

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue
Other names/site number N/A
Name of related multiple property listing N/A
(Remove "N/A" if property is part of a multiple property listing and add name)

2. Location

Street & Number: 120 North East Yates Road
City or town: Memphis State: TN County: Shelby
Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A Zip: 38120

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title: Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official: Date

Title: State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

 Signature of the Keeper

 Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: MODERNISTIC

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, glass, asbestos, concrete

Narrative Description

The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is an irregularly shaped tri-level split Orthodox Jewish synagogue located at 120 North East Yates Road in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee. Memphis is in the southwest quadrant of the state along the Mississippi River and is the anchor of the Mid-South region. The city population in 2017 was 652,752, making Memphis the second most populous city in Tennessee, after Nashville. Sitting within a four-acre lot, the synagogue was designed by Francis Mah and Keith Kays in the style of the Modern Movement and has a flat roof, brick veneer, steel construction, and a cast concrete foundation. The building is in excellent condition and has only been altered by an added sukkah and outbuilding to the south, added in 1981 and ca. 1985 respectively.¹ The interior retains original maple doors, mylar coated aluminum panels, and acoustical panels.

The site is within a ca. 1960 subdivision. Trees provide cover and a natural separation on the north and west elevations from homes along Rich Road and North East Yates Road. A dense grove of trees is present to the south along Barfield Road which provides the single-family, low density homes on this street coverage from

¹ A sukkah is a temporary dwelling used during the holiday of Sukkot. From *Judaism101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>.

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the site. A large parking lot and tree coverage along the east and west sides of Colegrove Street provide some coverage to the site, but not as much as the other elevations. Major roads are Interstate 240 West to the east and Tennessee State Route 23 to the south. The Baptist Memorial Health Care Corporation is to the northeast and the Christian Brothers LaSalle High School is to the southeast, both across I-240 West. The Wolf River and Shelby Farms Park are also to the northeast of the property.

1. Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue, 1970 (Contributing Building)

EXTERIOR

The building is an irregularly shaped tri-level split Orthodox Jewish synagogue with an exterior of stretcher bond brick veneer and a cast concrete foundation. The roof is flat smooth surfaced with asbestos felts and has a series of clerestory windows which provide natural light to the interior of the building. The façade faces west and features an irregular massing effect and an uninterrupted brick exterior. Each step has its own series of clerestory windows. This elevation accesses the central level through two sets of double glass and wood doors, flanked by large sidelights.

The north elevation features the irregular massing effect and looks onto the 1981 sukkah. This elevation has an uninterrupted brick exterior with no windows or entry points.

The east elevation utilizes a stepped effect of the massing for a modern aesthetic. A series of clerestory windows are visible on the steps of this elevation, as well as a 1981 sukkah on the northeast corner and an access on the southeast corner. An entrance is located within the sukkah and has double glass and wood doors with a single-light transom and large sidelights. The exterior is uninterrupted brick with clerestory windows at the roofline. Exposed conduits are visible on this elevation. The southeast entrance is a set of double glass and wood doors with a slim sidelight just to the left.

The south elevation features the irregular massing effect and an uninterrupted brick exterior. This elevation has an awning-covered entrance to the main building and the entrance to the mikvah.² The mikvah is accessed by an aluminum door, and the boiler entrance is double grilled aluminum doors just to the right.

The detached ca. 1985 outbuilding is visible on this elevation, and has an exterior of stretcher bond brick, hipped roof of asphalt shingles, and a concrete foundation. The building has double wood doors with significant water damage at the bottom. A detached pad-mounted transformer is on this elevation, as well as the dumpster surrounded by a wood fence with brick columns at the corners. A section this elevation has been surrounded by a chain-link fence and holds additional cooking apparatus.

INTERIOR

The building has three levels: The central level, the upper level, and the lower level. The upper level is on the north side of the building, while the lower level sits on the north and south parts of the building. There are three main entrances to the building, on the northeast corner, the façade (west elevation), and the east elevation. The entrances on the northeast corner and façade are on the lower level, while the west elevation enters the central level. The central level is offset from the upper and lower levels and contains the open

² A mikvah is a ritual bath used for spiritual purification, primarily in conversion rituals and after the period of sexual separation during a woman's menstrual cycles. From *Judaism 101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>.

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lobby space and entrance to the sanctuary. The lower level contains the sanctuary, chapel, Kiddush room, offices, workroom, gift shop, dining hall, kitchens, and cantor office.³ The upper level contains the rabbi office, consultation room, library and classrooms.

Central Level

The interior central level lobby space features tile floors and gypsum board walls and ceilings. The ceilings have banks of clerestory windows and are supported by rectangular beams. The entrance doors are original single-light and maple doors with 2-light sidelights. The central level retains an original maple storage table.

The Sacharin-Posner Sanctuary is directly across from the main entry on the façade. It is accessed by original maple doors. Originally open, glass has been added to the doors for soundproofing. The sanctuary has four sections of seating descending to the lower level, where the altar is located. The floors are a combination of vinyl asbestos under seats and acrilan carpeting elsewhere. Walls are gypsum board and ceilings have suspended acoustical plywood panels covered in mylar coated aluminum. The north and south walls are covered in the mylar coated aluminum as well. Plaques from the previous North Parkway synagogue hang on the walls. The upper level has a series of acoustic panels designed by Boston acoustical consulting firm Bolt Beranek and Newman, now Acentech Incorporated. The ceiling is vaulted and equipped with acoustic panels and hanging bulb lights. The walls on the east elevation are stepped and covered with reflective mylar coated aluminum. Fiberglass sound absorbing material is used between wall panels for acoustic control. A large tapestry has been added to the Parochet (or Parokhet) in the Ark of the sanctuary.⁴ The bimah fixtures are original marble. The interior colors of the sanctuary are blue, purple, and red, which the Book of Exodus says were used by the Israelites in the desert to build the Tabernacles. The seats are original and have been reupholstered.⁵

The Sacharin-Posner Sanctuary tapestry was designed by Murial Nezhnie Helfman and weaved by the Edwards Fields Company. The Torah Mantles were by Inna Golub. The tapestry is symbolic of God's Mercy while the Torah mantles are symbolic of God's glory. When the tapestry is closed, it features symbols from the Book of Exodus, including the Tablets of the Ten Commandments, God's statement to Moses: "I shall cause my goodness to pass before you," and images related to the Tree of Life and the Burning Bush. When the ark curtain is parted, it appears that the waters are divided and the Hebrew letter "Shin," representing God's sacred name, is revealed in white. The seven Torah mantles are symbolic of the seven "lower" Kabbalistic emanations of God and each mantle contains one of the words: Lovingkindness, Power, Splendor, Eternality, Glory, Foundation, and Kingship.

The Sylvia Buring Social Hall is in the southwest corner of the central level, with access from the south end of the main level.⁶ The main and lower level accesses are original maple doors with added glass. The dining

³ A Kiddush is a sanctification or prayer recited over wine sanctifying Shabbat or a holiday. From *Judaism 101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>.

⁴ A Parochet (or Parokhet) is the curtain inside the Ark; An Ark is the cabinet where the Torah scrolls are kept. From *Judaism 101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>.

⁵ The bimah is the pedestal on which the Torah scrolls are placed when they are being read in the synagogue. From *Judaism 101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>.

⁶ The building is named for the wife of Nat Buring, founder of the 1937 Nat Buring Packing Company. A devoted

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hall has original hardwood floors, gypsum board walls, and an added ceiling with acoustic panels and hanging lights. The dining hall has two kitchens, one for meat and one for dairy. Both are equipped with tile floors, gypsum board walls, acoustical tile ceiling with fluorescent light banks. The equipment is stainless steel. A storage closet is in the dining hall as well, with concrete floors, gypsum board walls and ceiling, and exposed duct work.

The Melvin Silberstein Daily Beth Medrash Chapel and kiddush are in the southeast corner of the central level and have a combination of carpeted and tile floors, gypsum board walls and ceilings, and recessed lights. The doors are original maple wood. Above the aron kodesh, where the Torah is stored, is rectangular stained glass. Figure 12 shows a detailed view of the Torah Scrolls. The synagogue's bimah is marble.⁷

The mikvah and associated restroom are accessed on the south elevation of the building and has original tile floors and walls, gypsum board ceiling, and replacement plumbing and lighting. The water is in the northeast corner of the mikvah room. Stairs descend into a large tiled bathtub that can be viewed from a circular opening on the east side of the room. The restrooms are in the northwest corner and have stalls, sinks, and mirrors for preparation. The water is provided by a cistern atop the roof. The boiler is on the other side of the restroom.

Lower Level

The lower level offices and gift shop are in the northern portion of the building, beneath the upper level classrooms and workrooms. They are carpeted and have original solid maple doors, gypsum board walls and ceilings, and fluorescent light banks.

The restrooms are in the southern portion of the building and are accessed immediately upon descending from the central level. They have faux hardwood floors, gypsum walls and ceilings, and replacement plumbing and lighting. The ceiling has added recessed lights.

Upper Level

The upper level sits in the northern portion of the building has the Rabbi's office, classrooms, library, and a common space, all with carpeted floors, gypsum board walls and ceilings, and original solid maple doors. The classrooms have clerestory windows, as well as fluorescent light banks.

2. Outbuilding, ca. 1985 (Non-Contributing Building)

The outbuilding is a single-story building with an exterior of stretcher bond brick, a hipped roof of asphalt shingles, plain fascia board, and a concrete foundation. Aluminum double doors are on the north elevation. As it was constructed outside the period of significance and within fewer than fifty years, the resource is not architecturally significant.

member of Anshei Sphard, Buring was a local philanthropist for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Memphis State University, and various projects in Orange Mound. Before the merging with Beth El Emeth, the Anshei Sphard educational building at North Parkway was named for him. From "Nat Buring," *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/48120420/nat-buring>.

⁷ The aron kodesh is a holy chest, or another term for the cabinet where the Torah scrolls are kept. From *Judaism 101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>.

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Integrity

The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is an irregularly shaped tri-level split Orthodox Jewish synagogue located at its original location at 120 North East Yates Road in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee. The building was designed by Francis Mah and Keith Kays in the style of the Modern Movement and has a flat roof, brick veneer, steel construction, and a cast concrete foundation. The design of the building was done with great care to meet the needs of the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth congregation, such as communal space and a modern design to represent their faith to the public. The significant aspects of Francis Mah and Keith Kays' Modern design are intact, including the clerestory windows, stepped-effect layout, maple and marble details throughout the interior, and open communal and office space made possible by the tri-level and flat roof design. The building is in excellent condition and has only been altered by an added sukkah and outbuilding to the south, added in 1981 and ca. 1985 respectively.⁸ These additions do not detract from integrity as the outbuilding and sukkah are small and do not affect or obscure any of the synagogue's important features. The overall design, workmanship, and materials remains the same as they were in 1970 and reflects the Modern style of the period. Like the building, the synagogue's setting is the same as it was historically, characterized by single-family residence with major roads beyond the site. The high degree of physical integrity allows the synagogue to maintain its association with its significance in Architecture and Jewish Heritage, as well as its overall feeling as a modernist synagogue. Overall, the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth retains a high level of integrity that allows it to stand as an excellent representation of Memphis's Jewish Heritage and as a modernist religious architecture.

⁸ A sukkah is a temporary dwelling used during the holiday of Sukkot. From *Judaism101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE-JEWISH

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1970

Significant Dates

1970

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Mah, Francis

Kays, Keith

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, at the local level of significance in the areas of Ethnic Heritage-Jewish and Criterion C for Architecture. Descended from nineteenth-century Memphis Jewish congregations of Anshei Sphard and Beth El Emeth, the synagogue is a significant physical representation of the culmination of Jewish ethnic heritage in Memphis. The building was designed in a Modernistic style by renowned Memphis architects Francis Mah and Keith Kays and has won awards for its innovative design. It is also eligible for listing under Criterion Consideration A because the synagogue was built as a religious facility and continues to be used as such. The synagogue meets the requirements of Criterion Consideration A because of its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for historic and architectural significance. The period of significance is 1970, the year Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue was formally dedicated.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Criterion A: Ethnic Heritage Significance

Historical Context of Memphis Jewish Significance

Tennessee first experienced Jewish settlement in the 1830s as political unrest in their Central European home countries pushed the Jewish people to emigrate. The South in this period was a region of increasing economic opportunities, and many Jews who made this their home established successful businesses as merchants and artisans. After these communities stabilized, they typically created cemeteries and benevolent societies to serve their members, with official chartering of congregations to follow. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century marked another wave of Jewish immigration, this time due to political turmoil in Russia and Eastern Europe. Unlike their earlier counterparts, these emigrants did not settle into the South in large numbers, and those that did were typically more Orthodox and traditional.⁹ As a result, Tennessee boasted a diverse Jewish population with various synagogues and associations, many of which still exist today.¹⁰

Unlike many other cities, Memphis's Jewish community is deeply rooted rather than transplanted from elsewhere in the country and world. Jewish immigrants began arriving in the 1840s and 1850s and established ties with their community through businesses and civic service. After enough Jewish immigrants called Memphis home in the 1850s, Jewish institutions were established to teach, worship, and assist newer immigrants as they settled into the city. The earliest Jewish settlers were largely Reformist in religious

⁹ Orthodox Judaism has historically adhered to traditional worship and observances as dictated by the Torah, and is notable for its strict observance of Shabbat and worship in Hebrew. Conservative Judaism is different in its embrace of modernity into its practices and a larger range of observance among its followers. Reform Judaism is considered the most flexible observance of the faith as it emphasizes ethical Jewish traditions over Jewish law and strives for a politically progressive image. From "The Jewish Denominations," *My Jewish Learning*, accessed February 21, 2020, retrieved from <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-jewish-denominations/>

¹⁰ Peter J. Haas, "Jewish Settlement in Tennessee," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, October 8, 2017, accessed October 29, 2019, retrieved from <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/jewish-settlement-in-tennessee/>; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities-Tennessee," *Goldring Woldernberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life*.

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practice, but Orthodox congregations sprang up in Tennessee's larger cities as Jewish immigration increased. As referenced in Figure 5, Memphis's Jewish community grew exponentially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century neighborhood of the Pinch, allowing Orthodox Judaism to flourish. Roughly bounded by Main, Overton, Third, and Washington Streets, the Pinch was created by the Eastern European immigrants that arrived in droves between 1880 and 1910 and remained there until the World War II period. Several Jewish congregations were founded in the city around this time, including Tennessee's first chartered Jewish House of Worship, B'nai Israel (Children of Israel), later Temple Israel, in 1854. A Menorah Institute was founded in 1928 by the Baron Hirsch Synagogue and became the heart of the neighborhood during the Pinch's prime. Memphis's version of the Lower East Side in New York, the Pinch disappeared in the 1940s as postwar transitions broke the community's invisible boundaries and the city's Jews followed other city dwellers eastward to the suburbs.¹¹

Beth El Emeth

In 1862, the Beth El Emeth Congregation was chartered on Jefferson Street as an Orthodox synagogue, attracting rabbis and congregants disillusioned with Reform Judaism. The congregation hired notable Orthodox rabbis, including B'nai Israel's first rabbi, Rabbi Jacob Peres, and the United States' first Jewish chaplain, Rabbi Ferdinand Leopold Sarner. Facing depleted congregations due to Yellow Fever, Beth El Emeth and the Reformist B'mai Israel congregations jointly purchased a lot at 165 Poplar Avenue. This merging did not suit everyone, and some Beth El Emeth congregants preferred instead to rent Cochrane Hall on Main Street to continue their Orthodox worship. Years later, Beth El Emeth reconvened and purchased the 165 Poplar Avenue lot from the B'nai Israel in 1916. Figure 6 shows this building at the time of Beth El Emeth's congregation. Known as the "Poplar Street Shul," the congregation worshipped at this site until 1957 or 1958, at which time they purchased property eight miles east at 3771 Poplar Avenue. Beth El Emeth built an education center at this site and held services there while it considered constructing a new synagogue. Ultimately, the congregation determined that with the movement of Memphis Jews east, a new synagogue would not thrive at this location. The issue of merging came again in the 1950s, this time with the Conservative Judaism movement.¹² The Conservative movement differs from Orthodoxy in its embrace of modernity, while the latter maintains a steadfast devotion to traditional forms of worship and traditional

¹¹ "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities-Orthodox Congregations, Memphis, Tennessee," *Goldring Woldernberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life*.; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities-Tennessee," *Goldring Woldernberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life*; Rabbi A. Mark Levin, "The Two That Became One—Among the Oldest and the Newest: The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Congregation—Memphis Tennessee," *Southern Jewish Heritage*, October 1989, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives; Selma S. Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s- 1960s* (Mercer University Press, 1998) 180, 336; Sue Dickerson and Harriet Stern, "Arks and Bimas of Memphis (Part Two)," *Southern Jewish Heritage*, Summer/Fall 1997, 3-4, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

¹² Levin, "The Two That Became One," Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities-Orthodox Congregations, Memphis, Tennessee," *Goldring Woldernberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life*; Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt*, 180, 336; Bernard Messinger, "Mayrayshis L' Rayshis...From Beginning To...Beginning!"; 24, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives; Dickerson and Stern, "Arks and Bimas of Memphis (Part Two)," *Southern Jewish Heritage*, 4; Levin, "The Two That Became One," Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

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observances.¹³ The congregation's preference for Orthodoxy among the congregation and other Orthodox Memphis Jews ended the discussion of merging.¹⁴

Anshei Sphard

The Anshei Sphard Congregation was founded in 1893 by a group of Polish Jews from Galicia who prayed in nusach Sephard.¹⁵ The group worshipped in a building or residence, possibly owned by a Samuel Bachanan, at Main and Beale Streets in its early years. In 1904, the congregation was chartered and drawn up by Israel Peres. Anshei Sphard purchased a two-story residence on Market Street the same year and remodeled it for worship. A purchase of a cemetery site on Airways Boulevard came soon after in 1907. In 1925, the congregation built a new brick synagogue on the Market Street site, as shown in Figure 7.¹⁶ By 1941, Anshei Sphard's 235-member congregation was dwindling as worshippers relocated from the Pinch to the suburbs. Anshei Sphard followed in 1948 with an establishment at Bellevue and North Parkway, as shown in Figure 8. The Anshei Sphard Synagogue was completed in 1950.¹⁷

Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Congregation

The Beth El Emeth and Anshei Sphard congregations were struggling financially in the 1960s and faced the threat of becoming obsolete as membership continued to dwindle. Wishing to continue Memphis's Jewish history, both congregations decided to merge and jointly commit to Orthodox Judaism in 1966. An official charter was drawn in March of that year and signed in June. The document specifically stated that they were joined by a desire to continue activities that promoted and furthered orthodox Jewish customs. The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue on East Yates Road was formally dedicated on September 13, 1970. Announcements of the new facility articulated a commitment to being relevant to the "spiritual, cultural, educational and social needs of the modern, progressive, young American Jewish Family" in an increasingly secular world. The two synagogues together represented over 175 years of Jewish history in Memphis, and their merging allowed for the continuation of Memphis' Jewish legacy.¹⁸

¹³ "The Jewish Denominations," *My Jewish Learning*, accessed February 21, 2020, retrieved from <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-jewish-denominations/>

¹⁴ Levin, "The Two That Became One," Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities-Orthodox Congregations, Memphis, Tennessee," *Goldring Woldernberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life*; Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt*, 180, 336; Bernard Messinger, "Mayrayshis L' Rayshis...From Beginning To...Beginning!"; 24, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives; Dickerson and Stern, "Arks and Bimas of Memphis (Part Two), *Southern Jewish Heritage*, 4; Levin, "The Two That Became One," Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

¹⁵ This refers to the cross between Ashkenaz and Sephardic liturgy that incorporates Kabbalist-influenced Sephardic rites into prayers. From Posner Menachem, "Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews: The history of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," *Chabad.org*, https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/12145/jewish/Posner-Menachem.htm

¹⁶ The Market Street alley was later renamed November 6th Street, as noted in Figure 7.

¹⁷ Dickerson and Stern, "Arks and Bimas of Memphis (Part Two), *Southern Jewish Heritage*, 4; Levin, "The Two That Became One."; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities-Orthodox Congregations, Memphis, Tennessee," *Goldring Woldernberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life*.

¹⁸ Levin, "The Two That Became One"; Mayrayshis L' Rayshis...From Beginning To...Beginning!"; 24; Testimonial

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While the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Congregation facility is relatively modern, its history represents the evolution of the Memphis Jewish presence. The Beth El Emeth and Anshei Sphard congregations were among the most significant synagogues and contributed greatly to Memphis's unique Orthodox Jewish community. Both began in the historic Pinch neighborhood and were mainstays of Memphis Orthodoxy as the city fluctuated between an Orthodox and Reform stronghold. The congregations followed their worshippers as they outgrew the Pinch and relocated to the more affluent suburbs to the east. Anshei Sphard was first of the two historic congregations to make this move in 1948, beginning the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue's significance in East Memphis. The congregation has remained a vital part of Memphis's Jewish community and illustrates a distinct merging of Southern and Orthodox cultures. It is the only Orthodox synagogue in Memphis to offer programs for people interested in converting to Judaism. It also offers twice daily prayer services which are open to the community. Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth has continually engaged the community in understanding and celebrating Jewish culture through Kosher barbecue contests to supporting exhibits showcasing various ethnic communities which call Memphis home.¹⁹ The synagogue's work has gone beyond the Jewish community, significantly through its work with Christian and Muslim communities to promote respect and understanding among the different religions. Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Congregation has also partnered with the Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association and the Food Bank to host "Hunger Banquets" for those suffering from food scarcity. The congregation's impact has been noted with various awards and other recognition, including a 1980 Yeshiva University Certificate of Award and a ca. 1985 City of Memphis Proclamation by former Mayor Memphis J. Wyeth Chandler, as shown in Figures 10 and 11. Former Vice President Al Gore helped recognize the synagogue's work in a ca. 1985 ceremony, as shown in Figure 9, although the circumstances of this ceremony remain unclear.²⁰

Criterion C: Architectural Significance

Designed in a Modernistic style by renowned Memphis architects Francis Mah and Keith Kays of Walk Jones Francis Mah Incorporated, the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is a significant example of Modern religious architecture in Memphis. Mah received his degree in architecture from Yale University in 1952 where he studied under respected architect and professor, Louis Kahn. He joined the firm of Walk C. Jones Jr. in the late 1950s and became partner and principal in charge of design during his employment. In 1966, Walk C. Jones III and Mah became managing principals and the firm became Walk Jones, Mah, Jones Architects, Inc. Throughout Mah's career, he worked with the father of modern architecture in Memphis,

Dinner Honoring Mr. and Mrs. Herman Manis, Sunday Evening, June 5, 1966, 4, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives; Certificate of Consolidation, March 29, 1966, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives; Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue opening announcement, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

¹⁹ Kosher refers to the proper or correct way to prepare food, or describes food that is permissible to eat under Jewish dietary laws. From *Judaism 101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>.

²⁰ Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt*, 34; "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities-Orthodox Congregations, Memphis, Tennessee," *Goldring Woldernberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life*, Accessed October 24, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.isjl.org/tennessee-memphis-orthodox-encyclopedia.html>; "Memphis' Jewish Community to be Showcased at City Hall," News Release, *Center for Southern Folklore*, 1987, Selma S. Lewis Collection, Box 1, Folder 10, Jewish History-Local, Item 10; Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

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Alfred Lewis Aydelott, and served as president and director of Memphis chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He also served on the AIA Committee on Urban Design for a time. Mah designed a number of significant buildings in Memphis and overseas, including the JMGR offices (1987), the Holiday Inn Corporate Headquarters (1987), Shanghai East Hospital (1995, Shanghai, China), and Tianjin Children's Hospital (2000, Tianjin, China).

The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is a unique example of religious architecture in Memphis. Known as the "City of Churches," many of the city's most notable churches are much more traditional and handsome in style.²¹ Some examples of such designs include the Romanesque First Presbyterian Church at 166 Poplar Avenue, the Spanish Colonial Revival style of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception at 1695 Central Avenue, and the Gothic Idlewild Presbyterian Church at 1750 Union Avenue. The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is quite a departure from these buildings, as well as from other synagogues in the city. Despite a relatively recent construction date of 1970, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is the oldest synagogue building still used as such in Memphis. Other significant Memphis congregations, such as the Temple Israel at 1376 E. Massey Road, Baron Hirsch at 400 S. Yates Road, and Beth Shalom at 6675 Humphreys Boulevard, all moved into their current buildings in 1976, 1988, and 2000 respectively. These examples make use of some Modernistic styles, such as rectangular or geometric forms and uninterrupted bays of brickwork, but they do not possess the same streamlined design as the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue.

The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue exemplifies Midcentury Modern religious design. The dominant architectural discourse of the twentieth century, this style is noted for creativity and rejection of traditional building styles.²² Contemporary congregations also consciously sought modern styles to reflect openness to the general public and forward-thinking.²³ The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue possesses unembellished facades of stretcher bond brick and limited glass panes. The east elevation has a series of clerestory lights on the upper levels that provide plentiful natural light to the interior. Other elevations are almost entirely uninterrupted walls of brick. The flat roof, while exemplary of many Modern designs, provide the practical effect of more space for church facilities. The simple, neat lines are also a classic element of Modernist architecture.

The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth's interior is a striking example of form taking its cue from function. This Midcentury Modern design practice was especially crucial for religious institutions struggling to remain relevant in an increasingly secular society. Places of worship grew as centers of fellowship, communal activities, and education, in addition to prayer, and modern design reflected these uses.²⁴ The clerestory

²¹ "Memphis Historic Churches in the Downtown and Mid-town Areas," *Historic Memphis*, accessed April 2, 2020. Retrieved from <http://historic-memphis.com/memphis-historic/churches/churches.html>

²² Virginia Savage McAlester, "Modern Houses," *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2013), 655, 664; "History," *brg3s architects*, accessed September 16, 2019, retrieved from <http://brg3s.com/studio/history/>

²³ Esley Hamilton and Catie Myers. "Mid-Century Modern Church Survey: Religious Structures 1940-1970 in St. Louis County." <https://dnr.mo.gov/shpo/survey/SLAS043-R.pdf>, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

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windows provide plentiful natural light, and the Sacharin-Posner Sanctuary utilizes mylar coated aluminum panels to provide reflective properties. While the congregation is joined in worship, one could look to the ceiling and see what appears to be an endless crowd of congregants reflected back at them. Open floor plans and flat roofs allow for larger gatherings, and the synagogue's tri-level split interior provides adequate space for offices, classrooms, and other purposes that do not overcrowd the space.²⁵ This is especially needed as many services require men and women to be separated. Interior details feature original maple woodwork and marble features throughout, providing organic complements to the heavy brick exterior.

Like Mah's other projects, Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue has attracted significant praise for its design. The building won the Award of Excellence for Design of Interiors by *Architectural Record* in 1972, shown in Figure 13. The building seamlessly blends the needs of the synagogue with Midcentury modern elements and was praised for its "appeal... to our senses and to the emotions these senses inspire."²⁶ The expansive, flat roof provides more space for communal and educational activities as well as separate spaces for men and women. The clerestory windows provide natural light to ensure the interior is not darkened by its heavy, box-like form. As Figures 14 and 15 illustrate, the synagogue has not changed significantly since its construction. The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue truly has no match in terms of religious architecture in Memphis.

²⁵ Ibid., 8.

²⁶ *Architectural Record*, January 1972, *US Modernist*. <https://usmodernist.org/AR/AR-1972-01.pdf>

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9. Major Bibliographic References

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Selma S. Lewis Collection. Memphis and Shelby County Room. Memphis & Shelby County Public Library & Information Center. 3030 Poplar Avenue, Memphis, TN 38111. Collection Processed by Krystle Savage, University of Memphis. 2002.

Shelby County Register of Deeds.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)	<input type="checkbox"/>	State Historic Preservation Office
<input type="checkbox"/>	previously listed in the National Register	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other State agency
<input type="checkbox"/>	previously determined eligible by the National Register	<input type="checkbox"/>	Federal agency
<input type="checkbox"/>	designated a National Historic Landmark	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local government
<input type="checkbox"/>	recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #	<input type="checkbox"/>	University
<input type="checkbox"/>	recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #	Name of repository: Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A			

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.001 **USGS Quadrangle** Ellendale, 409 NE

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 35.134789 | Longitude: -89.871594 |
| 2. Latitude: 35.134730 | Longitude: -89.869877 |
| 3. Latitude: 35.133758 | Longitude: -89.869915 |
| 4. Latitude: 35.133819 | Longitude: -89.871650 |

Verbal Boundary Description

The Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is at 120 North East Yates Road, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee. It is located on Shelby County tax map parcel 068071 00084. The parcel is 4.001 acres. The property is bounded to the north by Rich Road, to the west by East Yates Road, to the south by Barfield Road, and the west by Colegrove Street. The corners of these boundaries correspond to the latitude/longitude coordinates noted above. These boundaries follow the legal parcel boundaries of Shelby County Tax Parcel 068071 00084, which are depicted on the enclosed tax map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire nominated 4.001-acre property, which contains all of the property historically and currently associated with the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue.

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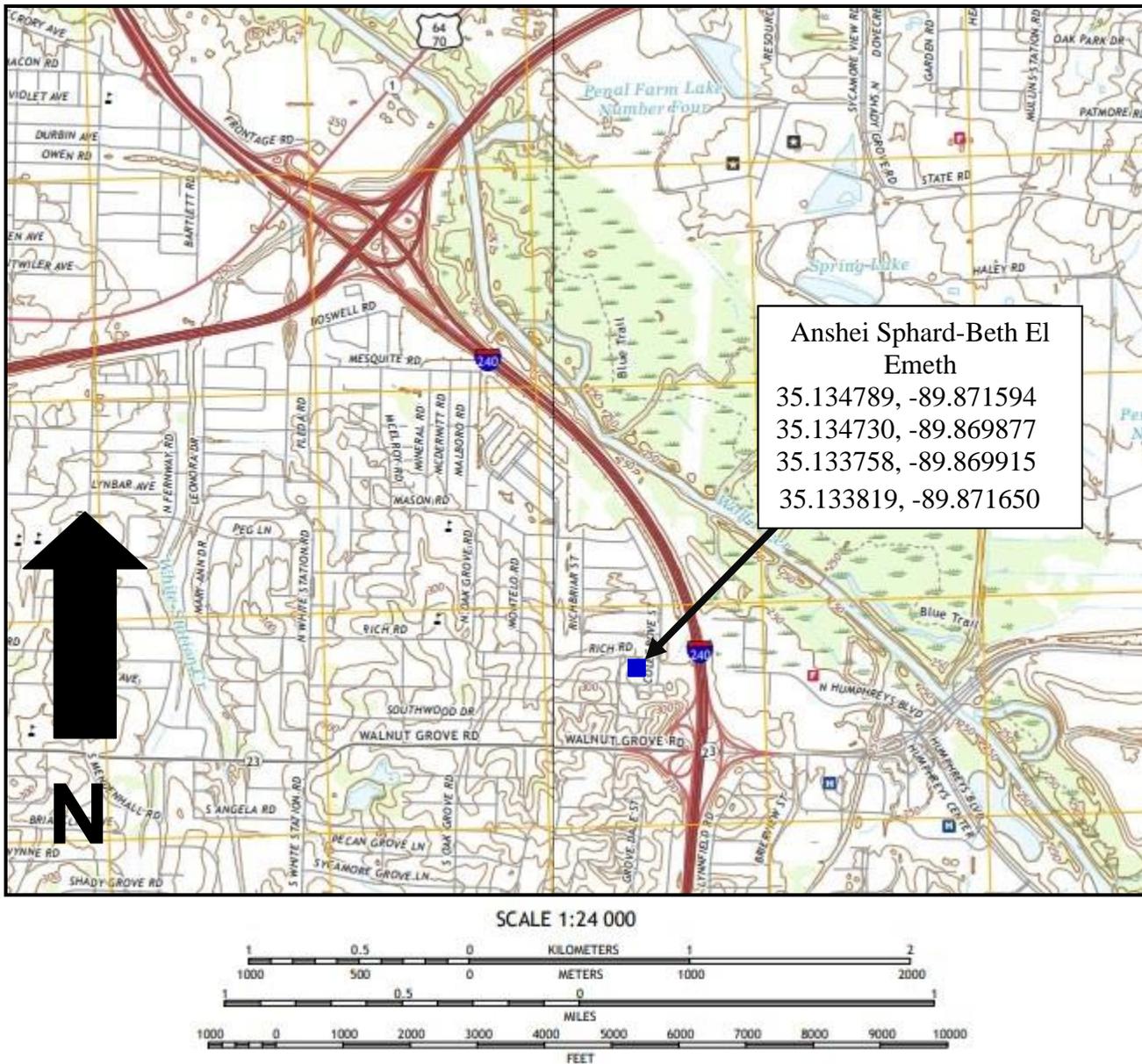


Figure 1: Merging of Ellendale Quadrangle and Northeast Memphis Quadrangle maps, 2019. The location of the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue is illustrated with a blue square.

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Figure 2: Shelby County property viewer map close-up of the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue lot, outlined in blue. Imagery dated 2020.

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11. Form Prepared By

Name Kelsey Lamkin, Historic Preservation Planner; Lynn Mirvis

Organization Memphis Area Association of Governments

Street & Number 8289 Cordova Road, Suite 103 Date April 9, 2020

City or Town Cordova Telephone (901) 729-2871

E-mail klamkin@maagov.org State TN Zip Code 38016

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Photographs** (refer to Tennessee Historical Commission National Register *Photo Policy* for submittal of digital images and prints)
- **Additional items:** (additional supporting documentation including historic photographs, historic maps, etc. should be included on a Continuation Sheet following the photographic log and sketch maps)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Photo Log

Name of Property: Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue City
or Vicinity: Memphis
County: Shelby State: Tennessee
Photographer: Kelsey Lamkin
Date Photographed: September 24, 2019

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 38. East elevation view to the west.
- 2 of 38. North and east elevations, view to the southwest.
- 3 of 38. North elevation, view to the south.
- 4 of 38. North and façade (west) elevations, view to the southeast.
- 5 of 38. Facade, view to the east.
- 6 of 38. Facade and south elevations, view to the northeast.
- 7 of 38. South elevation, view to the north.
- 8 of 38. South and east elevations, view to the northwest.
- 9 of 38. Added sukkah, view to the southwest.
- 10 of 38. Outbuilding, view to the southwest.
- 11 of 38. Interior view of sanctuary, view to the east.
- 12 of 38. Interior view of sanctuary, view to the northwest.
- 13 of 38. Interior view of sanctuary lights and acoustic panels, view to the northwest.
- 14 of 38. Interior view of sanctuary and tapestry, view to the east.
- 15 of 38. Interior view of sanctuary, view to the southeast.
- 16 of 38. Interior view of sanctuary plaques, view to the southwest.
- 17 of 38. Interior view of original maple doors in sanctuary, view to the west.

Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue
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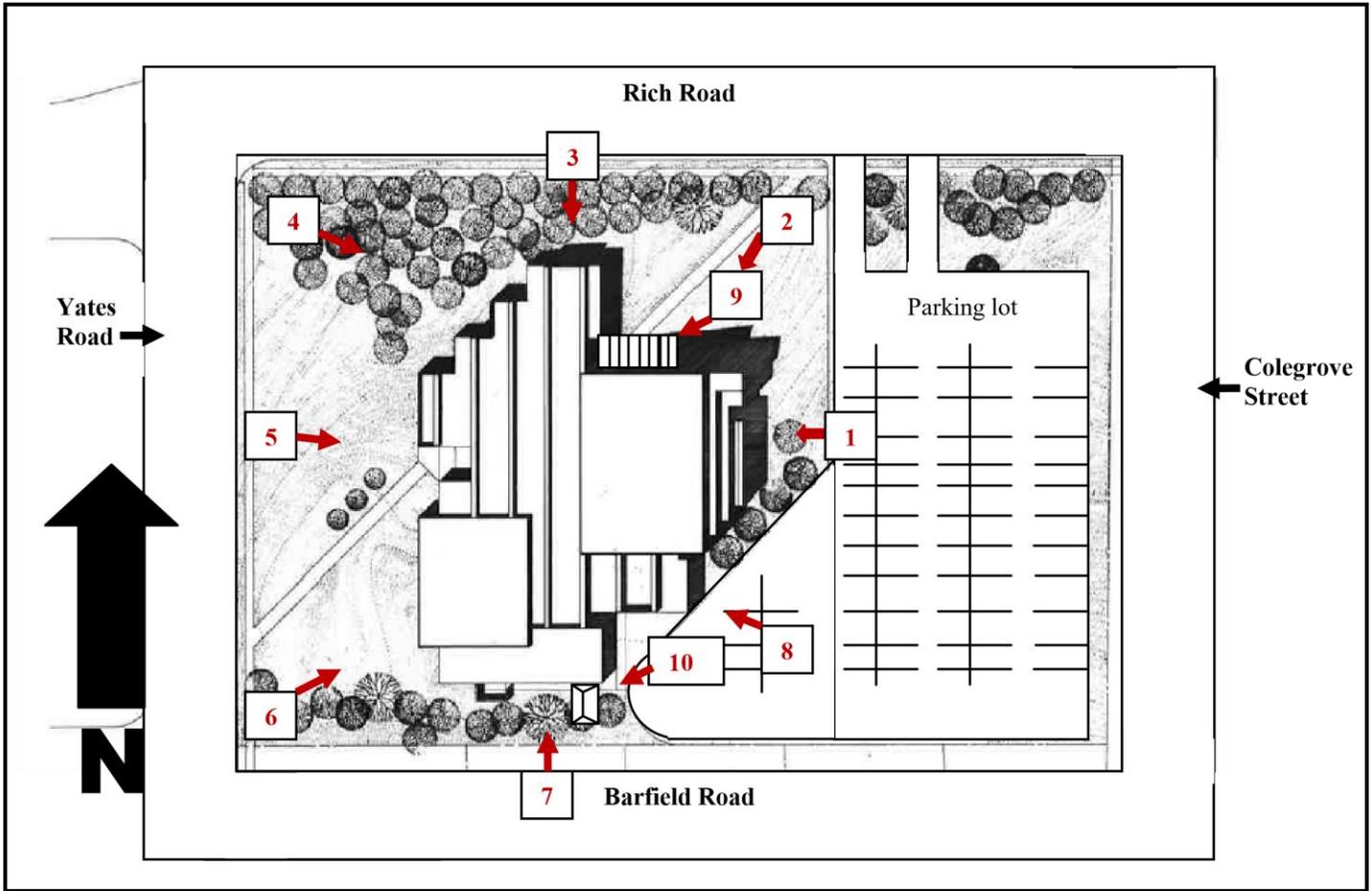
Shelby County, Tennessee
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- 18 of 38. Interior view of main level common area, view to the northwest.
- 19 of 38. Interior view of main level common area, view to the southwest.
- 20 of 38. Interior view of lower level office in common area, view to the northeast.
- 21 of 38. Interior view of upper level common space outside classrooms, view to the northeast.
- 22 of 38. Interior view of upper level classroom, view to the west.
- 23 of 38. Interior view of upper level office, view to the southwest.
- 24 of 38. Interior view of northeast entry on lower level, view to the southeast.
- 25 of 38. Interior view of lower level women's restroom, view to the southwest.
- 26 of 38. Interior view of lower level women's restroom, view to the north.
- 27 of 38. Interior view of dining hall, view to the northwest.
- 28 of 38. Interior view of dining hall, view to the northeast.
- 29 of 38. Interior view of dairy kitchen, view to the west.
- 30 of 38. Interior view of meat kitchen, view to the east.
- 31 of 38. Interior view of dining hall storage closet, view to the south.
- 32 of 38. View of original maple doors to dining hall, view to the west.
- 33 of 38. Interior view of original maple air conditioner vents, view to the northeast.
- 34 of 38. View of original maple doors to chapel, view to the east.
- 35 of 38. Interior view of chapel, view to the east.
- 36 of 38. Interior view of chapel, view to the northwest.
- 37 of 38. Interior view of mikvah, view to the east.
- 38 of 38. Interior view of mikvah, view to the north.

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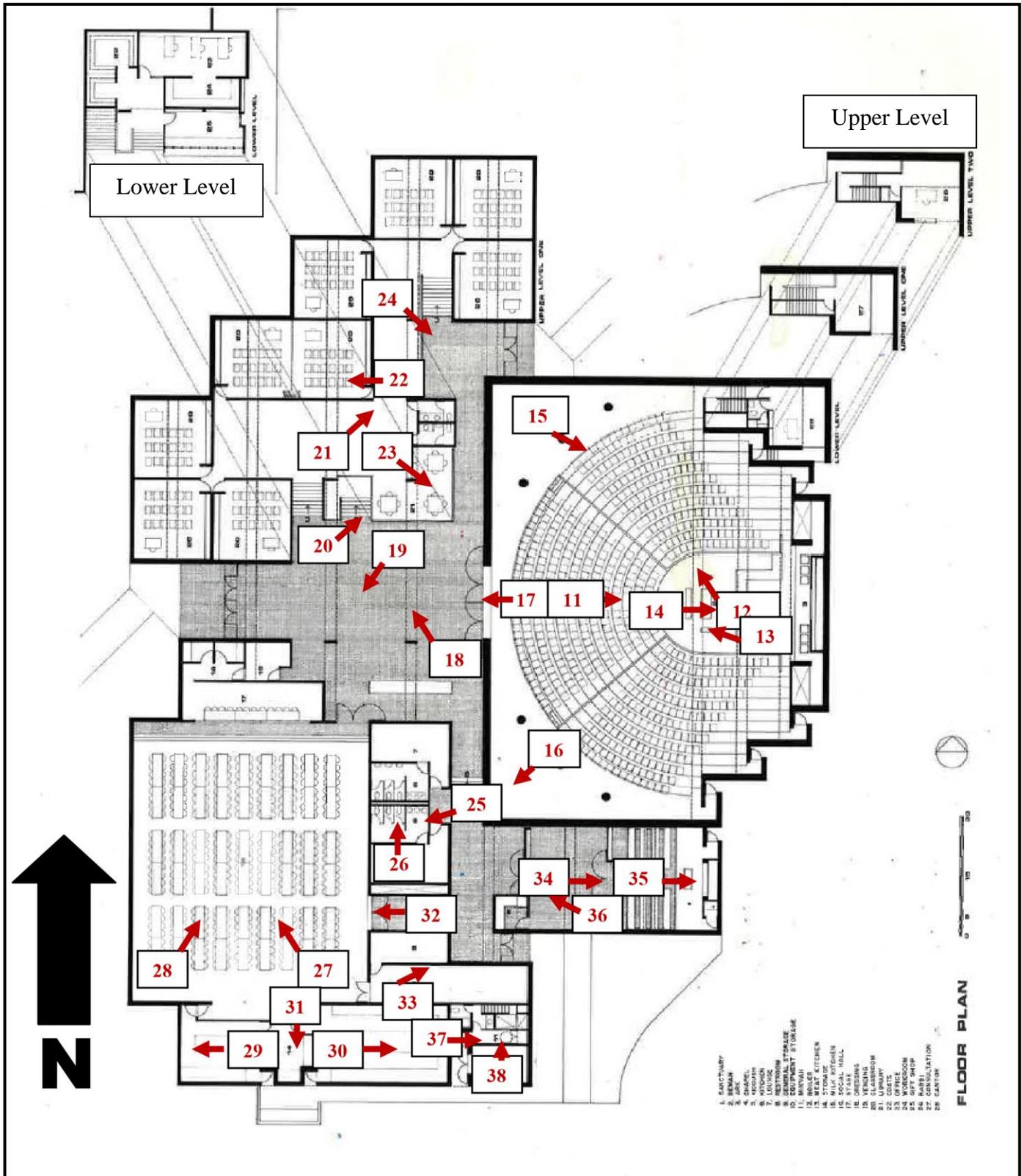
Site Plan



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Floor Plan



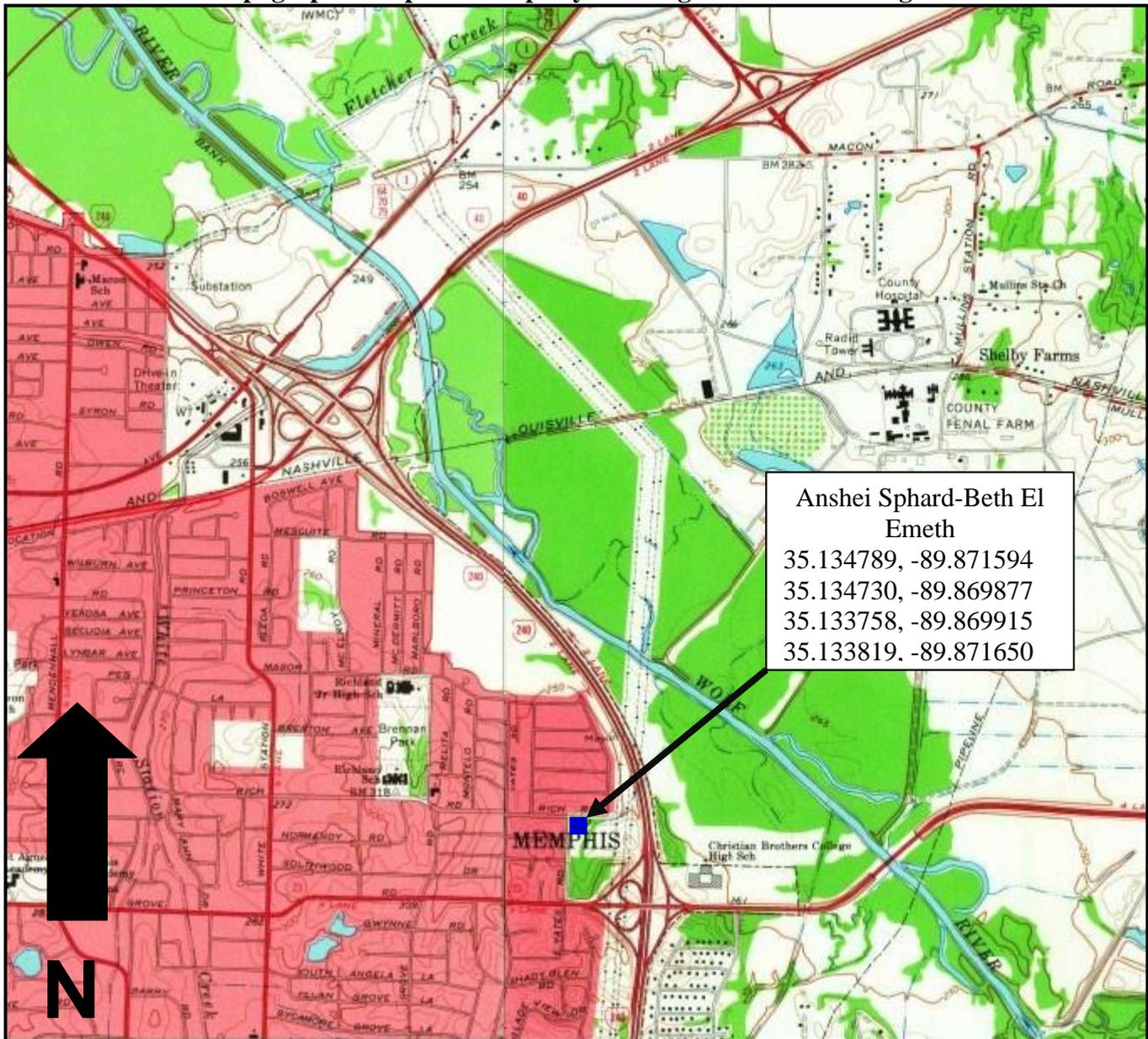
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USGS Topographic Map with Property Showing Latitude and Longitude Points



Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth
 35.134789, -89.871594
 35.134730, -89.869877
 35.133758, -89.869915
 35.133819, -89.871650

N

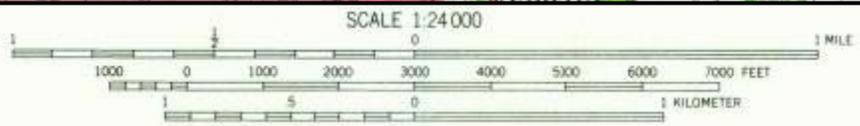


Figure 3. Merging of 1965 Ellendale Quadrangle and Northeast Memphis Quadrangle maps showing approximate location of Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue, illustrated with a blue square.

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Figure 4: Aerial map of the Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue lot, outlined in red.

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Figure 5. Marker for Pinch Historical District. Photograph by Jan Meyer, courtesy of Memphis Public Library.

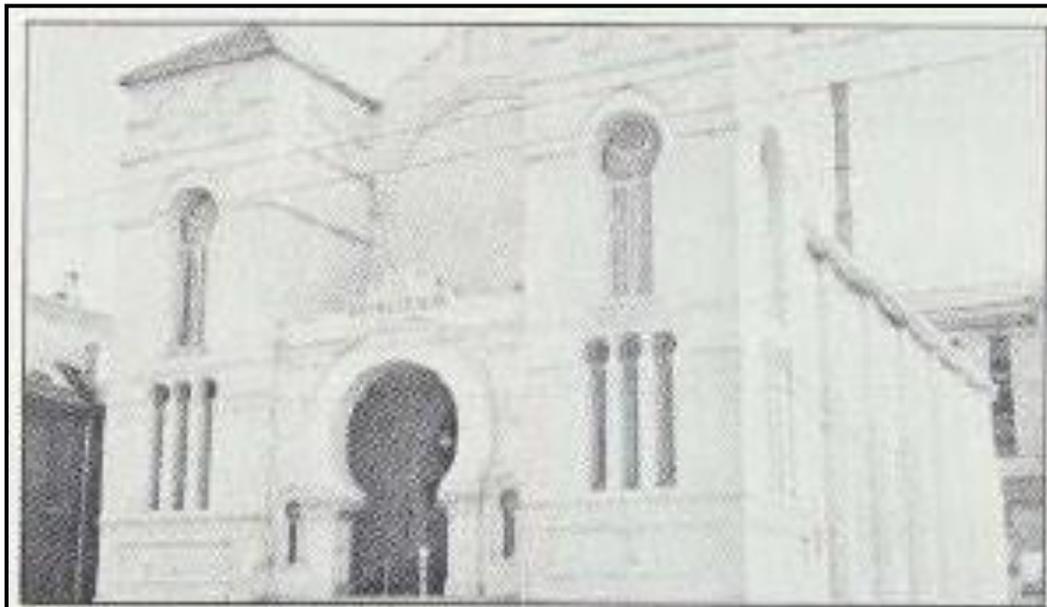


Figure 6. Beth El Emeth at 165 Poplar Avenue, 1916-1958. Courtesy of Selma S. Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s-1960s* (1998). No longer extant.

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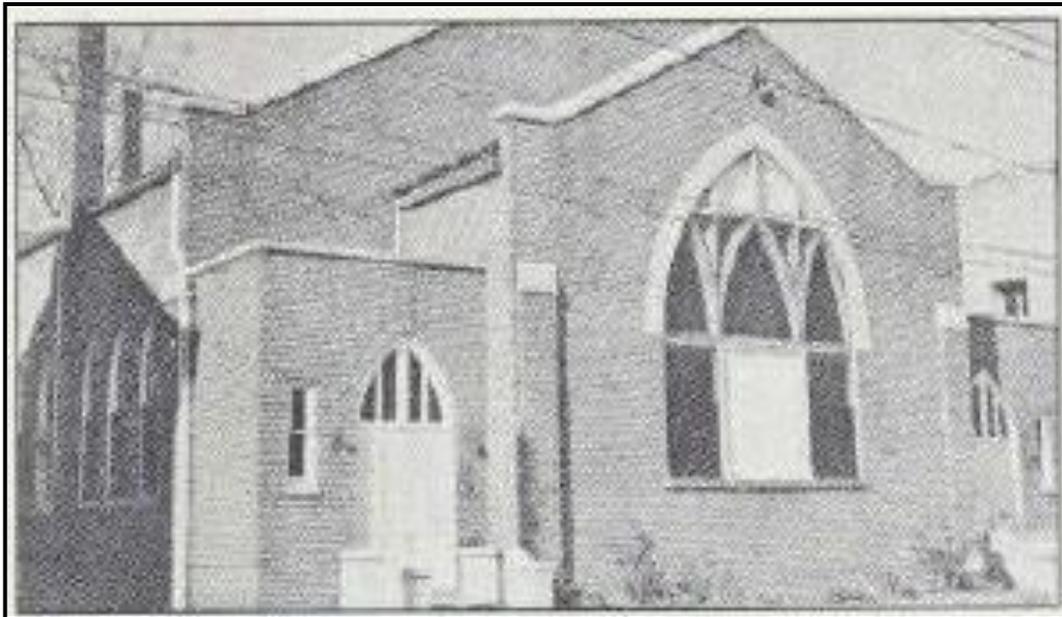


Figure 7. Anshei Sphard on November 6th Street, 1925-1948. Courtesy of Selma S. Lewis. *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s-1960s* (1998). No longer extant.

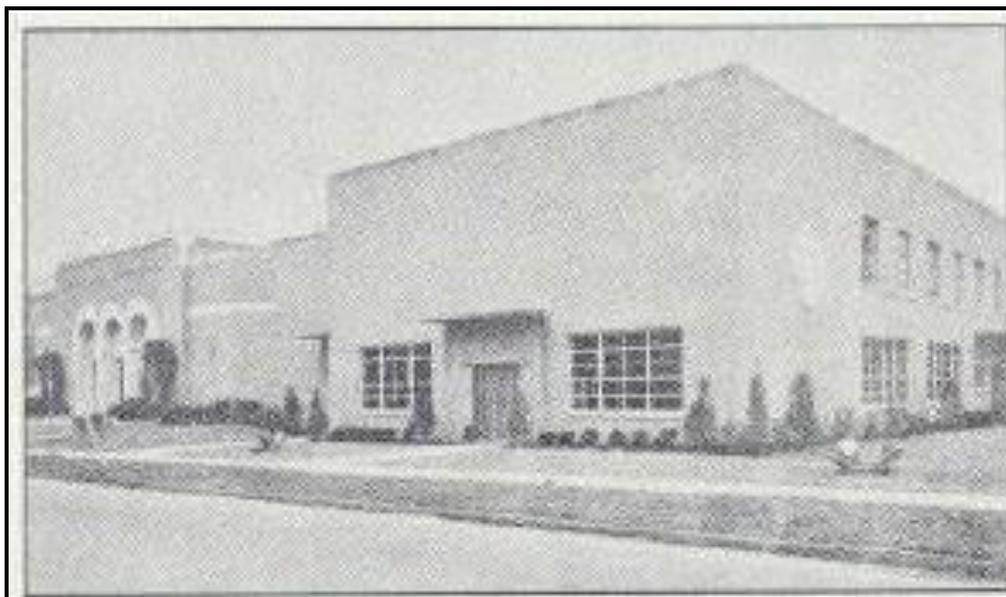


Figure 8. Anshei Sphard at 1188 North Parkway, 1948-1970. Courtesy of Selma S. Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s-1960s* (1998).

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Figure 9. Former Vice President Al Gore, Rabbi Levin, and B. Gold, ca. 1985. Courtesy of Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

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Figure 10. Former Memphis Mayor J. Wyeth Chandler and Rabbi Levin, ca. 1980. Courtesy of Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

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Figure 11. Yeshiva University Certificate of Award, 1980. Courtesy of Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

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Figure 12. Photograph of Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue Torah Scrolls. Courtesy of Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Archives.

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Figure 13. Award of Excellence for Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue 1972. Courtesy of Stephen Berger, brg3s Archives.

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Figure 14. Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth, ca. 1970. Courtesy of Stephen Berger, brg3s Archives.

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--

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Figure 15. View of Sacharin-Posner Sanctuary, ca. 1970. Courtesy of Stephen Berger, brg3s Archives.

Property Owner:

(This information will not be submitted to the National Park Service, but will remain on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission)

Name	Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Synagogue		
Street & Number	120 North East Yates Road	Telephone	(901) 682-1611
City or Town	Memphis	State/Zip	TN 38120