



HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY - BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

*** Note:** Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common) Westville Synagogue
 Building Name (Historic) Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol - B'nai Israel - The Westville Synagogue
 Street Address or Location 74 West Prospect Street
 Town/City New Haven Village Westville County New Haven
 Owner(s) Beth Hamedrosh Westville Synagogue Public Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Religious - Synagogue
 Historic Use: Religious - Synagogue

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road? Yes No
 Interior accessible? Yes No If yes, explain During limited hours by appointment
 Style of building Modernist Date of Construction 1958, 1964

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate):

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clapboard | <input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos Siding | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brick | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Shingle | <input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt Siding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fieldstone | <input type="checkbox"/> Board & Batten | <input type="checkbox"/> Stucco | <input type="checkbox"/> Cobblestone | <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum Siding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete (Type _____) | <input type="checkbox"/> Cut Stone (Type _____) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |

Structural System

- Wood Frame Post & Beam Balloon Load bearing masonry Structural iron or steel
 Other _____

Roof (Type)

- Gable Flat Mansard Monitor Sawtooth
 Gambrel Shed Hip Round Other _____

(Material)

- Wood Shingle Roll Asphalt Tin Slate Asphalt Shingle
 Built up Tile Other _____

Number of Stories: 1 + B Approximate Dimensions 120' x 85' and 40' x 75'

Structural Condition: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

Exterior Condition: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

Location Integrity: On original site Moved When? _____

Alterations? Yes No If yes, explain: _____

FOR OFFICE USE: Town # _____ Site # _____ UTM _____

District: S NR If NR, Specify: Actual Potential

PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)

Related outbuildings or landscape features:

- Barn Shed Garage Carriage House Shop Garden
- Other landscape features or buildings: Front yard landscaping and walk, rear paved parking

Surrounding Environment:

- Open land Woodland Residential Commercial Industrial Rural
- High building density Scattered buildings visible from site

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The site is in a densely-built residential neighborhood of 2- to 3-story single and multi-family homes of the early- to mid-20th century. Located at the crown of a hill, the site is on the corner of Fairfield and West Prospect Streets, within walking distance of the members of the congregation. The site also includes 121 Fairfield Street.

• Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/or Exterior*)

See continuation sheet.

Architect Everett C. Bradley, Mutual Engineering (1958); Caproni Associates (1964) Builder Rapid Construction, Ernest Maruca (1958); R. A. Civitello (1964)

• Historical or Architectural importance:

See continuation sheet.

• Sources:

Brown, Elizabeth Mills; *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976.
Carley, Rachel D., *Tomorrow is Here: New Haven and the Modern Movement* (Privately printed by the New Haven Preservation Trust, New Haven CT) June, 2008.
New Haven Tax Assessor's Record: Map/Block/Parcel: 420/1202/020-021, Building Department permit files.
See continuation sheet.

Photographer Charlotte Hitchcock Date 11/01/2009
View Multiple views Negative on File NHPT
Name Charlotte Hitchcock Date 3/11/2010
Organization The New Haven Preservation Trust
Address 934 State Street, P.O. Box 1671, New Haven, CT 06507

• Subsequent field evaluations:

Threats to the building or site:

- None known Highways Vandalism Developers Renewal Private
- Deterioration Zoning Other _____ Explanation _____

- Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and exterior*):

The building consists of two blocks oriented at right angles. At the northwest part of the site is a 1 1/2-story rectangular block of light-colored yellow-gold brick with narrow vertical aluminum-framed windows; the basement level windows are off-set from the first floor windows forming a staggered pattern. At the southeast corner of the site prominently featured on the corner exposure, is the taller volume of the sanctuary, clad in dark brown brick. On the south facade, full-height masonry panels alternate with glazed panels consisting of random-shaped thick glass panes set in mortar. The east facade, of solid brick, is broken forming an obtuse angle or prow projecting toward the east. A vertical reveal in the brick at the angle is in-filled with white marble. At the northeast inside corner of the two blocks there is a glass entry vestibule with a flat roof. A low marble wall directs the entry walk toward a pair of double glass doors. A stylized low relief menorah is mounted high on the east masonry wall adjacent to the entry, and sans serif aluminum lettering on the brick at the corner identifies the building. The rear (northwest) facade is plain, of painted concrete block masonry with emergency exit doors and small roof canopies.

- Historical or Architectural importance:

Prior to the Urban Renewal period of the late 1950s to the 1970s, most of New Haven's Jewish population was clustered in an area known as the Oak Street neighborhood, south and east of the New Haven Green. There were more than a dozen synagogues, located within walking distance of the members' homes.

When plans were made to demolish the Oak Street neighborhood and build CT Route 34 as a sunken highway, most of the synagogues were purchased through eminent domain and torn down. The eviction of the Jewish community from the area accelerated a movement that was already occurring as families were moving out of downtown into more suburban settings such as the Edgewood, Beaver Hills, and Westville neighborhoods of New Haven and to nearby suburban towns. Using payments from the Redevelopment Agency's purchase of their old synagogue buildings, the congregations moved and built new facilities in other areas of the city (see Inventory forms for 292 Norton Street and 85 Harrison Street) and suburban towns.

As Jewish families moved to the Westville area during the post-WWII period, the Orthodox needed a neighborhood synagogue within walking distance of home, and so plans to build a new synagogue took shape. A site was purchased in 1954 and the first phase of building completed in 1958, a multi-purpose structure which is now the rear wing. In 1962 the Westville Synagogue merged with the Beth Hamedrosh Hagadol who moved out of a downtown location on George Street, selling it to the Redevelopment Agency. The sanctuary was constructed in 1963-4 to accommodate the combined membership. The congregation of the Rose Street "Shul," B'nai Israel, left its old location, which had been taken by the Redevelopment Agency, and merged with the Westville Synagogue in 1974.

The Modernist synagogue building memorialized the eviction of the Orthodox Jewish population of New Haven from their previous community in the Oak Street neighborhood in order to realize the Redevelopment Plan for that area. At the same time its simple unpretentious Modernism symbolized the new middle-class lifestyle which Americans enjoyed in the post-war period. This location within the city limits combined a suburban-style density of housing with a walkable urbanity that suited needs of the members.

- Sources (*continuation*):

Herman, Dr. Barry E., *Jews in New Haven Volume II*, Jewish Historical Society of New Haven, Inc., 1979, New Haven, pp. 126-132.

Website of Westville Synagogue: www.westvilleshul.org/history

Jewish Historical Society of New Haven, Inc., archival materials including:

New Haven Journal Courier, December 31, 1957, article on opening of the synagogue building;

New Haven Register, December 22, 1957, article on opening of the synagogue building;

New Haven Evening Register, September 12, 1958 advertisement of opening;

Perspective drawing by Caproni Associates Architects reproduced in fund-raising brochure.



1. South and east facades viewed from Fairfield Street, camera facing north.



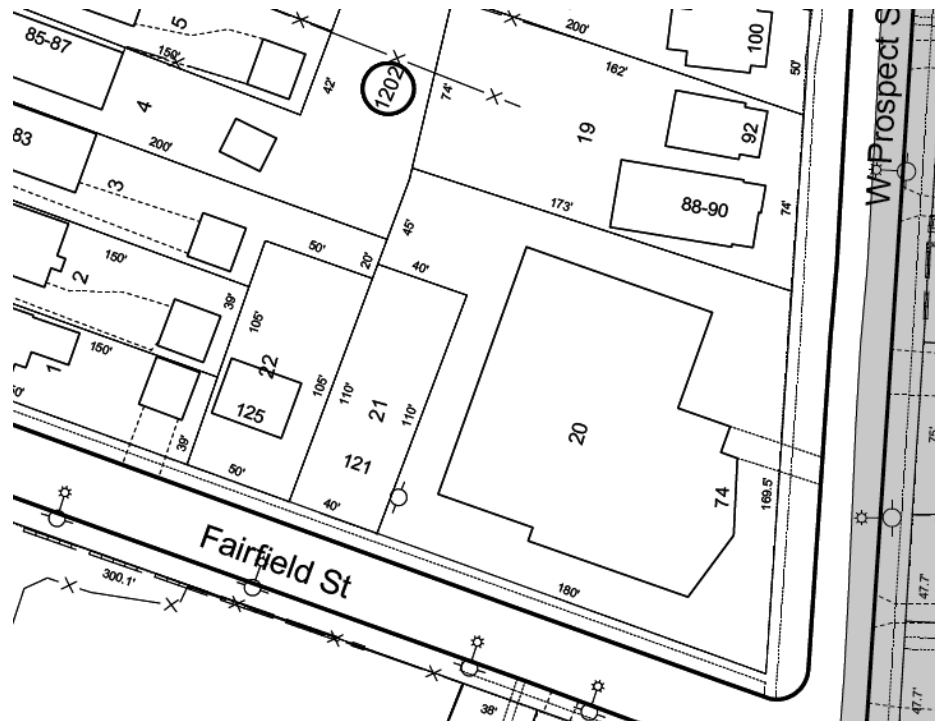
2. East and north sides viewed from West Prospect St., camera facing southwest.



3. Southwest View – rear (west) and Fairfield Street (south). side of building, camera facing northeast.



4. Aerial view from Google Maps. <http://maps.google.com> accessed 3/11/2011.



5. Site Plan – from City of New Haven Tax Map 420/1202/020-021 not to scale, North ↑