

CONGREGATION TIFEREETH ISRAEL, 109-18 54th Avenue, Borough of Queens.
Constructed 1911; Crescent L. Varrone, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 2010, Lot 1 in part, consisting of that portion of the lot bounded by a line beginning at the northwesterly corner, then extending easterly along the northern property line to a point 24.75 feet from the northwesterly corner, southerly along a line at an angle of 90 degrees to the southern property line, westerly along the southern property line to the western property line, and northerly along the western property line, to the point of beginning.

On January 15, 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Congregation Tifereth Israel and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provision of the law. Five people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the Landmarks Conservancy, Municipal Art Society, Historic Districts Council, the Board of Trustees of Congregation Tifereth Israel, and the Council of Jewish Émigré Community Organization. Additionally, the Commission has received letters from Queens Borough President Helen M. Marshall, City Council Member Hiram Monserrate, Queens Community Board 3 Chairman Martin Maier, and the Queens Jewish Historical Society in support of designation.

Summary

The oldest active synagogue in Corona, the Congregation Tifereth Israel is a rare survivor of the earliest Jewish synagogues built in Queens. This synagogue, whose full name is translated as the Congregation Independent Community, Glory of Israel, People of Corona, was constructed in 1911 to house a congregation of Jews that had relocated to Queens primarily from other parts of New York City. Corona had a relatively small population of Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century; of approximately 1.3 million Jews in the city in 1913, about 23,000 lived in the Borough of Queens. The original members of the Congregation Tifereth Israel predominantly came from the tenement district of the Lower East Side, which was home to an enormous Yiddish-speaking immigrant community hailing mostly from Eastern Europe. In 1918, East Queens had 18 synagogues, two of which were located in Corona. Of these two synagogues, only the Congregation Tifereth Israel survives.



The Congregation Tifereth Israel, although located in Queens, is strikingly reminiscent of synagogues found in the Jewish enclaves of the Lower East Side. These synagogues, which had to be shoehorned into narrow tenement lots, were often similar in size, material and proportion to their neighboring tenements and commercial buildings, and typically featured symmetrical tripartite facades with a central entrance and corner towers. The Congregation Tifereth Israel synagogue follows this pattern despite its location in an environment ungoverned by the restraints of the densely urban Lower East Side. Designed by local architect C. L. Varrone, the synagogue is a two-story wood-frame building that was originally clad with horizontal clapboard siding. Its design is typical of early twentieth-century American synagogues, combining Gothic and Moorish design with Judaic ornament. It has pointed-arched windows, a tripartite upper-story window with a roundel featuring a Star of David in colored glass, and decorative ornament at its gabled parapet. The original wood stoop and railing have been replaced with a brick porch with an iron railing, and the wood clapboard siding has been covered with stucco. Despite these alterations, the Congregation Tifereth Israel remains a rare survivor as what is likely the oldest purpose-built synagogue in Queens and a striking representative of a regional vernacular style.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Development of Corona, Queens¹

The neighborhood of Corona is located in north-central Queens, just west of Flushing-Meadows Park. Historically composed of dense forests, open meadows and swampland in the area along Flushing Creek (now mostly reduced after more than a century of filling), it was once a fertile hunting ground for Native American Munsee. In the years during the Revolutionary War until approximately the middle of the nineteenth century, the area now known as Corona remained sparsely populated with the majority of its residents being farmers of European ancestry. These early settlers kept Africans as slaves, and it was the hands of these laborers that largely shaped the agrarian landscape of the greater Corona area for nearly two centuries. Residents from this period would have said they lived in Newtown Long Island;² it was not until 1873 that the name Corona (meaning “crown” of Queens County) came into common use.

Like many neighborhoods in the boroughs of New York City, transportation was the principal factor in the development of Corona. The first wave of growth in the rural township came in 1853 with the construction of the Flushing Railroad, which would bring it within a 30-minute commute of Manhattan. Enticed by country living, a few wealthy Manhattanites began relocating to Newtown and its environs. The area had likely already been made familiar to them by the popular National Racetrack, which flourished in Corona in the 1850s and 60s and attracted amusement seekers from the other boroughs. The next wave of development came with the arrival of fixed-rail horsecar lines to the Brooklyn and Manhattan ferries in 1876 and trolleys in the 1890s, which further increased Corona’s appeal as a viable commuter suburb for middle- and upper-class professionals.

Mid to late nineteenth-century Corona was principally a neighborhood of modest single-family homes, boasting a firehouse, several churches and a number of small businesses. An assortment of industries came to Corona in the following decades, including a French China company, a tile works, a straw works and the American Patent Portable House Manufacturing Company. Tiffany Glass Company opened a major factory in Corona in 1893. In 1898 Corona, along with the rest of the present-day borough of Queens, was annexed to the newly-created City of New York. Shortly after, in what was likely the impetus for the largest transformation in Corona’s built environment, the 1917 opening of the elevated train service (today’s Flushing Line of the IRT Division, or the number 7 line) permanently cemented Corona’s position as city neighborhood. The construction of the elevated train along Roosevelt Avenue sparked commercial and residential development, and many of the wood-frame houses of the previous century were replaced with multiple-family dwellings and apartment buildings. The 1939 development of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park and the World’s Fair site on the former dumping ground of Flushing Creek brought further attention to Corona; the park—which is New York City’s third largest, was home to the 1964 World’s Fair and hosts the annual U.S. Open tennis tournament—is less than one block from the Congregation Tifereth Israel.

Corona’s Jewish Community and the Formation of Congregation Tifereth Israel³

Queens had a Jewish presence as early as 1759, but it was not until after the Civil War that the community slowly began to flourish. With the Jewish neighborhood of Manhattan’s Lower East Side far exceeding its capacity and with the development of more reliable transportation and bridges, it became an attractive alternative to settle in one of the neighboring and less-congested suburbs of Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island. In Queens, the first Jewish settlements formed in areas such as Jamaica, Flushing, Newtown, Astoria, and Long Island City. Additionally, a resort community began to develop in the Rockaways, which became a fashionable vacation spot for more affluent Ashkenazim. The Corona settlement was among the first of these pioneering Jewish communities, having formed as early as 1900. By 1908, Corona’s Jewish population reached approximately 150. Despite the burgeoning Jewish population in Queens, its numbers remained relatively low in contrast to Manhattan and Brooklyn; in 1918, of New York City’s estimated 1.5 million Jews, only about 23,000 lived in Queens.

There were said to have been two Jewish neighborhoods in Corona in the early part of the twentieth century: an older and poorer one along Corona Avenue and a newer and more prosperous one

along Northern Boulevard. Many of Corona's Jewish residents managed shirtwaist factories, an industry brought over from the Lower East Side, and most of these factories were located along Corona Avenue and its adjacent side streets. Many of the area's theaters were also managed by members of the Jewish community; the El Dorado, Hyperion and Park Theaters were all Jewish-owned and operated. There were two synagogues in Corona in the early part of the twentieth century: the Anshei Emes (or Smith Street Synagogue) on 52nd Avenue, organized in 1905, and the Congregation Tifereth Israel on 54th Avenue, organized circa 1907.⁴ At least three additional synagogues formed in Corona during the following decade, none of which exist today. Of the first two, only the Tifereth Israel survives; the Anshei Emes was demolished in 1936.⁵

Although organized circa 1907, the Congregation Tifereth Israel did not incorporate until 1911. Its officers at the time of incorporation were Philip Worth, president; Solomon Dauber, vice president; Jacob Teitelbaum, secretary; and Hersch Eisenstein, treasurer. According to its certificate of incorporation, the congregation's intention was "to have a synagogue for the purposes of praying, to bury their dead, and to advance its members spiritually and intellectually."⁶ Its name, Congregation Independent Chevre Tyfers Israel Anshei Corona (meaning Congregation Independent Community, Glory of Israel, People of Corona), was cumbersome in length and soon the synagogue was fondly known as the Home Street Synagogue for the street on which it was located. The congregation acquired the lot at 136 Home Street (changed to 54th Avenue circa 1925) in April, 1911, and the ceremonial cornerstone laying took place on August 13th. A local newspaper described the ceremony as follows:

A large attendance of interested spectators witnessed the ceremonies at which Dr. Peyser, president of the Smith Street synagogue, officiated as auctioneer in auctioning off the privileges which netted the handsome sum of \$350 for which the whole congregation unite in giving the Doctor their sincere thanks for his efforts in making the event a complete success. The new synagogue, when completed, will be one of the most imposing temples of worship in Corona.⁷

In addition to the synagogue, over the years there would be a *mikveh* (on the same lot as the synagogue), a *yeshiva* (nearby on 53rd Avenue) and a cemetery.⁸

One of the synagogue's early congregants was a young woman named Josephine Esther Mentzer, who would grow up to become the immensely successful cosmetics entrepreneur Estée Lauder. Born in 1908, Mentzer spent her youth in Corona and began her business selling products door to door. Her parents, Rose and Max Mentzer, owned a hardware store two blocks from the Tifereth Israel synagogue. Estée Lauder, who would remark later in life that she thought she had grown "a nice little business," would become the head of a multi-billion dollar company that would expand to control 45 percent of the cosmetics market in United States department stores and sell its products in 118 countries.⁹

Subsequent History¹⁰

Until about 1960, Corona was a predominantly white neighborhood with 98 percent of its residents claiming various European ancestries. It was around this time that the demographics of Corona began to shift, so much so that in 1992 New York's Department of City Planning called the area "perhaps the most ethnically mixed community in the world."¹¹ In his book, *The Future of Us All: Race and Neighborhood Politics in New York City*, Roger Sanjek considers the Elmhurst-Corona (or Queens Community District No. 4) area's demographic evolution to be emblematic of the way other American cities are gradually experiencing (or will soon experience) a "great transition" in their ethnic composition. According to Sanjek, "Elmhurst-Corona underwent its majority-minority transition in the 1970s. The neighborhood's white population fell from 98 percent in 1960 to 67 percent in 1970, 34 percent in 1980, and 18 percent in 1990."¹² He continues, "By 1990 Elmhurst-Corona was 45 percent Latin American, 26 percent Asian, and ten percent black. Established residents of German, Irish, Polish, Italian, Jewish, and other European ancestries now lived among African, African American, Chinese, Colombian, Cuban, Dominican, Ecuadorian, Filipino, Haitian, Indian, Korean, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other new neighbors."¹³

As the demographics of Corona shifted, its Jewish community waned and the synagogue lost many of its local congregants to other neighborhoods. The yeshiva closed in the 1970s and was converted into a residence and music studio; still standing and largely unchanged, it continues to be distinguished by large Star of David motifs in the brick at its main façade.¹⁴ Throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s the Congregation Tifereth Israel synagogue continued to be used for worship by a very small contingency of its original congregation and their descendants; however, with few remaining members and low contributions of dues, the synagogue was not adequately maintained and fell into a state of disrepair. A small community of Bukharan Jews from the former Soviet Union began meeting in the synagogue in the mid-1990s, and in 1996 an appeal was made to congregants to help restore the synagogue, which at that time was reported to be “in dire straits, plagued by just about every physical problem a building can have.”¹⁵ In 1999, the Queens Historical Society granted Queensmark status to the synagogue in recognition of its historical and architectural merit and in 2002 it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. It continues to be used and cared for today by members of its congregation, some of whose relatives have been attending services there since its incorporation and others who are comparatively new to the area. With a diverse congregation in a diverse city neighborhood, and as Corona’s only synagogue continuously in use since the early part of the twentieth century, it remains a vital part of the evolving history of the neighborhood and of Queens as a whole.

Synagogue Design and Congregation Tifereth Israel¹⁶

The Congregation Tifereth Israel synagogue closely follows the conventions of synagogue design that developed in turn-of-the-century New York City, particularly in the Jewish enclaves of Manhattan’s Lower East Side. With the arrival of so many Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1920, it was inevitable that the course of American synagogue architecture be profoundly affected. According to Oscar Israelowitz, “Many of these immigrants had lived in the shtetls of Poland and Russia, where synagogue design was an evolutionary outgrowth of many centuries of traditional folk art.”¹⁷ Thus, the vernacular synagogues of the Lower East Side subscribed to the patterns of American architecture while incorporating the values of the primarily Russian-, German- and Polish-Jewish population; these values, while adhering to the constraints of building in a densely urban environment, resulted in a unique vernacular style.

These eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century vernacular synagogues generally employed a Gothic, Beaux Arts or Classical vocabulary while applying Moorish and Judiac ornament. The Moorish style was a particularly fashionable choice as it reflected the historicist attitudes of the time while harkening back to the so called “Golden Age” of Jewry in Spain when that nation was under Muslim rule. These synagogues typically featured a tripartite façade with a dominant central bay, a central entrance fronted by a double staircase, and corner towers. Through custom, synagogues typically faced east toward Jerusalem; however the city grid of New York often did not allow for this convention. More important than making a grand architectural statement with the design of vernacular synagogues was having a place to congregate with other people of common heritage.

The Congregation Tifereth Israel synagogue, in this fashion, was designed as a modest, local synagogue for a small and diverse population. Little is known about its architect, Crescent L. Varrone, except that he had an office in Corona and designed numerous residential and commercial buildings throughout a career that spanned nearly fifty years.¹⁸ His design for the Tifereth Israel synagogue implemented those characteristics seen in the vernacular synagogues of the Lower East Side, such as the tripartite façade, central entrance and corner towers topped with onion-shaped domes. This markedly Moorish reference, along with other applied ornament at the top of the façade, distinguished the synagogue from neighboring residential buildings while remaining a modest and appropriate contribution to the surrounding built environment.

Description¹⁹

Congregation Tifereth Israel is located on the south side of 54th Avenue between 108th and 111th streets in Corona, borough of Queens, New York. Although the lot contains two buildings—a synagogue

and mikveh (also known to have been the Rabbi's residence)—only the part containing the synagogue is included in the landmark site.

The synagogue is two stories tall with a raised basement. It is rectangular in shape and has a flat roof, which is obscured by a decorative parapet at the main façade. There is a skylight located at the center of the roof. Original architectural drawings show a wood frame building with clapboard siding and a wood stoop; the building was coated with textured stucco circa 1921 and still possesses this cladding today.²⁰ It is unknown if the wood stoop was ever constructed or, if it was, when it was removed; the circa 1940 Department of Taxes photograph shows the current brick double staircase. The porch landing, which today stretches the width of the façade, is not historic in its current configuration; the tax photo shows a porch that stretches approximately the width of the entrance at the top of the double stairway. Today the synagogue is painted white with dark brown trim, which appears to generally be consistent with the historic color scheme.

Main façade: The main, or 54th Avenue, façade of the synagogue is three bays wide and symmetrical. It features a wide central bay flanked by a narrower bay on either side. The main entrance is located in the central bay and is set within an arched opening; it consists of a wood double door with metal kickplates and a wood transom panel, and is surrounded by a molded wood frame. The doors and the transom panel each feature a small decorative Star of David. The entrance is fronted by a full-width concrete porch and double stairway, elevating it above street level. This stairway is faced with brick at the portion that faces the street and is topped with stone coping and an iron handrail. The stair rail appears to be historic; the balustrade at the full-width porch was likely installed at the same time as the widening of the porch. A decorative iron Star of David is located at the center of the handrail at the stair landing. The brick wall has decorative piercings near its center; behind the piercings are glass-block windows. Two secondary entrances are located behind the raised entry stoop, providing direct access to the synagogue's basement. These entrances each have a simple metal-clad wood door.

Fenestration at the first floor of the main façade consists of a single pointed-arched window on either side of the central entrance. These windows have double-hung wood sashes with molded wood surrounds and feature stained pebbled-glass panes. The upper pane in the eastern window has been replaced with a wood panel. Second-floor fenestration consists of a large, central tripartite window with two narrower windows in the flanking bays. The tripartite window features a central roundel with a Star of David with stained-glass panes of various colors and flanking narrow pointed-arched windows. The windows in the flanking bays are round-headed. All sashes are wood and double-hung, and all panes are stained pebbled-glass (except the roundel, which has a couple replacement non-textured stained glass panes). Three of the four panes in the flanking windows have been replaced with wood panels.

The main façade culminates in a decorative parapet in the shape of a central gable and flanking onion-dome towers. Historically there was a small Star of David mounted to the peak of the gable and finials mounted to the tops of the onion domes; none of these features exist today. This part of the façade is clad with metal and painted brown. Metal coping has been mounted to the onion-dome towers, which gives them a triangular appearance from the street. The parapet features paired brackets and other decorative elements. Most of these decorative elements have been painted a contrasting gold color. Historically, there was signage mounted here; it has since been removed. There are several light fixtures attached to the main façade: a sconce above the central entrance (which appears to be historic), and non-historic small light fixtures above each of the first-floor windows. There are simple sconce light fixtures mounted adjacent to each of the secondary entrances behind the stoop, and a security camera has been mounted to the frame of each of the second-floor outer-bay windows. A small round medallion commemorating the synagogue's Queensmark status has been mounted to the façade, directly east of the entrance. There is non-historic signage reading "Cong. Tifereth Israel" above the main entrance and non-historic address numbers, "109-18," attached to the transom panel.

East façade: The east façade has two rows of seven regularly-spaced window openings, rectangular shaped at the first floor and round arched at the second. All windows have double-hung wood sashes and molded wood frames, and all feature pebbled-glass panes. The upper pane in the window at the first bay (from the front of the building) has been covered with a wood panel. The first-floor windows

historically had decorative wood lintels; two have been removed (in the first and second bays, counting from the front of the building). The basement level is slightly recessed and has six window openings. Basement windows are rectangular shaped; all have been covered with wood panels with the exception of the first (from the front of the building), which has a non-historic aluminum sash window. All have simple concrete sills. The east façade culminates in a flat parapet topped with vinyl coping. A pipe vent is visible at the roof, near the front of the building. A vertical iron pipe and spout are located at basement level, also near the front of the building. The paint at this façade is peeling throughout.

West façade: The west façade of the synagogue is essentially identical to the east façade, with the following exceptions: There is an exterior brick chimney that rises up the side of the building between the second and third bays (counting from the building's front). There are five basement-level window openings; the first bay contains its historic wood casement sashes. Unlike the east façade, there is no visible pipe vent at the roof or iron pipe and spout at basement level at this façade; however there is piping and what appears to be a meter near the base of the chimney.

Site features: A concrete sidewalk stretches along the east side of the synagogue, leading to the rear of the building and the neighboring mikveh. There is a flat dirt area west of the synagogue. The building is surrounded by a wrought-iron picket fence, with a small wrought-iron gate at the base of each of the main entrance stairways. There is a chain link gate at either side of the synagogue near the rear of the building. To the east of the synagogue is the historic mikveh, which is set back and fronted by a flat grassy area that is used for parking; the mikveh and grassy area are not part of the landmark site.

Report researched and written by
Kathryn E. Horak
Research Department

NOTES

¹ Sources for this section include: Anthony Robins, *Congregation Tifereth Israel, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (New York: National Park Service, 2002); Roger Sanjek, *The Future of Us All: Race and Neighborhood Politics in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Vincent F. Seyfried, *Corona: From Farmland to City Suburb, 1650-1935* (Staten Island: Edgian Press, 1986).

² Newtown comprised today's Maspeth, Middle Village, Ridgewood, Glendale, Rego Park, Forest Hills, Corona, East Elmhurst, Jackson Heights and Woodside.

³ Sources for this section include: Frederick M. Binder, *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Phyllis Hochberg, "Congregation Tifereth Israel of Corona—A Piece of Jewish History in Queens" *The Jewish Press* (March 24, 2002): 46-47; Oscar Israelowitz, *Synagogues of New York City: A Pictorial Survey in 123 Photographs* (New York: Dover, 1982); Viola Milne, "Corona History: Rich in Ethnic Background" *The Corona Times* (Jan. 9 1997): page unknown; Grace Mirabella, "The Time 100- The Most Important People of the Century" *Time Magazine Online* (Dec. 7 1998), <<http://www.time.com/time/time100/builder/profile/lauder.html>>; Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Robins, *Congregation Tifereth Israel, National Register Form; The Jewish Communal Register of New York City, 1917-1918* (New York: Kehillah [Jewish Community], 1918).

⁴ The Congregation Tifereth Israel is generally thought to have been organized in 1907; however, it has been reported that the original date of organization was 1906 (see Milne, “Corona History”).

⁵ The New York Department of Buildings has a demolition permit on file for 108-37 52nd Avenue (the site of the Smith Street synagogue) that dates to 1936 (DP 3312-36). A certificate of occupancy from 1953 (COQ 100204) describes the building on the site as a one-story multiple dwelling.

⁶ See Robins, Section 8, Page 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A *mikveh* is the location of the ritual bath, and a *yeshiva* is the school for Talmudic studies.

⁹ See Mirabella, “The Time 100.”

¹⁰ Sources for this section include: Milne, “Corona History: Rich in Ethnic Background”; *Home Street Synagogue News: The Newsletter of the Sisterhood of Congregation Tifereth Israel* 1.1 (December 1, 1996); Sanjek.

¹¹ Sanjek, 1.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The yeshiva, located at 108-44 53rd Avenue, has gained some attention over the years as having been the residence and music studio of brothers Dan and Ed Gilroy (of the Grammy-nominated band, The Breakfast Club) beginning in the mid-1970s. According to Ed Gilroy, the singer and film actress Madonna lived with him and his brother circa 1979-80. Ed Gilroy, personal interview, Dec. 17, 2007; Liz Rosenberg (Publicist to Madonna), “Re: Madonna,” emails to Kathryn Horak, Sept. 5, 2007, Oct. 4, 2007, Dec. 11, 2007.

¹⁵ *Home Street Synagogue News*, 2.

¹⁶ Sources for this section include: William Aron and Oscar Israelowitz, *The Changing Face of New York Synagogues, 1730-1974* (New York: Yeshiva University Museum, 1976); Judit Targarona Borrás and Angel Saenz-Badillos, eds., *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Netherlands: Brill Publishing, 1999); Marilyn Joyce Chiat, *America’s Religious Architecture: Sacred Places for Every Community* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997); Brian de Breffney, *The Synagogue* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978); Shari Goldberg, “Vernacular Synagogue Architecture,” *Common Bond* 16.2 (2001): 2-4; Israelowitz. Portions of this section adapted from: LPC, *Kehila Kadosha Janina Synagogue* (LP-2143) (New York: City of New York, 2005), prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

¹⁷ Israelowitz, viii.

¹⁸ The *New York Times* posted building notices with C.L. Varrone listed as architect until 1950, so it can be assumed that he practiced at least until then. No obituary could be found.

¹⁹ Sources for this section include: Architectural drawings from the New York City Borough of Queens Buildings Department; E. Belcher Hyde, Inc., *Atlases of Queens County*, Volume two, Plate 28: 1903, 1915, 1927, 1934, 1955, 1989 (courtesy of the New York Public Library, Map Division); Robins.

²⁰ E. Belcher Hyde, Inc., *Atlases of Queens County* show a stucco building at 109-18 54th Avenue by 1927, but not earlier than 1915 (the 1915 atlas shows a wood frame building on the site), and there is an alteration permit on file with the Queens Buildings Department from 1921. The clapboard siding still exists beneath the stucco.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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

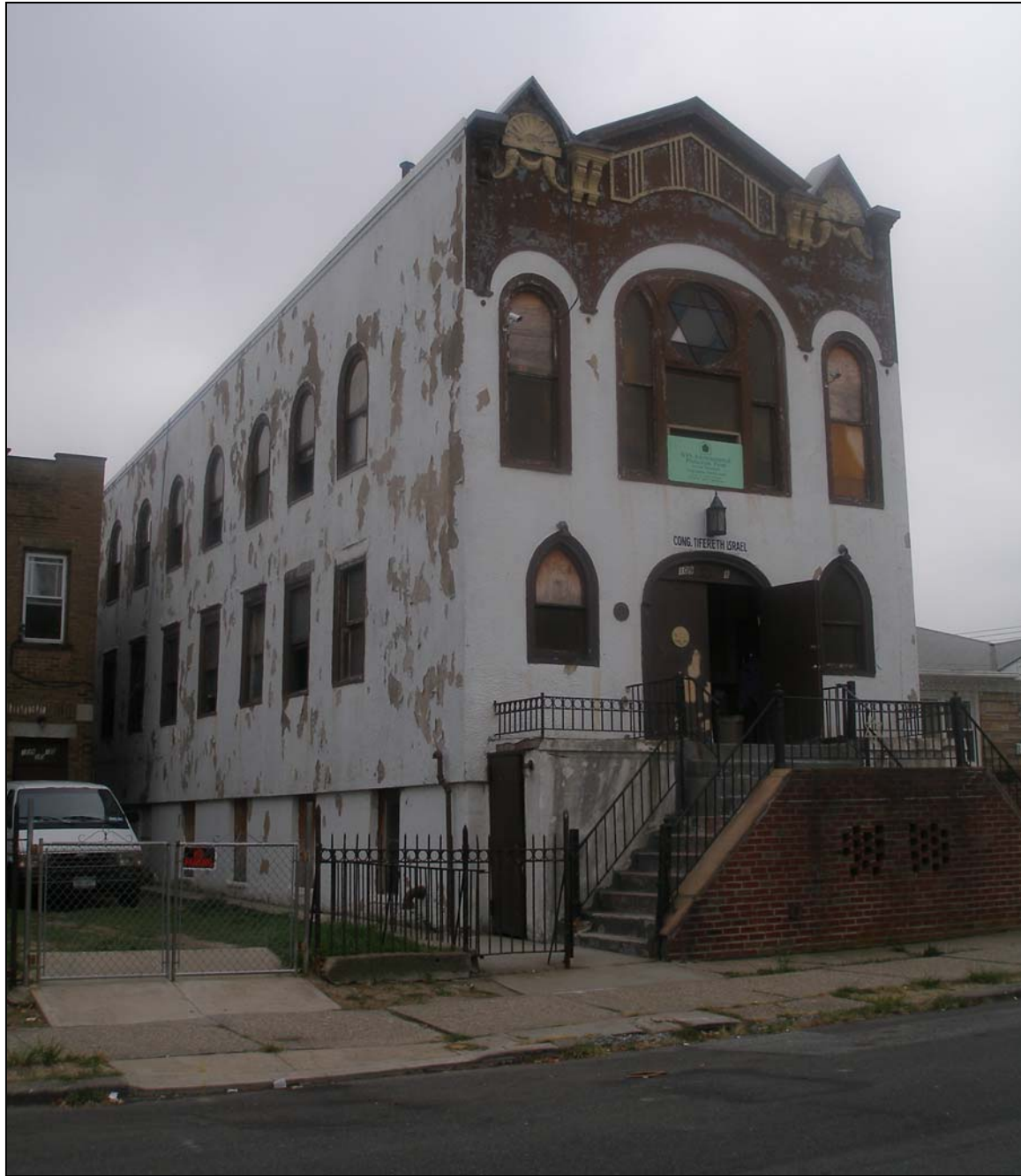
The Commission further finds that among its important qualities, the Congregation Tifereth Israel is the oldest active synagogue in Corona and a rare survivor of the earliest Jewish synagogues built in Queens; that it was constructed in 1911 to house a congregation that had relocated to Queens primarily from other parts of New York City; that the original members of the Congregation Tifereth Israel predominantly came from the tenement district of the Lower East Side, which was home to an enormous Yiddish-speaking immigrant community hailing mostly from Eastern Europe; that of two synagogues located in Corona in 1918, it is the only synagogue to survive; that although it is located in Queens, the Congregation Tifereth Israel is strikingly reminiscent of synagogues found in the Jewish enclaves of the Lower East Side, which had to be shoehorned into narrow tenement lots, were often similar in size, material and proportion to their neighboring tenements and commercial buildings, and typically featured symmetrical tripartite facades with a central entrance and corner towers; that it was designed by local architect C. L. Varrone; that it is a two-story wood-frame building that was originally clad with horizontal clapboard siding; that its design is typical of early twentieth-century American synagogues, combining Gothic and Moorish design with Judaic ornament; that it has pointed-arched windows, a tripartite upper-story window with a roundel featuring a Star of David in colored glass, and decorative ornament at its gabled parapet; and that despite some alterations, which include a replacement brick porch and stucco cladding over the original clapboard, the Congregation Tifereth Israel remains a rare survivor as what it likely the oldest purpose-built synagogue in Queens and a striking representative of a regional vernacular style

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Congregation Tifereth Israel, 109-18 54th Avenue, Borough of Queens, and designates Queens Tax Map Block 2010, Lot 1 in part as a Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin, Christopher Moore,
Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Congregation Tifereth Israel, main (north) façade
Photo: Kathryn Horak



Congregation Tifereth Israel, main and east façades, view looking southwest
Photo: Kathryn Horak



Congregation Tifereth Israel, main and west façades, view looking southeast
Photo: Kathryn Horak



Congregation Tifereth Israel, detail, main façades and porch, view looking southeast
Photo: Kathryn Horak



Congregation Tifereth Israel, detail, main facade
Photo: Kathryn Horak



Congregation Tifereth Israel, circa 1939
New York City Department of Taxes Photograph



CONGREGATION TIFERETH ISRAEL (LP-2283) 109-18 54th Avenue.
Landmark Site: Borough of Queens, Tax Map Block 2010, Lot 1 (in part).

Designated: February 12, 2008

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, 2006.
Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, J.M.