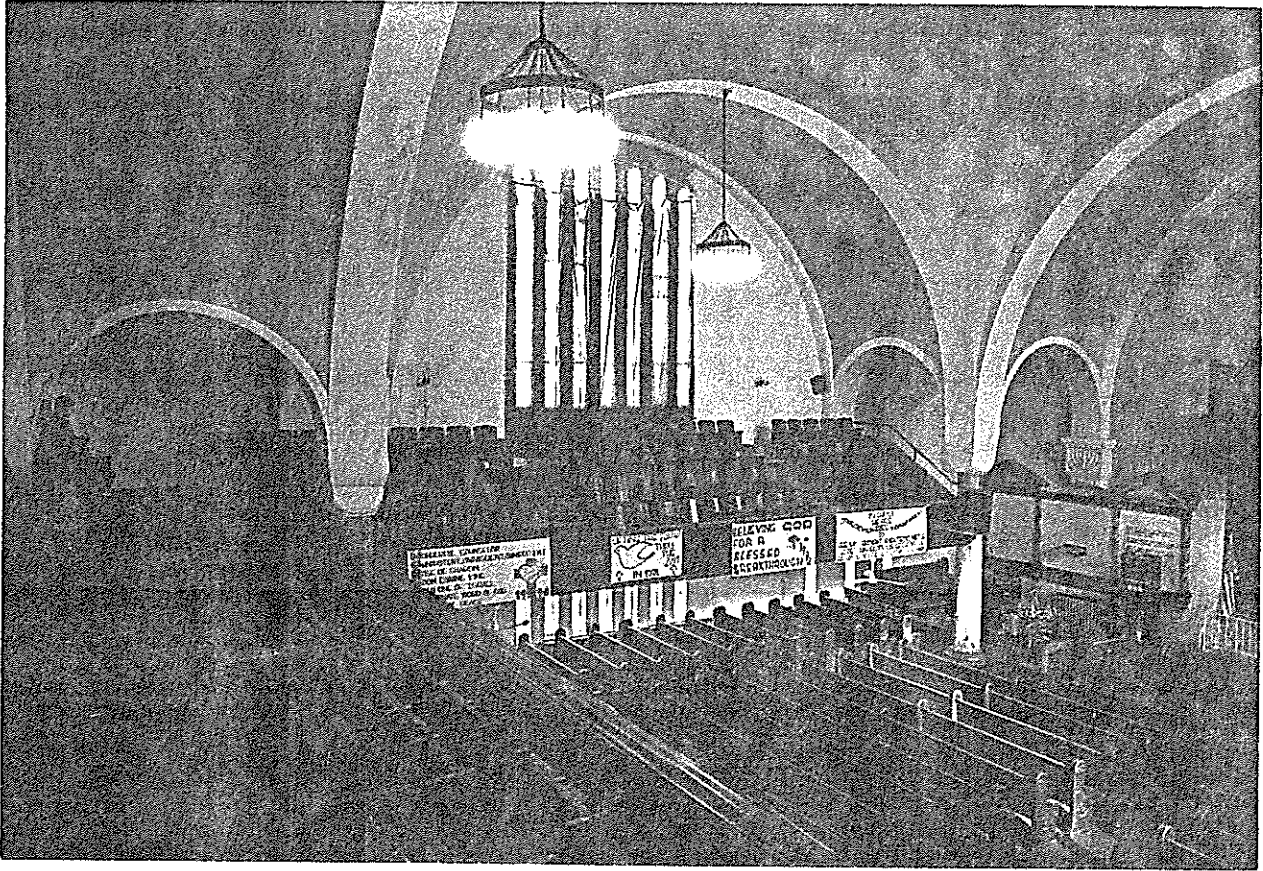
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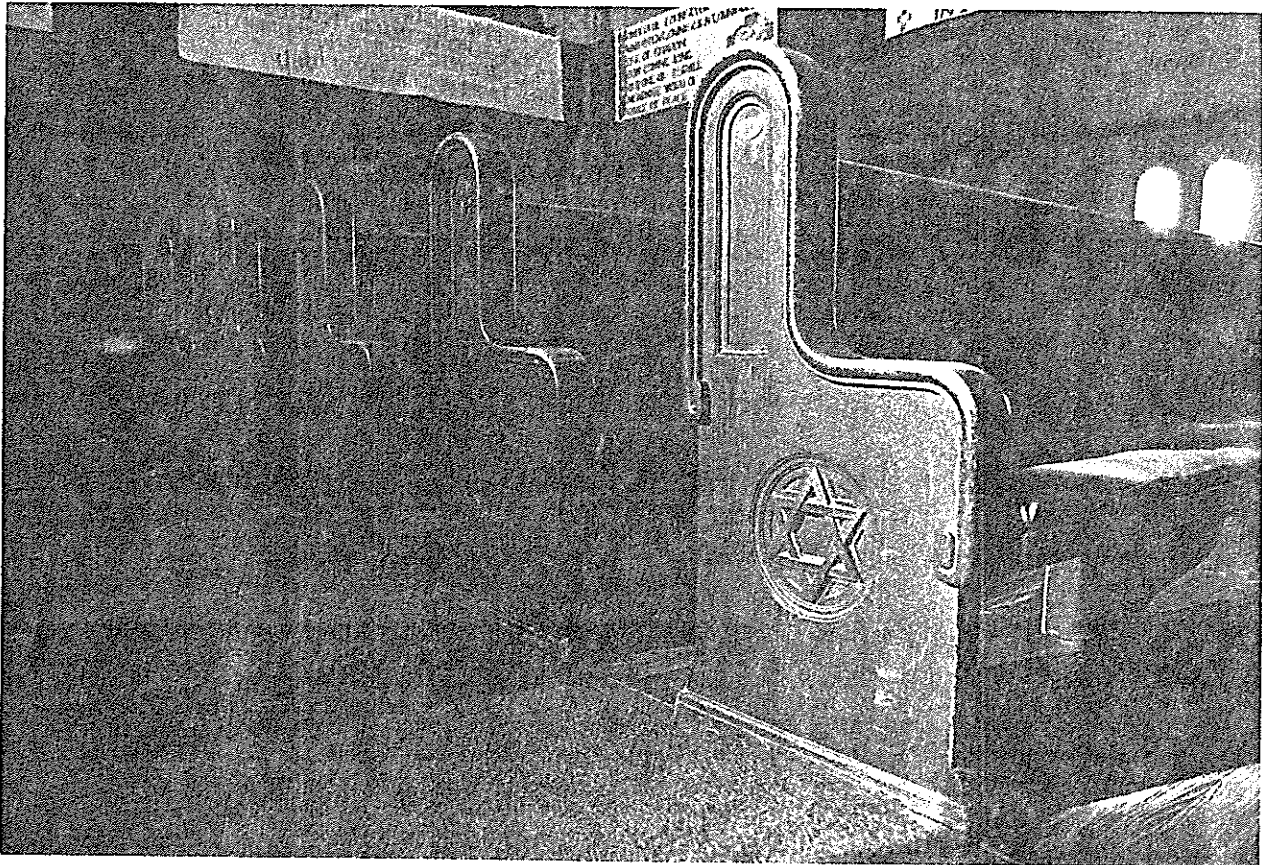


Temple Beth Israel, 1801 North 32nd Street, Philadelphia

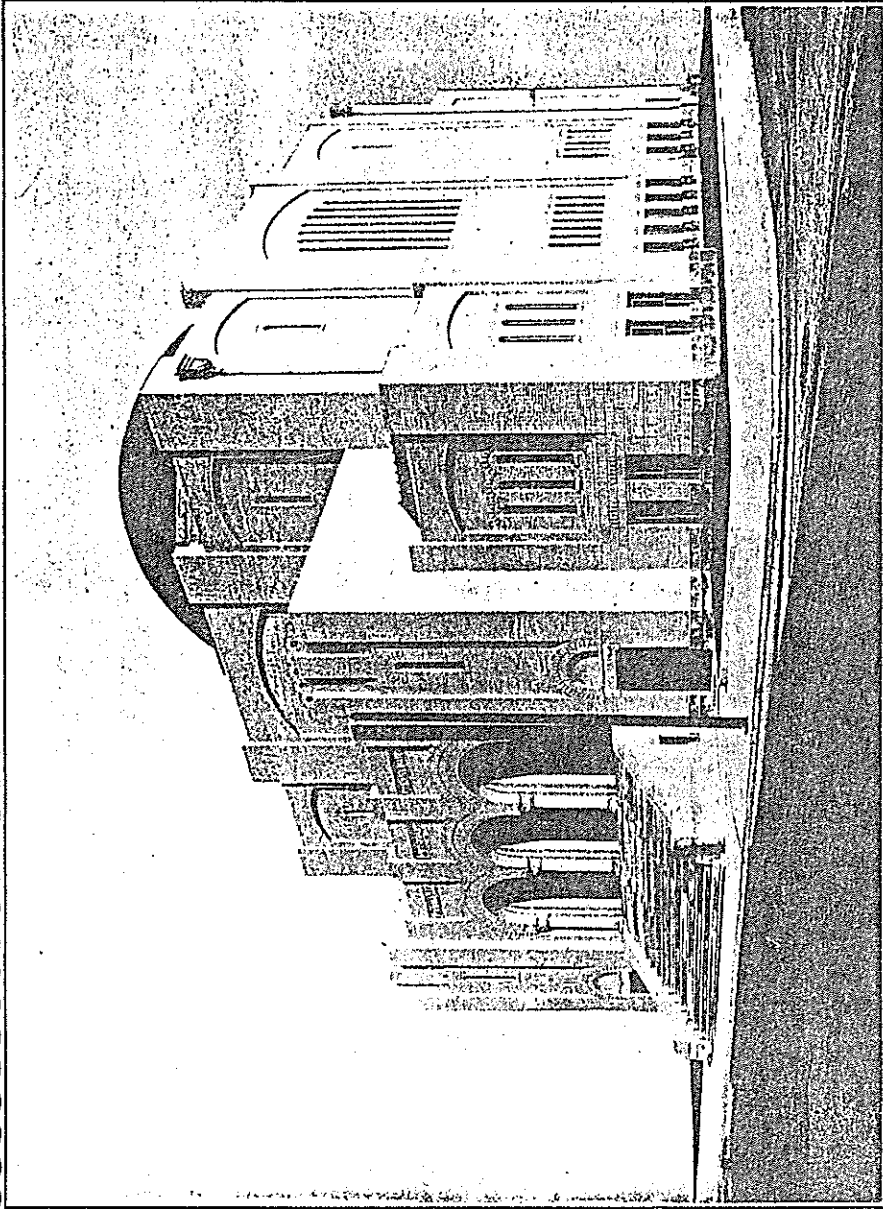




Temple Beth Israel Auditorium, above Detail Of Benches, below



BETH ISRAEL



Beth Israel's Present Synagogue 32nd Street & Montgomery Avenue 1907-1940

1840-100th ANNIVERSARY-1940

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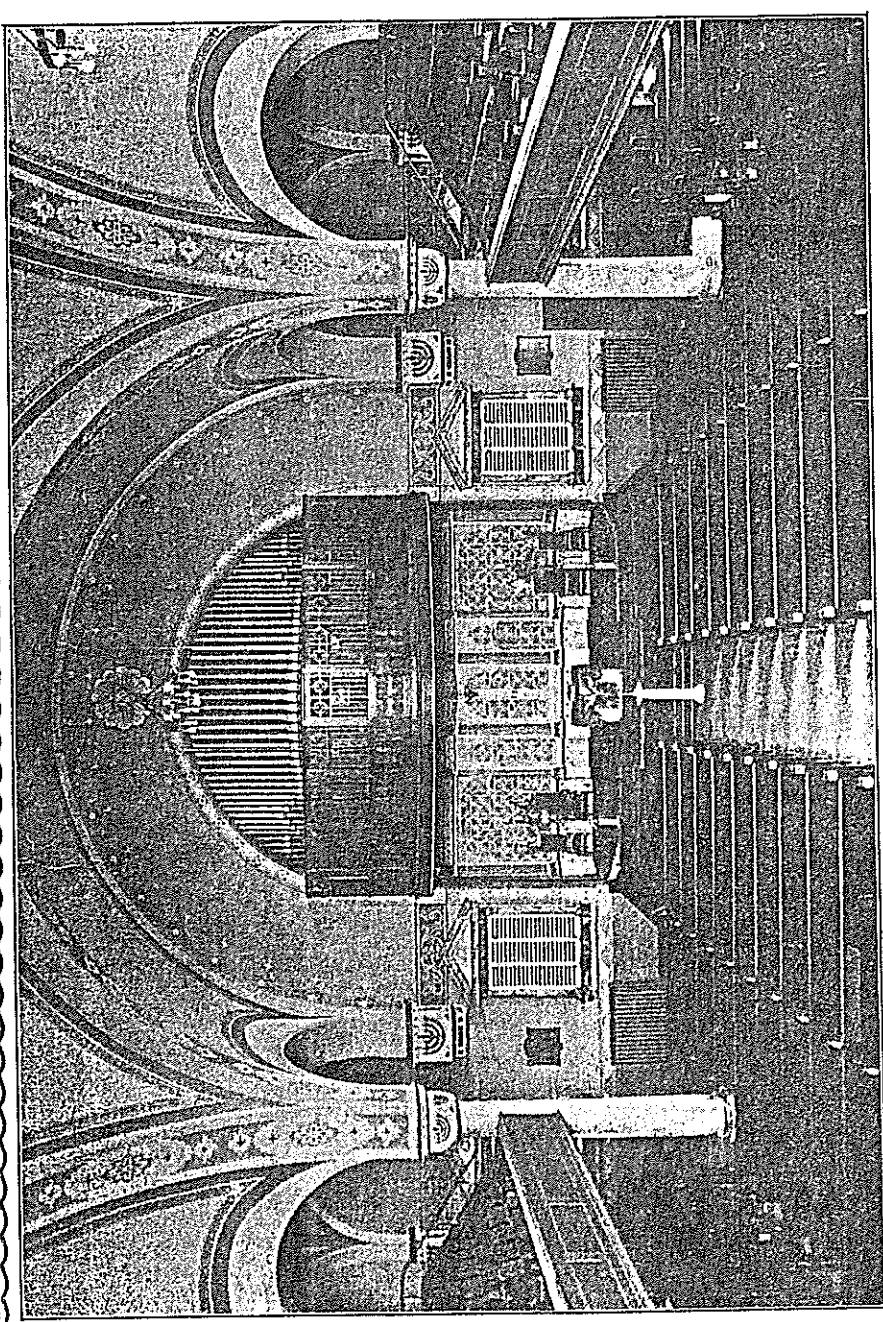
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1840-100th ANNIVERSARY-1940

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