Architecture and Community: Congregation Rodef Sholom, Youngstown, OH

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

History

Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2022

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes Congregation Rodef Sholom's identity and development as a community of Reform Jews in Youngstown, Ohio through a study of its synagogue design. The period under consideration traces back to 1867, the year of the community's founding. More extensive analysis begins in 1914 with plans to construct a new synagogue on Elm Street, which borders Wick Park. This study concludes in the present day with a consideration of the congregation's future and how leadership and members are responding to declining trends in the Jewish population of Youngstown as reflected in synagogue design and use.

Discussion of developments in the broader Jewish community such as the synagogue-center and Jewish Community Center will provide insight into the architectural decisions made by the building committee with the contours and ideologies of its congregation in mind. Brief histories of the city of Youngstown and Reform Judaism in the United States serve to explain the dynamics of the Jewish community in the city. This thesis is historiographically unique in that it considers a deep history of a singular synagogue building in relation to the congregation and city which it serves.

The intent of this thesis is to explain how the congregation designed and updated their synagogue to fit their needs and goals as Reform Jews in Youngstown, Ohio. The building design aided the group in integrating into the city while establishing a vibrant Jewish community. Congregation Rodef Sholom's synagogue is an architectural manifestation of the desires of Reform Jews in Youngstown, Ohio.

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Introduction

In 2020, Congregation Rodef Sholom's newly appointed executive director, Sarah Wilschek, discovered the congregation's archives in a supply closet in the basement of the synagogue. In order to preserve the historical documents, the community created a formal archival room. The room had once been a gift shop. Now, formerly for-sale items such as a Moses figurine and a sports-themed menorah are shoved in Rubbermaid containers.

That was not the only room in the building that saw dramatic change over the years. The education wing now consists of six empty rooms that were once filled on Sundays with children learning Hebrew and Jewish values, or immigrants learning English as an additional language. Down the hall is an empty Cantor's office, now used for storage. Downstairs is Strouss Hall, a large social space modeled after Strouss-Hirshberg department store, now closed, which used to be a Youngstown landmark. Isaac Strouss and Bernard Hirshberg, congregants of Rodef Sholom, opened the store April 9, 1875.[1] After proving to be successful in downtown Youngstown, the department store expanded and added locations throughout northern Ohio and western Pennsylvania.

Rodef Sholom is Youngstown's oldest Jewish congregation, founded in 1867. It was one of the first Reform institutions in the United States. Youngstown's steel and manufacturing industries were booming, making the Mahoning Valley an appealing area to settle in America. In the mid-20th century, the Jewish population in Youngstown peaked at 8,000. Today, the number

[1] "Strouss-Hirshberg Company Grew with Youngstown, Ohio," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* (New York), April 10, 1934.

is around 1,400—a result of Youngstown's decreasing population.[2] In 1867, services were held in the houses of members. In 1886, they purchased a lot to build the first temple in the city of Youngstown. Nearly thirty years later, their house of worship moved one last time and they constructed their current synagogue.

In building and remodeling its synagogue, the congregation took many factors into account, including the size of its membership, the city's socioeconomic trends, its social desires as a community of Reform Jews in America, and the cultural trends of the greater Jewish community. In 1914, when drafting plans for their new synagogue, the idea of a synagogue-center was the leading trend in modern Jewish life. The rise of the synagogue-center and eventually Jewish (community) center allowed Jewish communities to manifest a new identity as American Jews. The synagogue became a house of prayer, a house of assembly, and a house of study.[3] The design of Rodef Sholom's Elm Street synagogue shows that the congregation had an awareness of the broader Jewish community and how they were adjusting to life in America. It reflected a desire to balance spiritual and social goals. The inclusion of a social hall, for example, was seen across synagogues in America. It granted members the opportunity for friendly, social intercourse. Rodef Sholom's social hall also doubled as a gymnasium until 1948 when the space was remodeled and rededicated. A gymnasium permitted athleticism and thus, allowed Jews to challenge the antisemitic stereotype that they were physically interior.

Congregation Rodef Sholom's synagogue is an architectural manifestation of the social desires of Reform Jews in Youngstown, Ohio. An analysis of the building, both in its original form

[2] Dorie Chevlen, "Downsizing the Community," *Tablet Magazine*, July 2018, 3.

[3] David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999), 2.

and after a series of remodels ending in 1960, will reveal how the congregation used and adapted their space to meet their needs and self-perceptions as they found a place in a growing and industrialized city comprised of various immigrant groups. It will offer insights into how a collection of Jews built a Jewish community. The space aided the group in acclimating to a new city and creating an identity as European Jews in America. This master's thesis is unique from other scholarly works on synagogue architecture in that it will consider the synagogue's architecture in relation to an individual congregation and the city that it subsists in, rather than considering how the synagogue fits into broader trends.

Historiography

Scholars have approached synagogue architecture through various lenses and with multiple approaches, but they tend to focus on Jewish synagogues in a general or macro sense, not looking at a specific synagogue or region. Historical interpretations of synagogue architecture can be broken down into subcategories: postwar, European, American, and modern, to name a few. There are guidebooks, case studies, and functional approaches. Scholars have also produced encyclopedic treatments by analyzing multiple synagogues. Rachel Wischnitzer's *Synagogue Architecture in the United States: History and Interpretation* is an early example of a significant number of synagogues being analyzed at once. Published in 1955, Wischnitzer analyzes synagogues from the Colonial period to 1955 to explore various factors that contribute to design, such as the desire to parallel Christianity and a lack of professional architects.[4] While synagogue

[4] Rachel Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States: History and Interpretation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955).

architecture throughout American history is important as a topic of historical study, casting too wide of a net ignores the specific cultural impacts and influences that synagogues have often had.

Like Wischnitzer, Saskia Snyder surveys multiple synagogues in *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* She conducts a comparative analysis of synagogues in nineteenth-century European cities in order to explore modern Jewish identity. Synder argues that the modern Jewish identity is based on institutional and geographical characteristics. She uses the Berlin Oranienburgerstraße synagogue to highlight certain identity crises among the Prussian Jews as seen through tangible features, like the Moorish dome.[5] Snyder looks for correlations between the design of the synagogues and the congregation's identity.

A third work of consideration is Samuel Gruber's, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community,* published in 2003. Gruber considers the architecture of modern American synagogues in the twentieth century and examines the changes in the organization of the Jewish community and how synagogue design, specifically characteristics such as location, size, and shape, reflect the changing values of American Jews. Samuel Gruber argues that the erection of synagogues played a large role in conveying Jewish identity, values, and aspirations to the non-Jewish American majority. He states that, "The design and building of synagogues helped chart a course for Jewish communal and religious life in a democratic,

[5] Saskia Snyder, *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).

pluralistic society."[6] Gruber's analyses are fascinating, but they are architecturally oriented and often ignore the broader history of the individual congregations.

Scholars have also produced anthologies, *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book To Synagogue Design and Construction* for example. Published in 1954 by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, it claims to be the first definitive volume on contemporary synagogue architecture. Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, then president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, states the guidebook was created on the belief that Jews in America "ought to build synagogues that will be uniquely Jewish houses of worship and, at the same time, American in form and spirit…"[7] With that goal in mind, they sought out architects, artists, and congregation leaders to travel around America visiting synagogues. The concluding synagogue checklist reiterates that this work meant to serve as a tool used by the congregation's building committees and architects.

The texts above use a plethora of synagogues as examples and the interpretations are merely three pages each, leaving room for additional scholarly research. This thesis aims to fill the existing gaps in synagogue architecture scholarship and consider what an analysis of one specific congregation and their space tells us about their spirituality and social aspirations. It will draw on the approaches and ideas of prior studies on Jewish synagogue architecture but will take it a step further by looking at the physical site of one Jewish congregation in one city. Focusing on a singular synagogue provides a much deeper understanding of the congregation's identity

[6] Samuel D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 2003).

[7] Peter Blake, *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction*, (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), xiii.

and how they hoped to express their religious and social aspirations through their building design. The themes and approaches used by previous scholars, like those discussed above, can be used and expanded upon to explain a microhistory of one congregation. Congregation Rodef Sholom is an ideal candidate for this model due to their well-preserved archives and rich history. The archival materials of most value to this project include the meeting minutes dating back to the 1867 inception, a congregant's essay titled "Without Vision We Perish" that provides a thorough understanding of the emotions behind the sanctuary remodel in 1960, and minutes from the series of meetings in 1984 considering the congregation's longevity and whether to stay in their Elm Street synagogue or rebuild in Liberty Township.

In addition to works focused solely on architecture, texts on Reform Judaism and American Judaism provide insight to Jewish design techniques and the motivating factors. Michael A. Meyer's *A Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* is a thorough overview of the topic. Meyer states, "Judaism could not possibly continue to appeal to Jews who had absorbed the culture of the Enlightenment."[8] The Reform movement was the result of new modes of thinking and a response to a new set of historical circumstances.[9] Meyer argues that these precedents are in Jewish history earlier than the Reform movement, but the movement itself provided conditions in which these ideals could survive. For example, the installation of an organ in a synagogue in Prague that was played on Friday nights to welcome the Sabbath. This adoption of Christian practices is an early example of Jews trying to coexist in a modern world and to experience Judaism as—in their eyes—a modern religion. Hasia Diner

[8] Michael A. Meyer, *A Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism,* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 62.
[9] Ibid, 4.

makes similar points about Jews in America. She claims that the Jewish people of America searched for "ways to render the traditional system acceptable to their American sensibilities."[10] American Jews fashioned their religious lives in their own image.[11] The themes expressed by Meyer and Diner will be used to reiterate that Congregation Rodef Sholom, as a Reform institution in Youngstown, designed their building to meet new needs and social desires as their identity developed in the city.

David Kaufman's *Shul with a Pool: The Synagogue-Center in American Jewish History* is an analysis of an originally and quintessentially American development in Jewry: the synagogue-center. The social-religious split of American Jewry falls across a continuum in which the "religious sphere shifts toward modern secularism and social activity, and the secular sphere moves 'back' toward traditional Judaism."[12] The synagogue-center served to heal the rift between Jews and Judaism by providing a space in which social and spiritual needs could be met. A synagogue-center differs from a traditional synagogue in that it expands beyond the sanctuary space and introduces rooms like a chapel, a hall for social functions, classrooms, a library, offices, and other relevant rooms. Rodef Sholom's 1915 design is a textbook example of a synagogue-center making *Shul with a Pool* a valuable source to this thesis. It reinforces that the congregation was following the broader trends set by the Jewish community in America.

[10] Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 2.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

Chapter Organization

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, though brief, will consider the history of the city of Youngstown, Congregation Rodef Sholom, and Reform Judaism. By 1867, the population of Youngstown, Ohio was around 18,000, with the Jewish population steadily increasing. The flourishing economy attracted Jews, particularly from Western Europe, to pursue various business endeavors. Though established financially, the Jewish community still lacked a formal religious entity in Youngstown. It was on May 12, 1867, that the fifteen charter members held a meeting at the home of Abraham Walburn to create the first Jewish congregation in Youngstown, and one of the first Reform congregations in America.[13] The congregation continued to meet for the Sabbath and High Holy Day Services in private rooms before renting a room on West Federal Street for Sunday school and as a place of worship. It was not until 1884 that the congregation purchased property to construct a temple. The lot sat on the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Holmes Street, now Fifth Avenue. It was dedicated as the first synagogue in the city of Youngstown. By 1912, Congregation Rodef Sholom had increased in size and in purpose and motions were made to construct a new, larger, synagogue.

The second section will focus on Congregation Rodef Sholom's building design related to Reform Judaism and their congregation's intentions. The building reveals the desire to create an all-inclusive space that would allow the congregation room to worship, study, and run social programs that aided integration into Youngstown as a community of Jews. At Congregation Rodef Sholom's first building's dedication in 1884, founding member Mr. David Theobald stated:

[13] Irving E. Ozer, Harry Alter, Lois Davidow, and Saul Friedman, *These are the Names: The History of the Jews of Greater Youngstown, Ohio, 1865-1990* (Irving Ozer, 1994), 19.

> Beside the array of other houses of prayer, this simply proves that we live in a happy land of divine peace and religious liberty. You will always be welcome in these walls, and our prayers will be as much for your welfare as for ours. … Our seats will be free to all, and no one is at any time excluded, as we have no executive sessions or mysteries.[14]

To Theobald, the temple was meant to serve not only Rodef Sholom, but also the city of Youngstown. By being straightforward with their goals, Theobald aimed to dispel any feelings of antisemitism. These same hopes and goals were expressed in the congregation's second official synagogue, as well. The aesthetics of the buildings, both eclectic designs, reveal what the congregation wanted the citizens of Youngstown to presume about them as a newly established Jewish community. This chapter also examines the trends in the broader American Jewish community, specifically through the rise of synagogue-centers. Settling on the north side of the city positioned the Jewish community amongst Youngstown's prominent industrialists.

The third chapter of this thesis will examine how trends in the Jewish community influenced Congregation Rodef Sholom's building design through a series of remodels beginning in 1948. The congregation responded to the greater cultural trends among Jewish communities in the United States, apparent from the significant remodels during the postwar era. The twentieth century saw a large influx of Jewish immigration, followed by an antisemitic backlash. This thesis will expand on Gruber's ideas in *American Synagogues* using Congregation Rodef Sholom as a text. Gruber analyses of cultural adaptations reflected in synagogue design can be seen in the architecture of Rodef Sholom. An analysis of the building and congregation over time can provide insight to the changes in the Reform community, and Jewish community of Youngstown as a whole.

[14] Ibid, 32.

Congregation Rodef Sholom's synagogue design serves as a case study to mediate between local history and broader, national trends in Jewish culture and politics. Since its inception, the congregation has responded to cultural and demographic shifts in both the wider Jewish community and the local Jewish community. Analyzing the various remodels and expansions that span from the 1940s to the present day offers insight into the community's changes and the resulting exigencies. Additionally, it is the architectural details that help to reveal the aspirations and needs of this specific community of Jews aligned with the Reform movement.

The conclusion will focus on the present state and future of the congregation and how this too is being expressed in the design. In the 1970s, Youngstown's steel mills began to close, spelling the end of the industry that once carried the city. The city experienced typical Midwestern deindustrialization and subsequent disinvestment. Between 2010 and 2012, the city lost more residents than any other city in America—over 50,000 people.[15] The Jewish community was especially affected by the population loss and economic decline. Faced with shrinking populations, many local congregations chose to consolidate and merge with other neighboring temples. In 2021, a merger between Rodef Sholom and Ohev Tzedek, a nearby congregation in Boardman, Ohio, was finalized. The synagogue hired a new Rabbi with the goal of having a Reform service on Friday evening and a Conservative service on Saturday morning. They saw yet another influx of Yahrzeit plaques—bronze plaques that commemorate the passing of congregants on the date of death annually—and stained glass. The building also serves new purposes for the community. It houses health clinics for the city of Youngstown and a local food

[15] "Wick Neighborhood Action Plan," Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation, March 11, 2016.

pantry uses an old classroom as their distribution base. Various Youngstown State University classes have been held at the synagogue, and the congregation hosts Religious School for the Jewish community again. In 2021, the process of nominating the building to the National Register of Historic Places began. Congregation Ohev Beth Sholom's synagogue continues to adapt to the trends of Youngstown's Jewish community, just as it did under its previous name.

Chapter One: Congregation Rodef Sholom and Youngstown, Ohio

The history of Jewish immigration to North America and the USA through World War One has been divided into three parts: a Sephardic era (1654-1820), a German era (1820-1880) and then an age of Eastern European immigrants (1880-1924).[1] Motivated by persecution, social and political disturbances and economic hardship, millions of Jews immigrated to America in search of equal opportunities and freedoms. In the years between 1820 and 1880, nearly 150,000 Jews arrived in the United States. Between 1880 and 1925, over two and a half million arrived.[2] Upon coming to America, a majority of Jews settled for familiar work and made a livelihood in small businesses typically related to the field of dry goods. Hasia Diner outlines the sort of sub-economy that was existed within the Jewish community:

> As in Europe, in America a kind of Jewish sub-economy existed in the interstices of the larger one, in which Jews dispensed interest free loans to each other; family and kin networks were like by small stores and peddling routes; rival businessmen in the same trades clustered in the same congregations. Business connections made up part of the history of the Jewish people and confirmed patterns of identity and meaning.[3]

This type of pattern can be seen in Youngstown's Jewish history, as Jewish owned establishments lined Federal Street in downtown Youngstown, such as David Theobald's shop specializing in "hoop skirts, shirts and caps, hats & notions, parasols, linen & cassimere shirts and undershirts and drawers."[4] Or Louis Scheible's store where he sold "spring mattresses, cane bottom chairs,

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[1] Hasia Diner, "A Time For Gathering: The Second Migration," *American Jewish History* 81, no.1 (1993): 22.
[2] Ibid, 31.
[3] Ibid, 25.
[4] Irving E. Ozer, Harry Alter, Lois Davidow, and Saul Friedman, *These are the Names: The History of the Jews of Greater Youngstown, Ohio, 1865-1990*, (Self-pub, 1994), 18.

and did Undertaking."[5] Many of the families became partners and formed businesses, like Strouss-Hirshberg Company, the leading department store in the greater Youngstown area. The community established itself financially in Youngstown before shifting its focus to social and spiritual needs.

In 1797, John Young arrived in Range Two, Township Two of New Connecticut.[6] The land was a vast green valley and the only open vista along the Mahoning River, once owned by James I, King of England.[7] "Young's Town's" economic development was secured in 1803, after a deposit of iron ore was discovered in Poland, a settlement south of Youngstown. Mineral rich areas saw unprecedented levels of growth during westward expansion. Ohio's Trumbull and Columbiana Counties held vast deposits of iron and coal, the main heating fuel among Americans at that time. Coal served as a key component in the production of iron and steel. As the need for coal increased, Youngstown became an industrial powerhouse. Between 1850 and 1870, the population increased from 2,802, to 8,075 residents as individuals capitalized on the booming steel and coal industry.[8] While a majority of Jewish immigrants opted for careers they were familiar with, some did join the steel industry, though they often met with discrimination. A miner or steel worker was not permitted time off for non-Christian religious observances and could therefore not stay home on the Sabbath, whereas those employed at Jewish-owned establishments were allowed to practice their religion freely.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Thomas Welsh, Joshua Foster, and Gordon F. Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown and the Steel Valley*, (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2017), 20-21.

[7] George Higley, *Youngstown: An Intimate History,* (Self-pub, 1953), 10.

[8] Ibid, 29.

While the newly situated Jewish community economically thrived in Youngstown, they still lacked a formal house of worship. On May 12, 1867, fifteen men met to establish the first Jewish congregation in Youngstown. The following men were present: Charles Ritter, Edward Ritter, Ferdinand Ritter, Abraham Ritter, Abraham Walbrun, Emanuel Herzog, David Theobald, S.J. Lambert, S. Lowenstein, M. Ulman, A. Schaffner, William Jones, Henry Theobald, Emanuel Guthman, and Abraham Printz.[9] A week later, at the second meeting, the charter members decided on a name for the congregation: Rodef Sholom, Pursuer of Peace. David Theobald was chosen as president; Edward Ritter, vice president; Abraham Walbrun, treasurer, and Emanuel Guthman, secretary.[10] The chosen name, Rodef Sholom, is revealing. In *American Judaism,* Jonathan Sarna compares two synagogues in Philadelphia: Mikveh Israel and Rodeph Shalom. He explains that whereas colonial synagogue names pointed toward the "lofty promise of redemption," the nineteenth-century synagogues faced unprecedented challenges to their authority and focused on pursuing communal peace.[11] While dealing with internal issues of authority of rabbis over the private and public lives of Jews, and external threats such as antisemitism, new congregations in America sought to achieve peace and acceptance from the general population. American freedoms weakened the position of rabbis over some Jews. In addition, any individuals did not delve deeply into the nuances of philosophy and theology but rather with everyday communal happenings. They felt empowered as Americans in a new and open land and built synagogues to reflect that. They decided among themselves how the

[9] Ibid, 19.
[10] Joseph Butler, *History of Youngstown and The Mahoning Valley, Ohio*, (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1921), 323.
[11] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History,* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2019), 53.

congregation should function. In November of 1873, Congregation Rodef Sholom voted to affiliate with the Union of Hebrew Congregations, now the Union for Reform Judaism.

The name touches on the goals of the founders as they integrated into a new city that was not rid of antisemitism. On September 5, 1873, *Review Israelite*, the French-Jewish Publication, reported the following incident:

> In Youngstown, in the State of Ohio, (America), it seemed to be the time of the Middle Ages again. The newspaper of that city, *The Vindicator,* relates the following incident: A gang of youths accosted a little Jewish boy at the intersection of Walt Street and Champion Street; they forced him into an out-of-the-way corner, gathering up the leaves and twigs of dead branches which they stacked around the Jewish child preparing to set him afire, when fortunately, some people who witnessed the incident intervened and set the child free. On being questioned why they had acted this way, they offered no excuse other than to respond: "We did it to punish the Jews for crucifying our Lord."[12]

While Jews were accepted in some sectors, they were clearly still discriminated against in sectors of Youngstown society. It was apparent to the Jewish community that they needed to make their intentions clear in order to gain the trust and respect of the broader community.

Despite discrimination, the congregation proved to be successful and quickly grew. It selected its first rabbi in 1868. The trustees established six criteria and regulations that had to be met by the Rabbi:

> He must be a Chazan [prayer leader], Schochet [kosher slaughterer], and Reader of the Pentateuch, and qualified to lead the choir; he must be well versed in English, Hebrew, and German; he must attend all hours of worship punctually, whether on Sabbath, Holy Days, or hours of mourning; he must attend all hours of schools, and be at the school room five minutes before the hour appointed by the committee, and remain in school until the time expires, teach and take up such studies as will be arranged between him and the School Committee from time to time; the Schechting, or kosher slaughtering, shall be so arranged between the Schochet and the butcher that it does not interfere with the hours of school nor hours of worship; and the teacher must observe the Sabbath and Holidays strictly in accordance with the faith of Israelites.[13]

[12] Ozer, et al. *These are the Names*, 34.
[13] Ibid, 29.

They hired Rabbi Lippman Liebman who was born in the city of Karlsruhe in Baden, Germany in 1832. Services were conducted in German, a common practice in the earliest Reform temples in the United States. It is estimated that the German language predominated in the majority of the Jewish congregations until as late as 1874. German was used in Jewish schools, synagogue minutes, liturgy, and sermons.[14] Liebman, as the only rabbi between Cleveland and Pittsburgh, conducted funerals, performed marriages, and served as both a teacher and officiant.

The members of Rodef Sholom worshiped in the private homes until January 1870, when a committee voted to rent the second story of Jacob Spiegel's store for three years.[15] The room was used for services and Sunday School. Next, in November 1874, the committee met to consider renting a space at the corner of Federal and Hazel Streets in downtown Youngstown. Though the space required costly repairs, the group voted unanimously to move into the new location. As they continued to grow, they met again to discuss another move. This time the group opted to build new a new structure with the specific needs of the congregation in mind. In 1886, they purchased a lot on the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Holmes Street, now Fifth Avenue. The temple was an eclectic building with cusped arches borrowed from Islamic Spain, a Central European inspired Baroque dome on its spire, and Romanesque arched windows cladding its sides. It was dedicated as the first synagogue in the city of Youngstown. At the dedication ceremony on June 4, 1886, founding member Mr. David Theobald stated:

> Beside the array of other houses of prayer, this simply proves that we live in a happy land of divine peace and religious liberty. You will always be welcome in these walls, and our

[14] Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 252.

[15] Meeting Minutes, 1867-1874, Board Meeting Minutes, Box 1, Folder 1, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.

> prayers will be as much for your welfare as for ours. … Our seats will be free to all, and no one is at any time excluded, as we have no executive sessions or mysteries.[16]

Theobald's quote is representative of what the congregation hoped to establish within their temple. It was built as a welcome addition to the city for both Jews and non-Jews. He continued, "To the kind visitors and citizens of Youngstown—to the authorities of this beloved city who show your kind sympathy by your presence—I have a right to appeal to you to look upon this edifice with looks of grace and consideration."[17] During a time of antisemitism in America, it was important to Theobald to dispel rumors and misgivings about Jews. He was transparent with their goals and portrayed that this was not a community apart. He believed that the establishment of a synagogue was positive for Youngstown in general. It showed progression and an inclusive environment in America.

The congregation held a second dedication ceremony in 1915 when it moved into its current synagogue on Elm Street. It was then that rabbi, Dr. Philo, expressed hopes that their new temple would be the "center of the Jewish Community—a house of prayer, a house of study, and a house of assembly combined…"[18] Rabbi Philo's quote explains what the Reform Jews of Youngstown hoped to achieve in their new space. By creating a synagogue-center, they were able to fulfill both the spiritual and social needs of congregants. In the new building, they were able to host gatherings sponsored by the Brother and Sisterhood, operate a religious school, and attend religious services, all under one roof.

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[16] Welsh, Foster, and Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown*, 12.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, 89.

Rodef Sholom was founded in the context of the German Reform movement, but the congregation did not adhere to the typical practices of Reform Jews in America. Most of Rodef's members kept kosher and the rabbi was expected to act as *schochet*, while *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws) was typically rejected by American Reform Jews at the time.[19] Rabbi Liebman acted as the region's *schochet* for many years. It was agreed that congregants would purchase meat from local butchers only if Rabbi Liebman had performed the slaughtering.[20] A sharp knife called a *challef* is used to slit the animal's throat in one action, resulting in a complete loss of consciousness. It is thought to be the most humane method of slaughter (available in premodern settings), in accordance with the laws of kashrut.[21]

The first Reform institution in the USA was founded in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1824 by Spanish and Portuguese Jews from England. The movement had roots in German-Jewish intellectualism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and responded to the general segregation of Jews and Jewish society from non-Jews in Europe.[22] Reform allowed for the integration of Jews as Europeans of the Jewish faith, even as it adjusted Jewish practices and beliefs in accordance with the Enlightenment. It thus sought and believed in a shared universal truth behind all monotheistic religions. Reform Jews hoped to achieve greater decorum in their services and believed that adding music to them would enhance their aesthetics, heighten Jews' spiritual experiences, and in turn, keep Jews from succumbing to the social and economic

[19] Meeting Minutes, 1867-1874, Board Meeting Minutes, Box 1, Folder 1, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.
[20] Welsh, Foster, and Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown*, 28.
[21] "Jewish Dietary Laws (Kashrut): Ritual Slaughter- Shechitah," Jewish Virtual Library, A Project of Aice, accessed February 6, 2022, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-ritual-slaughter-shechitah.
[22] Kaplan, Dana Evan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 9.

pressure to convert to Christianity. While the Reform movement allowed Jews to integrate into America, it was not met without challenges. Diner states:

> Reform-minded Jews found themselves deeply troubled by the gap between modern, rational science and certain core principles of Judaism, such as the resurrection of the dead. They measured the distance between their emerging political and social integration, gifts of emancipation, and the dictates of Judaism, which kept them apart and different. In central Europe, Reform Judaism was surfacing to ease the discomfort brought about by a new age.[23]

However, in all, Reform Judaism allowed Jews to balance a Jewish identity while adjusting to their new American identities. Examples included deemphasizing religious clothing, using the prevailing vernacular, and adopting a more liberal interpretation of Jewish beliefs and practices. Reform Judaism acted on the principle that change and evolution "are vital and desirable in Judaism and in the life of the Jewish people as it attempts to fulfill its covenant with God."[24] Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman claimed that the Reform movement had a tremendous impact upon human society because it subjected religious ideas and concepts to the scrutiny of free minds.[25] The reinterpretation of ideas and tradition is the essence of Reform Judaism and this can be seen in areas of worship, ritual practice, and activities in the synagogue and home.

The changes and developments from the Reform movement have created fresh patterns of congregational life and therefore the design of the synagogue. Reform services vary strongly from Orthodox services, with Conservative services ranging in the middle. Reform Judaism prayers may be read in the vernacular rather than solely in Hebrew (and Aramaic); men and

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[23] Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000,* (California: University of California Press, 2004), 120.
[24] Rabbi Eugene Lipman, "Reform Judaism: Its Ritual Observances, Its Education Practices and Its Social Activities," in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* ed. Peter Blake (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 51-61.
[25] Ibid.

women sit together in the synagogue, and Reform synagogues permit women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community to be rabbis. Introduced to Reform services in the 19th century, the organ was seen as a sort of 'Christianization' to traditional Jews. Reform temples, however, embraced the instrument and hired organists and cantors. Rodef Sholom had organs in both of their temples and held a formal dedication service at the second of the two on Wednesday, June 16, 1915. Congregation Rodef Sholom was one of the earliest congregations of Reform Judaism in Ohio. They were even the first signatory on the petition in 1873 for the founding of the Reform Judaism movement in the United States based in Cincinnati.[26]

Congregation Rodef Sholom's new synagogue of 1915 was designed by congregant Morris Scheibel in collaboration with the temple's building committee. The group designed the building in a fashion that reflected their needs and visions as Reform Jews in Youngstown. The exterior, designed in the Moorish Revival style, allowed the group to portray its identity to the general community. They designed the interior to fit their ritual practices, such as the auditorium-style layout in the sanctuary to allow for musical production and front-facing Torah readings. The building also fulfilled social and recreation goals, as manifest in the inclusion of a motion picture room and gymnasium. The design aided the congregation in integrating into the city while still forming a vibrant Jewish community.

[26] Sarah Wilschek and Kayla Metzger, "Congregation Rodef Sholom: A History and Lesson in Collaboration and the Creation of an Archive," *Association of Jewish Libraries: News and Reviews* 2, no.4 (2021): 5-6, accessed April 20, 2022, https://jewishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AJL-2021MayJune_v4.pdf.

Chapter Two: Congregation Rodef Sholom's Synagogue Design (1886-1915), Reform Judaism and Local Community

Congregation Rodef Sholom still worships in the synagogue that they dedicated in 1915. The congregation designed the synagogue to meet their needs as they grew in the city of Youngstown as a relatively new Jewish community. The building reveals the desire to create an all-inclusive space that would allow room to worship, study, and run social programs that aided integration into Youngstown as a community of Jews. Trends seen in their building design align with the development of the "synagogue-center." Rather than a "worship hall with a few dark and dingy schoolrooms in its basement," synagogues evolved to a complex institution to fully serve the needs of its members.[1] The synagogue grew to include a main sanctuary, a smaller chapel, a social hall, classrooms, a library, offices, and other spaces as needed. The synagogue-center was an inherently American-Jewish development as one of the first synagogue types without precedent in the European past. Marshall Sklare, the leading sociologist of American Jews explained the two roles of the synagogue-center: to engage Jews who were thoroughly acculturated in America, and to provide for their, or their children's, re-culturation to Judaism.[2] It introduced new facets to the design. David Kaufman writes:

> Just traditional Jewish life had been translated into secular American terms (in education, for instance), the reverse process then came into play; the newfound creative capacity to acquire property, build apartment houses, and lay out entirely new neighborhoods, was translated by Jewish builders into the "spiritual" endeavor of erecting monuments to Judaism and Jewish life-- the synagogue-center.[3]

[1] David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999), 2.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid, 245.

Rather than existing solely for worship, the synagogue served its community through religious worship, social activity, and education.

By 1925, the synagogue-center had become the leading trend in modern American Jewish life.[4] The trends are able to be traced in the design of Rodef Sholom's 1915 synagogue. There are also specific architectural elements in Rodef Sholom's design that are reflective of their approach as Reform Jews in America. The inclusion and dedication of an organ in the sanctuary and the spatial arrangement of the *bimah*—the raised platform from which the Torah is read. The inclusion of large social spaces shows an awareness of the patterns in the broader Jewish community in America. An analysis of the Elm Street synagogue reveals what the congregation valued in their space. Constructing the synagogue allowed their aspirations to be realized. The building displays shifts in their identity as American Jews.

The congregation had at least five rabbis before Rabbi Isador E. Philo's installation on September 23, 1913.[5] Philo was a lawyer and rabbi from Akron, Ohio. He retired on August 31, 1942 and died three years later. Leadership read the following statement in 1945, on the occasion of Rabbi Philo's death:

> "In this city wherever there was a movement to raise the cultural, social or health standards for the community; wherever there was a financial drive for church, school or hospital-- for the relief of the oppressed of the stench of intolerance and bigotry-- there invariably would Dr. Philo be found… He was a rabbi fifty years in Israel, and ministered to his people in that capacity with devotion, patience and sacrifice, achieving the reputation as one of the outstanding rabbis of America."[6]

[4] Ibid, 2.

[5] Irving E. Ozer, Harry Alter, Lois Davidow, and Saul Friedman, *These are the Names: The History of the Jews of Greater Youngstown, Ohio, 1865-1990*, (Self-pub, 1994), 87.

[6] Ibid, 92.

The congregation saw immense growth under Rabbi Philo's leadership. By 1937, membership had increased to 277 families; Sabbath school enrollment reached 160; and the Jewish population in Youngstown had grown to eight thousand. Aside from his first two years, Rabbi Philo conducted services and led his community in the newly built Elm Street synagogue.

In 1913, the congregation's first temple on the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Holmes Street was insufficient for the amount of members they had acquired. Rodef Sholom's first permanent synagogue on Lincoln Avenue was sold to the Evangelical Lutheran Honterus Gemeinde for $12,000 in 1914.[7] They have since demolished the building**.** Construction of the original temple finished on June 4, 1886. The temple, with a spire on the dome and stained glass windows, was Orientalist in style. It was visible from the city's downtown retail district. Oriental Revival became a popular architectural style as the Romanticists rediscovered "the Orient" and it became fashionable to travel there. In *Synagogue Architecture in the United States,* Wischnitzer describes that it was Benjamin Disraeli, later Lord Beaconsfield, who established an emotional link between the Jews and the Orient in literature.[8] After visiting Jerusalem in 1830, Disraeli wrote *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy*, revolving around a hidden talisman:

> The hero, Alroy, was a scion of the Davidic dynasty. The scepter of King Solomon was the talisman which was to give Alroy the power to conquer the Holy City. The action carried the hero to Hamadan, Bagdad and Jerusalem. The temple of Jerusalem appeared in a dream and the Star of David in a vision: "But as I gazed upon the star of David, a sudden halo rose around its rays, and ever and anon a meteor shot from out the silver veil."[9]

[7] Ozer, et al., *These are the Names,* 88.
[8] Rachel Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture In the United States: History and Interpretation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 6.
[9] Ibid.

It soon expanded beyond literature and into different realms of art. Oriental Revival architecture was first adopted by German Jewish congregations in the United States. Wischnitzer notes that as German congregations began to flourish numerically and socially, they became the first to show concern for some distinctive features in synagogue architecture.[10] As they heard of the leading communities in Germany building their synagogues in a magnificent style, American German congregations started to emulate them. The *Youngstown Telegram* described Rodef Sholom's first temple in 1886:

> The temple consists of two rooms, and a vestibule at the front on the first and second floors. The first floor is fashioned into a Sunday school room, 30 x 39 feet. It is furnished in white pine. The auditorium, or church proper, is in size identical with the school and is handsomely furnished and arranged for the ease and comfort of the congregation… The sanctuary, in which is kept the scroll of the divine law, or Pentateuch, stands immediately behind the pulpit, and is almost fifteen feet high, is made of hard, dark wood, and is covered with molding. Above the folding doors, in a small panel are the Ten Commandments inscribed in Hebrew characters, with the word "Jehovah" in Hebrew, in the center of a gilt sun at the top. The entire floor and platform are covered with red-figured Brussels carpet.[11]

The inclusion of Jewish symbols on the exterior of the building was also characteristic of German Jews.[12] At the dedication, the key presented to founding member, David Theobald, represented hope in the city in which they were situated. Theobald stated:

> To the kind visitors and citizens of Youngstown-- to the authorities of this beloved city who show your kind sympathy by your presence-- I have a right to appeal to you to look upon this edifice with looks of grace and consideration. You have aided us so that our Scriptures be fulfilled…[13]

[10] Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture In the United States*, 5.
[11] *Youngstown Telegram,* 1886.
[12] Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture In the United States*, 5.
[13] Ozer, et al. *These are the Names*, 32.

At the 1886 dedication, Theobald drew a connection between the city and the Temple. Constructing their own space symbolized that they were continuing to integrate—without homogenization—into the city of Youngstown as a Jewish community. Theobald requested that the audience looks at the synagogue with grace and consideration during a time of antisemitism. It was important to Theobald and the congregation to align themselves with the citizens of Youngstown. Theobald continued:

> Our seat will be free to all, and no one is at any time excluded, as we have no executive sessions or mysteries. You will find that our doctrines are not forbidding, and that Judaism has gone through a great development of thought. Our hope is to unite our religious aims with yours on this earth and hereafter…[14]

In 1886, the construction of a synagogue represented hope to the congregation. They were hopeful that the synagogue would aid the community as a whole to be more accepting and understanding them as Jews in America. The dedication gave Theobald a platform to outline their intentions to the community.

In January of 1914 at a congregational dinner, members pledged $25,000 for a new synagogue. The year before the congregation hosted the High Holy Day service at the Masonic Temple, as the congregation grew to be too large to fit comfortably in the Lincoln Avenue temple. The building committee recommended the purchase of the 150' x 150' lot at Elm Street and Woodbine Avenue, across from Wick Park.[15] The committee decided on Morris Scheibel (1887-1976), a Youngstown architect and congregant of Rodef Sholom. Harry M. Prince, A.I.A., states that "while it should be a cardinal rule not to select a member of a congregation solely because

[14] Ibid.

[15] Meeting Minutes, 1913-1921, Board Meeting Minutes, Box 7, Folder 2, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.

he is a member," they should be entitled to the same consideration as others. Prince continues that there are a few rare cases, primarily in larger urban cities, where the congregational member is well known for their "ability, integrity and high professional standing, in which case he may enjoy a justified preference based upon his reputation and past performance."[16] Though Scheibel would go on to design a few significant buildings in Youngstown's skyline, he was not yet well-established when selected for Rodef Sholom's building. He attended Columbia University for architecture, New York Technical Institute, and the Cleveland Institute of Art, and worked for J. Milton Dyer in Cleveland before establishing his own architecture firm, Stanley & Scheibel, with Edgar A. Stanley in 1911. [17] In addition to Rodef Sholom, he designed the buildings of Temple Beth Israel in Altoona, Pennsylvania (1927); Anshe Emeth in Youngstown, Ohio (1928); and Temple Beth Israel in Sharon, Pennsylvania (1950). Anshe Emeth's building, now Nevel's Temple, is also located on Elm Street. It is a mere two-minute walk between the two buildings. Of the Jewish temples that Scheibel designed, Rodef Sholom was the first and he incorporated many of the same design elements in the others. The large onion dome, five paneled stained glass, and sanctuary design are especially similar between Rodef Sholom and Temple Beth Israel in Altoona.

On April 9, 1914, the congregation made a pilgrimage following services at the Lincoln Avenue temple to the Elm Street site. William Jonas, the only surviving charter member, had the honor of breaking the ground.[18] The groundbreaking symbolized the progress they had made as

[16] Harry M. Prince, A.I.A., "The Architect and the Synagogue," in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* ed. Peter Blake (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 78-86.
[17] "Local architects add to story of Youngstown's skyline," metromonthly. Metro Monthly, April 20, 2017, https://www.metromonthly.net/2017/04/20/local-architects-add-to-story-of-citys-skyline/.
[18] Ibid.

a congregation. Discussions of founding a congregation began with twelve men in Abraham Walbrun's house and they were now planning for a sanctuary to fit 600 individuals. They recognized the goals of the founding members and outgrew their space due to increased membership not once, but twice. The Vindicator described the plan of the new synagogues:

> "The new temple being erected by Congregation Rodef Sholom at Elm Street and Woodbine Avenue will be Oriental in character, and will express both by its facade and plan the simplicity of the creed and the truth and dignity of the service it is built to perpetuate. To accomplish this, severity and plainness of design, proper and worthy materials will be employed throughout and simplicity will be the dominant note in the design of the building. The building will be 68 by 121 feet in size, the important feature of which will be the main auditorium on the first floor, which will have seating capacity of about 600. The entire floor space will be clear of columns and piers and will be surmounted by a dome supported on steel trusses 65 feet clear span. The pendentive and coffers of the dome will be treated with felt, making the auditorium practically acoustically correct."[19]

The simplicity of the design was intentional and meant to create a space in which the members could focus on the prayers and readings rather than ornamentation and adornments. It was a stark contrast to the Catholic churches and cathedrals designed with baroque influence. Nineteenth-century European Jews typically eschewed the established Christian architectural styles, while Christian authorities insisted that synagogues be constructed in a different style than churches. According to Samuel D. Gruber, architecture became a crucial element in the debate over Jewish assimilation.[20] While there is not a distinct Jewish architectural design to distinguish church and synagogues, there are elements and styles that Jews typically opted for, one being

[19] *The Vindicator,* 1914.

[20] Samuel D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.), 24.

the Moorish style. Churches in Europe were never designed in Moorish styles and only rarely in the United States.

Moorish style architecture combines Byzantine, Arab, and Oriental motifs. The style, typically associated with mosques, first appeared at a synagogue built by Gottfried Semper in Dresden (1838-40).[21] The style arrived in America around 1866, the year of the dedication of the Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati. The Plum Street Temple has two large minarets, numerous domes, and a "donkey-back" entrance arch, a feature typical of famous mosques. Ivan Kalmar states that the style is named "Moorish" because Moorish architecture, especially the Ahlambra of Granada, "dominated the image early-nineteenth-century Europeans had of Islamic architecture as a whole."[22] When synagogues of this style were built, Jews were considered by others and themselves as the "Orientals of the West."[23] Jews were typically identified as members of a Semitic race or people, figuring them as a sort of Oriental community, even as western governments focused on Jewish equality and civil integration. The East-West dichotomy pertains to cultural and religious borders rather than geographical constraints. By building in this style, they were able to control Oriental realizations of themselves. They bought into the East-West dichotomy but created their own narrative. The style was typically embraced by first-generation Jews who arrived in the United States in the 1840s, but only became prosperous enough to build large synagogues in the 1860s.[24] The Moorish style proved to be effective for

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ivan Davidson Kalmar, "Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture," *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no.3 (2001): 69.
[23] Ibid, 72.
[24] Gruber, *American Synagogues,* 25.

Jews in showcasing their new freedom while also paying homage to their histories and culture. Per Kalmar, the big buildings showed their rootedness in their new homes.[25]

The dedication ceremony of Rodef Sholom's Elm Street synagogue spanned the days of June 11, 12, and 13, 1915. The building and grounds represented an expenditure of about $100,000.[26] M.J. Samuels acted as chairperson for the building committee and visited the site daily. In addition to Samuels, Clarence J. Strouss frequently visited the site and played an integral role in the building committee. Mr. Medicus, the general contractor for the job, claimed it was one of the most complicated jobs he had taken in 32 years of work.[27] The subcontractors include:

> G.C. Riordan Co., Cincinnati, art glass windows; M.P. Moller, Hagerstown, M.d., pipe organ; Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Co., Meriden, Conn., tall seven-branch candlesticks, eternal lamp and wall lamps; Strouss-Hirschberg Co., carpets and rugs; James H. Matthews & Co., Pittsburgh, bronze tablet.[28]

The building is constructed in Indiana limestone. It features a large dome covered with red semi-glazed German tile with copper crowns. The dome is a central feature of Rodef Sholom and like their Lincoln Avenue temple, characteristic of the Moorish style. Rabbi Alexander S. Kline suggests that when the dome is placed over a square or polygonal interior, "the feeling of unity is further emphasized and we get away from the cruciform ground plan of Christian churches."[29] While Reform synagogues and services were aesthetically aligning with Christian churches—through the inclusion of organ music, for example—Rabbis and congregations still attempted to

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[25] Kalmar, "Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture," 70.

[26] Approximately $2,783,643.45 in 2022. Calculated for inflation using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

[27] *The Vindicator,* 1915.

[28] *The Vindicator,* 1914.

[29] Rabbi Alexander S. Kline, "The Synagogue in America," in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* ed. Peter Blake (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 38-46.

pay homage to their traditional Jewishness. The dome allowed the sanctuary to take a spherical shape. The shape was intentional and meant to carry out the idea of Israel's consecration and, "through the wholeness of the edifice, the conception of holiness."[30] Including a dome rather than a steeple signaled to viewers that this was *not* a church. It allowed them to embrace shared features and differences.

The Vindicator reported of another piece of symbolism in the sanctuary, stating that:

> There is another bit of Jewish symbolism in the use of a blue color in the chairs on the pulpit platform and in a narrow row band above the wainscot. Here the significance is that in the Jewish church there is no line of cleavage between pulpit and pew; the church is a democracy, and pastor and congregation stand on an equality.[31]

The explanation, likely from a congregant reporting directly to the *Vindicator*, shows that the colors in the sanctuary were strategically implemented. Running the color blue throughout the different sections of the sanctuary is meant to create an inclusive environment to those in the sanctuary. There is no divide between the congregation and Rabbi. The ceiling, though renovated in 1960, is the same color today that it was in 1915.

While the design relied on straightforwardness and simplicity, there were still decorative elements employed, mainly in the sanctuary space. There are twelve stained glass windows in the sanctuary, all of which were drawn and designed by Rabbi Philo to represent the twelve Tribes of Israel. There are six panels on each side of the sanctuary. Each panel is dedicated to a different founding member, representing how strongly the congregation felt about their history and roots in Youngstown. The panel's designs depict various ritual items and symbols in Judaism, such as a shofar, the ram's horn blown on the High Holy Days, and a menorah. Other windows

[30] *The Vindicator, 1915.*
[31] Ibid.

feature the Torah, a Kiddush cup, an open Bible, and the *Ner Tamid,* or eternal light. In sanctuaries, the *Ner Tamid* is situated near the Holy Ark that contains the Torah scrolls. Exodus 27 reads, "And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually."[32] The lamp, therefore, is a crucial element in sanctuary design and planning. It not only represents God's eternal presence among Israel, but it symbolizes the light of the Torah to those present in the sanctuary.

Another window contains the breastplate of the high priest with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Ephraim, and Manasseh, each of which are associated with a color. The color scheme of the windows as a whole, in harmony with the general decorations and colors of the tribes, "offers a symbolic representation of the evolution of the Jewish religion."[33] The company that designed the windows, G.C. Riordan & Company, is the oldest documented continuously operated stained glass studio in the United States.[34] They are based near Cincinnati, Ohio and have designed an array of windows for churches and synagogues, including those for Adath Israel Congregation, founded in 1847 in Cincinnati. The inclusion of stained-glass windows in synagogues came from Romanesque and Gothic churches.[35]

Richard Bennett, a previous vice president of the American Institute of Architects, stated "subsequent synagogues were true community centers in that they were built around a

[32] Gruber, *American Synagogues,* 105.
[33] *The Vindicator,* 1915.
[34] Virginia C. Raguin, "The History of BeauVerre Riordan Stained Glass Studios," BeauVerre Riordan Stained Glass Studio, accessed February 17, 2022, http://www.beauverre.net/history.html.
[35] Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture In the United States*, 6.

congregation and its needs, rather than centered upon its royal priesthood."[36] Rodef Sholom was no exception to this and paid increased attention to the social spaces. In *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History,* David Kaufman notes that the term "Jewish center" can be confusing since the term was applied to various types of institutions, such as congregational synagogues and community centers.[37] It is important to note the difference between Jewish center (small c) and Jewish Center. The Jewish center caught on when the Conservative movement became popular around 1885. It can be defined as follows:

> A service agency, offering a variety of activities and social benefits to its mainly Jewish constituents; (2) a communal gathering place, housed in a central located building, and forming an integral part of the local Jewish neighborhood; (3) a unifying factor, open to all Jews of the community regardless of their religious affiliation or class status; and (4) a sectarian institution fostering Jewish culture and Jewish education, hence a primary locus of Jewish identification.[38]

Kaufman emphasizes the importance of the final point, stating, "By joining a center one affiliates with the voluntarist American Jewish community, and feels that one has fulfilled the obligation to be 'a good Jew'.[39] It granted the community opportunities to socialize and volunteer outside of services. It became a center for Jewishness as the creation of the center was a historical departure in the construction of the Jewish community.[40] The Jewish center may be traced back to the B'nai B'rith fraternal lodges of the mid-nineteenth century. The movement followed Mordecai Kaplan, Jewish Center (large c) in New York. Kaplan eventually founded the

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[36] Richard M. Bennett, "Design of the Social Center," in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* ed. Peter Blake (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 129-142.
[37] Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool,* 3.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

Reconstructionist movement that defines Judaism as an "evolving religious civilization" with secular cultural elements essential to spirituality.[41] He stated in 1916:

> The function of the Synagogue will appear in a new light… It should become a social center where the Jews of the neighborhood may find every possible opportunity to give expression to their social and play instincts. It must become the Jew's second home. It must become his club, his theatre and his forum.[42]

Aside from creating a second home, sports, education, and entertainment were used to entice less observant Jews into the synagogue. Rodef Sholom's Sabbath school, then accessible from Woodbine Avenue, included rooms that were well-lit and well-ventilated with the "best and latest equipment, and ingress and egress for the same amply provided."[43] This suggests a concern for quality items and construction. They were building a synagogue that was meant to last.

The history of the Warner Brothers is important as Rodef Sholom's newly constructed synagogue featured a motion picture room. The inclusion of a movie room aligns with the vision of Mordecai Kaplan and others who agreed that the synagogue was meant to fulfill social needs, but it also shows that the members of Rodef Sholom were consciously aware and influenced by the local happenings in Youngstown. The Warner family settled in the United States in 1887 after fleeing Krasnosielc, Poland to escape anti-Jewish persecution. The family moved to Youngstown in 1896 and opened a shoe repair shop and eventually a butcher shop on Federal Street. Jack Warner described his father's butcher shop in his autobiography:

> Ben Warner's market was what you might call a segregated operation. The front part of the store was for the gentile trade. In the back was the kosher division, where on Friday nights a special crew performed the 'shehita' killing of chickens in accordance with rabbinic law.[44]

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[41] Gruber, *American Synagogues,* 81.
[42] Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Future of Judaism," *The Menorah Journal* (June 1916), 160-172.
[43] *The Vindicator,* 1915.
[44] Ozer, et al. *These are the Names*, 107.

Ben Warner became one of the founding members of Temple Emanu El. In the meantime, his sons grew interested in Thomas Edison's kinetoscope—an early motion-picture exhibition device. After testing out various locations for their nickelodeon operation, Idora Park being one, the Warner brothers decided to open their own movie theater in New Castle, Pennsylvania in 1903.[45] They began to invest in other theaters in Youngstown and surrounding cities and in 1907 they started to produce movies. In 1923, they created the Warner Bros. Company. With this in mind, the decision by Rodef Sholom to include a screening room proves that this Jewish community was also motivated by their larger community. It was important for them to design a building with novelties and elements that align with the modernization occurring in the city.

It is in the Elm Street building that Rodef Sholom also creates a formal social hall for their members, a feature that had been absent from Lincoln Avenue. Located in the basement, the social hall was used for congregational gatherings. It was meant to serve as the center for social activities and featured separate men and women's parlors, restrooms, a checkroom, and a kitchen large enough to serve up to 500 people. At times, the space was used as a gymnasium and was connected to a large shower and locker room.

The inclusion of recreational spaces shows a shift in goals for this community. Upon settling in Youngstown with comfortable careers and now a successful institution in which they could worship, they could afford to focus on creating a tightly knit Jewish community. The synagogue served as an architectural manifestation of what Jewishness represented to this community in Youngstown and America. It created a synagogue-center for the city and

[45] Ibid.

community and recognized Kaplan's feelings on what a synagogue should do for its members. It extended beyond the sanctuary and into social spaces that allowed for casual congregating, formal receptions and celebrations, and recreational activities. The social hall served as a place for friendly, social intercourse.

Sports gained popularity in America following the Civil War and provided Jews with an opportunity to engage in a sphere of American culture that was not closed off to them.[46] Athleticism, furthermore, challenged the antisemitic myth that Jews were physically interior to non-Jews. Engaging in athletics allowed Jews to construct a modern American Jewish identity and integrate into American society. Sport was used by Jews to "help them become acculturated and achieve structural assimilation, gain self-esteem and public recognition, fight stereotypes and anti-Semitism, and escape the poverty of the ghetto."[47] Rodef Sholom prioritizing a gymnasium in their newly designed synagogue is representative of their goals to break stereotypes while still blending into their American city. Rather than solely denying any antisemitic biases, they also hoped to fit into the Americanization narrative through athletics. Sports would act as a tool to fulfill the generational vision to raise American children.

A central aim in Reform Judaism was the restoration of the sermon. The sermon fell into disuse in the Middle Ages, during which there were only two or three sermons a year.[48] Reform services reintroduced the sermon and spent less time on the ritual of the service. In an Orthodox

[46] Ari F. Sclar, *Beyond Stereotypes: American Jews and Sports (*Indiana: Purdue University Press), 2014.
[47] Steven A. Riess, "Introduction: Sport and the American Jew," *American Jewish History* 74, no.3 (March 1985): 211.
[48] Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof, "Design of the Social Center," in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* ed. Peter Blake (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 47-50.

service, the Torah reading was and still is central. The Torah is taken from the Ark and carried to the *bimah,* or reading table, in the center of the sanctuary, where the reading portion can take as long as an hour. At the end of the service, the Torah is taken back to Holy Ark. Reform services shortened the reading time and spent more time on other sections of the service, like the musical elements and the sermon.[49] Changing the role the Torah plays in the Shabbat services called for the design of the sanctuary to be reconsidered. Instead of moving the Torah to the bima in the center of the room, it was read in the front of the room on a desk close to the Ark. The center *bimah* became an obstacle and unnecessarily reduced seating. To adapt, Reform synagogues moved the *bimah* to the front of the sanctuary with an aisle leading up the center and seats in an auditorium style. This design can be seen in Rodef Sholom's sanctuary. The layout was similar to that of a Byzantine church, with a nave and altar. Greek, Romanesque, and Byzantine forms gained popularity, as they were easily adaptable for Jewish use. The change in design was heavily opposed but proved so logical that some Conservative congregations eventually adopted the plans and placed the *bimah* at the front of the sanctuary, as well. The new design, reintroduction of the sermon, and musical emphasis allowed the services to seem more appealing to the American Jews who could not understand (and in some cases read) Hebrew. The services not only became more concise, but also took on the characteristics of production or show.

The inclusion of an organ at Jewish services was seen as a sort of 'Christianization' of Shabbat. As an increasing number of Jews fully assimilated to their new cities in America, the classic service decreased in effectiveness for some. They were viewed as long and disorganized, as many individuals no longer spoke fluent Hebrew and preferred to worship in the vernacular.

[49] Ibid.

These changes were seen and met in Rodef Sholom as the rabbis were expected to lead services in Hebrew and the preferred vernacular. However, synagogues still took this adaptation a step further as Jews began to compare their services to nearby Christian services. The lack of sufficiently understanding the preaching in Hebrew, mixed with the longing of the order and decorum of Christian services, led to rabbis and congregations implementing music, typically with an organ as the tool. These changes are predominantly seen in Reform congregations that were more influenced by their surroundings in American cities.

On Wednesday, June 16, 1915, the congregation formally dedicated the "noble instrument," as described in the dedication booklet.[50] The original temple on Lincoln Avenue also featured an organ, specifically a Mason and Hamlin Five Octave stop organ that members purchased for $110.00.[51] While organs were introduced in Reform temples in America and Britain as early as the 19th century, it was still a debated topic. The admission of organs was still considered a highly Christian practice and rabbis were met with the *halachic* question— questions pertaining to the body of Jewish law of whether one may play the organ on the Sabbath and Holidays, and whether a Jewish musician could perform.[52] It was typical of some congregations to hire non-Jewish professionals to play. Nevertheless, Rodef Sholom took pride in their organ and made it a central part of their sanctuary.

The congregation outgrowing their original temple on Lincoln Avenue meant not only that they had successfully increased membership numbers, but also that they were granted free reign

[50] Organ Dedication, June 16, 1915, Building Construction, Box 2, Folder 2, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.
[51] Ozer, et al. *These are the Names*, 30.
[52] Tina Frühauf, "Synagogue Organ Music," Music and the Holocaust, ORT, accessed February 17, 2022, https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/music/organ-music/.

to design a building to meet their needs. Rodef Sholom's Elm Street building introduced new elements not previously seen on Lincoln Avenue, such as the social hall. The inclusion of a social hall shows that while members were looking for a place to worship and attend Religious School, they were also interested in a community space where they could socialize after services, hold wedding receptions, or play basketball. The construction of a new building permitted the congregation to reconsider what they hoped to get out of their synagogue.

Their first temple gave them a space to hold services, and their second provided them with a space to grow as a Jewish community in Youngstown. This time, they had a much larger budget to work with and an architect who was also a congregant. Morris Scheibel, familiar with what a sanctuary space needed and how the exterior should look, was the ideal person for the job. This was further proven by the three additional synagogues that Scheibel designed afterwards. The similarities between Temple Beth Israel's temple in Sharon, Pennsylvania, Temple Beth Israel in Altoona, Pennsylvania, and Anshe Emeth's building in Youngstown, Ohio and Rodef Sholom proves that other congregations and communities were pleased with the work that Scheibel did on Rodef Sholom. He was able to use the Elm Street building as a model to create three more synagogues and became the ideal candidate for synagogue design in the region.

The congregation also paid attention to what was happening in other Jewish communities as they attempted to fit into their new homes in America. Designing the Elm Street synagogue as a synagogue-center and not just a place to worship shows that the congregation's goals and means changed. When drawing the blueprints in 1914, the congregation was established and growing. As they found identities as Jewish Americans, what it meant for them to be Jewish

evolved. These trends were seen across America as Jewish Centers were established and congregations designed large synagogues featuring everything they needed. Their building permitted them to come together and form a community as a group of Reform Jews in Youngstown. They were no longer creating a place intended for worship alone, but creating a place to relax, play, and celebrate. The space allowed them to integrate into the city of Youngstown by sticking together and keeping Jewish traditions. It also, however, provided them a space to make their own as Reform Jews. As the first Reform congregation in the city and one of the first in Ohio, the members had flexibility in their practice. There was not an associated architecture style or sanctuary design, thus granting the building committee the opportunity to work with Scheibel as both an architect and a congregant to fulfill their wishes.

Scheibel and the design committee were clearly aware of trends in the broader Jewish community while making stylistic choices. Opting to design the building in the Moorish style of architecture proves that they knew that was the favored style of Reform Jews and that they agreed with the reasoning. It was an ostentatious display of Jewishness and gave them the freedom to do so after enforced architectural modesty in Europe.[53] It also paid a slight homage to their original Lincoln Avenue temple. In *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow,* Daniel Schwartzman, A.I.A., states that the exterior appearance of the synagogue is its greatest asset for good public relations in the community.[54] The exterior design communicates with the

[53] Kalmar, "Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture," 94.

[54] Daniel Schwartzman "Remodeling Versus A New Building," in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* ed. Peter Blake (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 65-69.

outside community and gives onlookers clues about what the group stands for. It permits inclusion into the city skyline and society, but also allows the group to stand out as unique.

Since the dedication in 1915, the building has seen numerous renovations, most notable in 1954 with an expansion to include a dedicated education wing and chapel. If analyzed similarly, the expansions and remodels reveal how the congregation continued to respond to changes in the city and broader Jewish community. The simple, square-shaped, building gave the congregation a canvas that could easily be expanded upon as the community evolved. These alterations can be read as windows into the shifts in the community's needs, self-perceptions, and visions. The next chapter examines the Jewish community in Youngstown between 1915 and 1984 and how the Elm Street synagogue was changed to accommodate increased membership, postwar trends, and eventually a declining Jewish population.

Chapter 3: A Changing Community

After completion in 1915, Rodef Sholom's synagogue remained unchanged for nearly thirty years. However, once the congregation began altering the building, the changes were significant. In 1947, the social hall was remodeled and rededicated in memory of an influential congregant. In 1954, the congregation expanded the building to accommodate increased membership and religious school enrollment. Six years later, they raised $375,000 to expand the building yet again with a new education wing, a library, kitchen, parlor, and other new spaces. In addition, the money covered the renovation of the sanctuary.

The changes made to the synagogue in the mid-twentieth century reveal how the Jewish community in Youngstown responded to the greater cultural trends of the Jewish community in the United States. They continued to expand on their synagogue-center and develop their spaces. Additions such as the chapel were seen in synagogues throughout the country as congregations shifted their desires to worship in a more intimate space following the war. Replacing the gymnasium area from the social hall in 1947 was a direct response to the establishment of a Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Youngstown, which met that need. The suburban Jewish Community Center is the product of Mordecai Kaplan's Jewish Center, though the development of the JCC in Youngstown diminished the need for in-synagogue recreational spaces. Members at the time were participating in arts and sports with other members of the Jewish community and it was taking place outside of the temple. As a result, the temple became a site for holding more formal affairs and meetings.

As new institutions formed in the city and around America, the role of the synagogue changed too. In 1984, the congregation formed a Long-Range Planning Committee, at the urging of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, to assess their synagogue and the needs of their community. At the meeting, the committee weighed the benefits and liabilities of two options: remodeling and staying in their Elm Street temple,' or relocating and rebuilding about ten minutes away, where they had already acquired five acres of land. The building was reassessed by architects, and the committee members discussed the future of their congregation.

An analysis of the synagogue's remodels and expansions not only tell of the congregation's evolving demands, but of the broader Jewish community's needs. Analyzing the 1984 Long-Range Planning meetings provide a later scope into the congregation's desires for their space. Considering moving locations shows a potential shift in what they wanted out of their location and building. Conversely, the congregation opting to stay in their Elm Street location shows a level of satisfaction and commitment to their space, specifically to their sanctuary.

In 1947, in Rodef Sholom's 80th anniversary booklet, Harold Klivans, then president of the congregation, touched on Rodef Sholom's mission as American Jews:

> Looking back over the 80 years in the history of Rodef Sholom, what has been unique is its constant emphasis on the integration of the American Jew in the American scene, the conception of the Jewish community, not as a narrow exclusive island of faith in an alien land, but as good citizens of America, joining hands with all other good citizens for the realization of America's ideals. So long as an American is unable to take the hand of any man in any land and call him brother, so long is the task of Rodef Sholom not completed. This is the victory to which Rodef Sholom dedicates itself on this, its 80th anniversary of service to God and America.[1]

[1] 80th Anniversary, 1947, Building Construction, Box 1, Folder 2, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.

Klivans' message reflected the same values that Rodef Sholom instilled in 1867 as a new congregation in America composed of immigrants. Their consistent desire was to integrate into the American scene by creating an identity as American Jews. The same goals are seen in the building design, as previously explained. The initial inclusion of a movie room and gymnasium were representative of the congregational leaders aiding their members in integrating into the American scene. While renovations were being made and the initial intentions of the rooms were to change changed, Klivans reinscribed the goals upon the updated building. Scheibel and the congregation designed a building mindful of evolving needs and an evolving Jewish community.

In 1946, Congregation Rodef Sholom chose Dr. Sidney M. Berkowitz to serve as rabbi. The congregation and Jewish community of Youngstown made frequent comparisons between Rabbi Berkowitz and Rabbi Philo. Philo had served as rabbi for 33 years, and Berkowitz served for 37 years. Ozer, et. al., write in *These are the Names:*

> Both were eloquent orators, and both employed a prodigious vocabulary in speech and writing. Both believed strongly in a unified Jewish community and felt an obligation to represent the community in the councils of the general community. Both grew noticeable in their commitment to Zionism as their ministries advanced, Berkowitz to the extent of presiding over the local Z.O.A. Both were admired and loved-- even revered-- by Jews and Gentiles of Youngstown alike. Both developed intimate friendships with the Christian clergy.[2]

Both rabbis also witnessed great changes in the physical environment of the congregation. Philo saw the building move from Lincoln Avenue to Elm Street, and Rabbi Berkowitz oversaw many rounds of renovations and expansions.

[2] Irving E. Ozer, Harry Alter, Lois Davidow, and Saul Friedman, *These are the Names: The History of the Jews of Greater Youngstown, Ohio, 1865-1990*, (Self-pub, 1994), 190 .

Rodef Sholom's building remained relatively unchanged from 1915 until 1948 when the Strouss Memorial Social Hall was dedicated. The 80th anniversary booklet from 1947 states that in between 1915 and 1947, the years between Philo and Berkowitz, nothing had been added to the present building aside from repairs due to wear and tear. The social hall, a space originally furnished as a gymnasium, became the Strouss Memorial Social Hall.[3] Harold Klivans wrote that in the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the congregation's founding with plans to "convert our present social hall into a modern and beautiful room which can be used for all functions by our members, young and old, for religious, cultural and social activities."[4]

The remodeling of the social hall coincided with the development of other educational, recreational, and youth-oriented programs in the Jewish community of Youngstown. By the 1920s, there was increased support for the establishment of a Jewish community center.[5] The Youngstown Hebrew Institute, at the corner of Elm Street and Lincoln Avenue, had become the focal point of Youngstown Jewish activity. Originally intended as a community Hebrew and religious school, it became the virtual cultural center of the Jewish community, utilized by over 35 social and religious groups, serving over 1500 individuals.[6] In addition to housing group meetings, the Institute also offered a place for the leaders of the Jewish community to meet to

[3] 80th Anniversary, 1947, Building Construction, Box 1, Folder 2, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Thomas Welsh, Joshua Foster, and Gordon F. Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown and the Steel Valley*, (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2017), 71.
[6] Ozer, et al. *These are the Names*, 127.

discuss community issues and plans for a successful future. The Institute became known as " The Jewish Center," paving the way for the establishment of the Jewish Federation.

By 1927, there was an "ad hoc administration called The Youngstown Jewish Center, complete with temporary but functioning officers, trustees and executive board."[7] It was on August 21, 1935 that a group of Jewish men and women met to discuss the creation of a "new central community of organizations aimed at merging overseas, national and local appeals into a single united effort."[8] Clarence J. Strouss, of Strouss-Hirshberg Co., wrote a letter to the Jews of Youngstown explaining the effects of the Depression and the need for financial contributions to help. Rather than having multiple agencies with specific niches, he proposed a federation to channel all the money to the beneficiary agencies, thus establishing the Jewish Federation of Youngstown on October 31, 1935. Initially, the Federation operated out of Temple Anshe Emeth and established three departments: Family Welfare, Education, and Social and Recreational. Temple facilities were rented for activities such as club meetings, classes, and sports.[9] In addition to communal support and funding, the establishment of the Federation created a broader Jewish community in Youngstown. The Federation then purchased the McClain home on 646 Bryson Street, though the space lacked facilities for physical education and sports. Eventually, the Federation became the umbrella organization for five subsidiary organizations: The Jewish Community Relations Council; Jewish Family and Children's Services; Heritage Manor for the

[7] Ibid, 127.
[8] Ibid, 131.
[9] Ibid, 132.

Aged; and the Jewish Community Center.[10] The establishment of the Jewish Community Center in Youngstown altered what was necessary to include in the synagogue.

As the Federation developed to include such facilities, Rodef Sholom was able to reconsider their social space as congregants no longer needed a temple-specific gymnasium. At the original mass organization meeting of the Jewish Community Center on January 26, 1938, the Executive Director, Louis B. Greenberg stated:

> … that young people of Youngstown Jewry, from both organizational and unorganized groups, had already made the Center their central meeting place and were responding with real enthusiasm; also that the major adult organizations were likewise making the Center their headquarters and that it was serving in the fullest sense its function as the "Town Hall" of local Jewish life.[11]

Morris Scheibel served as the chairman of the Federation's Center Planning and Building committee, as well as President of the Jewish Community Center. The Jewish Community Center intended to aid cultural developments in the community and established the following departments: Educational, Athletic and Health, Music, Art and Concerts, Theater and Dramatics, and more. The JCC opened a new building in August 1954 to accommodate their social departments.[12] Having separate athletic and theater spaces outside of the synagogue diminished the need of having one in house. The Center thus provided new opportunities to the community, thereby changing the role of the synagogue again.

The rededicated social hall was named after Clarence J. Strouss, who passed away on March 7, 1947. Strouss was the president and general manager of Strouss-Hirshberg Co., and the founder and president of the Youngstown Jewish Federation for twelve years. The Strouss-

[10] Ibid, 285.
[11] Ibid, 134.
[12] Ibid, 288.

Hirshberg Company opened the doors of its large department store in downtown Youngstown in November of 1926. The space was 230,000 square-feet and six stories tall.[13] The building ran over $4 million in construction costs and stock. It featured Italian travertine floors, American walnut door frames, seven elevators, 150 phones, and a refrigerated vault that could hold over $1 million in fur.[14] Strouss-Hirshberg offered a variety of items, including "men's and women's clothing, radios, Victrola phonographs, furniture, carpets and rugs, interior decor and kitchen merchandise."[15]

The social hall in Rodef Sholom is said to be designed to replicate the store, specifically the double-sided staircase. The store represented a significant, Jewish, contribution to Youngstown's economy and longevity as a flourishing city. Interestingly, Daniel Kaufman draws a parallel between synagogue-centers and department stores as they both translate the secular building experience into Jewish institutional terms.[16] Both the synagogue-center and department store were service institutions offering many "wares" under one roof, and often times were "built by the same German-Jewish *balabatim.*"[17] Kaufman uses the example of Abraham Abraham and Isidor Straus, Jewish immigrants who pioneered the department store in New York's Lower East Side. Abraham & Straus was acquired by Macy's in 1994. Strouss-Hirshberg Co. was also purchased by Macy's in 2006.

[13] Welsh, Foster, and Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown*, 77.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999), 255.
[17] Ibid.

Clarence Strouss was also personally influential in the congregation, the Jewish community, and the city of Youngstown. By naming the social hall after him, Rodef Sholom acknowledged his impact and legacy. Covering Strouss' memorial service, The *Vindicator* wrote on March 10:

> A steady stream of more than 1,000 mourners paid respects Sunday to Clarence J. Strouss, one of the city's leading citizens who died last Friday, and expressed their sympathy to the family… Youngstowners of all walks of life, from department store stock clerks to bank presidents and industrial leaders, visited the funeral home where the body of Mr. Strouss lay in state.[18]

The memorial services were held at Rodef Sholom, Strouss' temple. The service was led by Rabbi Sidney M. Berkowitz, Rabbi I.E. Philo, Reverend Roland A. Luhman, Pastor of the First Reformed Church, and Dr. Rusell J. Humbert, Pastor of Trinity Methodist Church.[19] In the principal eulogy, Rabbi Bertkowitz stated:

> This outflowing of people, family and friends, Christian and Jewish, rich and poor, is complete and adequate tribute to the boundless unequaled esteem that were his. He gave so much of himself that there was little left of him to die.[20]

Strouss embodied an ideal for the Jewish community and members of Rodef Sholom. His philanthropic endeavors aligned with the mission of Reform Judaism and therefore Rodef Sholom. Honoring C.J. Strouss in a newly remodeled social hall not only pays respect but served to remind congregants of Strouss' actions and legacy in Youngstown. By remodeling the social hall, they also created a space in line with new ideals and self-image that was easily adaptable for various events and activities.

[18] Ozer, et al. *These are the Names,* 180.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid, 181.

Reconfiguring the gymnasium into a reception hall speaks to the economic advancement of the community, as well. By the time of the remodel, there were dozens of Jewish-owned businesses in the downtown sector. Welsh, et. al, lists the businesses in *A History of Jewish Youngstown and the Steel Valley*, such as Friedman's Confectionery, Levinson's, Klivan's jewelry and Greenblatt's furrier shop. Livingston's offered women's clothing trends while Lustig's and the Cinderella Shop, owned by Joseph Knable and Sam Kornspan, specialized in women's shoes. Men shopped at Hartzell's and the Printz Company, or ordered custom-made suits from Harr Tailoring, Hodes's tailor shop, Meyerovich Bros., Scher "Your" Tailor and Bud the Tailor, owned by Davis Schneider.[21] During the 1930s and 40s, Youngstown also witnessed an increase in Jewish-owned restaurants and eateries. Harry and Faye Malkoff established several restaurants such as the Gob Shop, Dixie Kitchen, and El Morocco. In 1939, Herb Kravitz opened the Elm Street Delicatessen on the same street as Rodef Sholom's synagogue.[22] It continues to successfully operate at Kravitz Deli on Belmont Avenue, roughly ten minutes from the synagogue. As the Jewish community of Youngstown continued to establish themselves economically, the need for a larger social hall increased. The community members could afford to host larger Bar Mitzvahs, weddings, and other events in the space. A more glamorous reception space was desirable to the congregation as aesthetic values changed and they had the means to achieve them.

At the end of the 1950s the American Jewish community was increasingly conflicted about what was an "acceptable mix of Jewish and secular life."[23] While some individuals turned away

[21] Welsh, Foster, and Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown*, 79.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Samuel D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.), 120.

from organized Judaism, some worked to transform the synagogue. Gruber states that terms like *decorum* and *acceptance* were heard less, while words like *community, spirituality, tradition,* and *transformation* took hold.[24] Synagogue designs shifted away from big buildings to more intimate settings. Already existing congregations, like Rodef Sholom, erected smaller chapels adjacent to their large sanctuaries. A chapel allowed congregations to recreate the lost (or perhaps imaginatively remembered) intimacy of Old World and inner city synagogues. By 1973, big synagogue building projects declined and "resources shifted to constructing large regional community centers and to Jewish museums and Holocaust memorials."[25]

Rodef Sholom's membership grew steadily and in 1954, at the request of Rabbi Berkowitz, a fund was started to make possible a $99,300 addition to cope with expanded school enrollment, increased temple activities, and shifting ritualistic aesthetics.[26] The plans called for a new two-story wing on the southwest corner of the wing. It would feature seven classrooms on the ground level. The main floor called for three more classrooms, a new rabbi's study, and the Tamarkin Memorial Chapel, being donated by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Tamarkin, Dr. and Mrs. Saul J. Tamarkin, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Tamarkin and Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Tamarkin.[27] The community broke ground on May 14, 1954. Rabbi Berkowitz dedicated the addition a year after the groundbreaking, on May 15, 1955. The *Vindicator* quoted Berkowitz at the dedication ceremony:

> Our members today are adding this chapel and religious school building as their contribution toward the future strength of Rodef Sholom. Unless each generation adds a link to the power and glory and force of Judaism, guaranteeing the 2,000 year old tradition of our faith, unless that is accomplished, we have doomed ourselves and our progeny. If man is to survive man in this atomic jet era, it can only be if he nurtures his spiritual

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ozer, et al. *These are the Names,* 190.
[27] *The Vindicator,* February 6, 1954.

> nature. We have obeyed and thereby strengthened the better and finer parts of our inner beings through this addition.[28]

To Berkowitz, the addition was crucial in ensuring their survival as a Jewish community following the war. It represented their contribution as a congregation to the longevity of their community and to Judaism. A significant expansion also proves that Berkowitz and others believed their Jewish community was still growing.

Rodef Sholom's next and arguably most substantial project came in 1960. Plans were made for an addition at the east side of the original temple and sanctuary remodel. The related expenses totaled $375,000. Of that, $250,000 went to the construction of a new education and office unit to bring the total number of classrooms in the temple to fourteen and add a library, kitchen, parlor, memorial and meditation room, secretarial offices and youth lounge.[29] When ground broke for the expansion, then president, Dr. Morris Rosenblum, said:

> Congregation Rodef Sholom has had a glorious past. It was the first Jewish congregation in the Mahoning Valley when it was organized in 1867 and was one of the founding congregations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873. But we think and look forward to the future. With this new addition we shall have a complete religious institution for all ages. We now look forward to a great future for us and the generation who will follow.[30]

Rosenblum touched on what the expansion meant for Rodef Sholom as a historical institution focused on the future. They were aware of the need to modernize their space to fit their current congregation's needs. Rosenblum knew the importance of their past as the first Jewish congregation in Youngstown and as one of the founding congregations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, but also knew that—with longevity in mind—it was time to expand.

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[28] *The Vindicator*, May 16, 1955.
[29] Ibid.
[30] *The Vindicator*, September 26, 1960.

The additional classrooms touches on an important part of Jewish tradition, learning. Learning is considered one of the fundamental commandments. The acquisition of knowledge equals prayer in its importance.[31] Reform Jews specifically do not limit knowledge to the "sacred literature of Jewish people," with the *Union Prayerbook* stating:

> O Lord, open our eyes that we may see and welcome all truth, whether shining from the annals of ancient revelations or reaching us through the seers of our own time; for Thou hidest not Thy light from any generation of Thy children that yearn for Thee and seek Thy guidance.[32]

The addition of a library also aligns with the education goals in Reform Judaism. The library, funded by Mildred S. Wilkoff, was intended to be called the D.J. Wilkoff Memorial Library. Upon Mildred's passing, however, it was renamed to the Mildred S. and David J. Wilkoff Library. It was to be stocked with valuable books on "Jewish history, literature, encyclopedia, and various other topics, as well as a section for children."[33] The responsibility of purchasing new books fell to the temple's Brotherhood. Adding a designated library space, along with the additional classrooms, shows that the congregation continued to prioritize education as they did upon founding in 1867. The synagogue served to provide access to Jewish learning for its congregants. By allowing Brotherhood members to select the books, learned individuals had control over what people could assess. Members that otherwise could not afford a plethora of books and educational materials were granted access, specifically at a time when public libraries did not carry many

[31] Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman, "Reform Judaism: Its Ritual Observances, Its Education Practices and Its Social Activities," in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* ed. Peter Blake (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 51-61.
[32] Ibid.
[33] "Without Vision We Perish," 1960, Building Construction, Box 3, Folder 11, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.

Jewish books. It was a matter of accessibility. The library was the last modification until 1964, when a $40,000 portico was added to the building.

The sanctuary remodel included new paneling, carpeting, seats, and enlarged pulpits. Before beginning work on the sanctuary, Rabbi Berkowitz led a de-consecration ceremony during Friday night services. A congregant wrote of the renovation and remodeling experience in an essay titled "Without Vision the People Perish":

> To our surprise there was a large attendance, and when our Rabbi, Dr. Berkowitz, announced that this would mark the last service in the present sanctuary, and he began to deconsecrate the Altar and Ark, there were tears in the eyes of most of the people. Even the most blase and the least sentimental among us had the feeling of parting from a time-honored friend-- the Ark was divested of the Torahs, and other ceremonial objects-- the light of the Ner Tamid, the Everlasting Light-- was removed by the architect, a Past President who designed the original sanctuary and building.[34]

The renovations were carried out once again by Scheibel. His involvement with the congregation permitted him to act on a new set of ideals, forty-five years later. It was a bittersweet moment for members as it promised modernization and continued growth but required the loss of the worship space members loved. The renovation required breaking through the west (rear) wall of the sanctuary to create balcony seating in a space that had previously been office space. With the office space there, the five panels of stained glass on the front of the building were covered. Removing the offices made them visible from within the sanctuary for the first time. The essay describes how the de-consecration gave a feeling of nostalgia and hurt, but once the empty space exposed the stained-glass windows that had been covered by offices for 45 years, "... what a thrill we enjoyed."[35] The space that had been used for offices was transformed into a balcony space

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

with additional sanctuary seating. Though initially emotional, the congregation was yet again satisfied with Scheibel's design. Not only did the renovation add additional seating, but it permitted five additional stained-glass windows to be enjoyed during services.

In 1982, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations mailed out a packet titled, "Forming Your Congregation's Future Planning Committee." The packet states that "many congregations exist from year to year, from crisis to crisis, with little advance planning or direction."[36] It encouraged congregations to create a Future Planning Committee to assess their congregation's self-identification, population changes, demographics, and other community-specific categories. Daniel Schwartzman explains the process of potentially remodeling in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow.*[37] Like the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Schwartzman advises congregations to prepare a comprehensive program of immediate and anticipated problems by providing three points to consider: the history of the congregation, the nature of the activities of the present members of the congregation, and the potential needs of the congregation and its relationship to the community.[38] Approaching the future of the institution realistically allows dwindling congregations a solid chance at survival and regrowth.

Rodef Sholom's Long-Range Planning Committee first met on September 20, 1983. In February of 1984 the committee met again to consider the synagogue and whether the building

[36] Union of American Hebrew Congregation Future Planning Kit, 1982, Building Construction, Box 3, Folder 16, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.
[37] Daniel Schwartzman "Remodeling Versus A New Building," in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* ed. Peter Blake (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 65-69.
[38] Ibid, 66.

was up to their congregation's standards. They were realistically considering the future of the congregation. At the time of the meeting, Rodef Sholom had 682 members, 85 of whom were under the age of 35. The minutes from one of the meetings consider the likelihood of gaining new members. One participant recorded the following questions:

> Would people actually move into the community? Is there a percentage of unaffiliated Jews in the area? Where would we get any temple growth? Is there enough of a community that is a member of this temple to even realistically think about gaining new members?[39]

The notes end with one straightforward line-- "Doubt much improvement."[40] Concerned with the sustainability of membership and the location of the synagogue in the city, the committee discussed potentially rebuilding a synagogue on Logan Way, in neighboring Liberty, OH, where the congregation owned five acres of land.[41]

While nothing was wrong with the Elm Street synagogue, the group was becoming increasingly concerned with the location. The notes from the meeting read:

> The police department was questioned about the security problem of the present location of the temple. The committee was informed that the crime rate had dropped about 18% in Youngstown. A lot of crimes in the area are drug related and they are committed by juveniles.[42]

At the time of Rodef Sholom's synagogue's inception, the area was the domain of Youngstown's prosperous and prominent. The Wick Park neighborhood's population increased as wealthy

[39] Long-Range Planning Committee Meeting Notes, 1984, Building Construction, Box 3, Folder 17, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

individuals migrated to the north side of the city in the 1890s. The park is located directly across the street from the synagogue and provided an attractive environment for residential and institutional development at the end of the nineteenth-century. When the park was established in 1889, two others existed in the city: Mill Creek Park, and Idora Park. Wick Park was notably different from the two:

> Idora is devoted to amusements and Mill Creek is wild and picturesque, but Wick Park is filled with quietude and loveliness, and thus stands in striking contrast with the pleasure grounds in the southern part of the city. Wick Park is an ideal one in many respects, and it is not at all strange that many fine residences have been erected in that vicinity and that others are in the course of erection.[43]

The dynamics of the city changed as more families relocated to prosperous suburbs. All sides of the city experienced suburbanization. On the South Side, the Jewish population relocated to Boardman Township and on the North Side, the community relocated to Liberty Township.[44] Downtown business struggled to compete with suburban plazas and the shopping mall. At the end of the 1960s, an economic planner, Dr. Charles F. Bonser conducted an economic study of Youngstown in cooperation with the city planning and urban renewal departments.[45] Dr. Bonser concluded that the downtown area was in a "fast slide" and urged local leaders to develop programs focused on restoring and revitalizing the area. He warned that "a mere continuation of previous economic development activities will simply not be adequate to solve the problem of the Youngstown economy."[46]

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[43] National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet, 1990, Building Construction, Box 3, Folder 11, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.
[44] Welsh, Foster, and Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown*, 133.
[45] Ibid, 136.
[46] Ibid.

By the 1970s, the Jewish population of the Greater Youngstown area, which peaked in the 1940s at approximately 8,000 individuals, had decreased by half. Welsh et al., notes that at this point, "the most glaring symptoms of the region's decline were still restricted to inner-city neighborhoods, which had largely been abandoned by white, middle-class urban dwellers."[47] This is evident at the 1984 series of Long-Range Planning meetings. Meeting notes state that if they leave they are helping the area to deteriorate and "owe it to Wick Park, the Cafaros, and Youngstown State University" to stay on the North Side.[48] The Cafaro Memorial Hospital, or Youngstown Osteopathic Hospital, was dedicated on March 23, 1953 as a $250,000, 30-bed facility.[49] The hospital was located in Youngstown and when the congregation contacted them for their plans, they stated that their plan was to buy more property north of their present location on Midlothian Boulevard for parking facilities. The Long-Range Planning committee members also spoke to Dean Salata, the Dean of Administration at Youngstown State University about the future plans of the university. Salata noted that the university has no plans to move north but did note that there are "a number of students who live on the north side in the neighborhood of the temple."[50] The Dean said that he "hopes the temple will stay in its present location as it helps to stabilize the community."[51]

Next, they spoke to Mr. Craig Hunter, the Pastor of Richard Brown Memorial Church, the church next to Rodef Sholom. Hunter told the committee that "his church had been there for 80

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[47] Ibid, 145.
[48] Long-Range Planning Committee Meeting Notes, 1984, Building Construction, Box 3, Folder 17, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.
[49] *The Vindicator,* March 23, 1953.
[50] Long-Range Planning Committee Meeting Notes, 1984, Building Construction, Box 3, Folder 17, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.
[51] Ibid.

years and they are making improvements to their building and they plan to stay there."[52] At the time, Richard Brown Memorial Church had a congregation of 250 people. Mr. Stephen Besel, Minister of the Unitarian Church, located on the other side of Rodef Sholom, said that his congregation was "on the rise."[53] At the time, the church had 175 people and had been in its location for 67 years with no plans of relocating. The consideration of neighboring institutions' plans shows that the committee was aware of their commitment to the city and the North Side even as they became increasingly bothered by crime rates and the changing neighborhood dynamics.

The group toured the synagogue and assessed what changes were crucial in order to bring the present structure up to par. The meeting notes list eight specific categories of concern: energy efficiency, the ability to be made barrier free, air conditioning in the classrooms, the size of the kitchen, the size of the social hall, as well as renovations to the sanctuary, hallway, and administration offices.[54] At the time, Sisterhood was funding the renovation of the Ark in the sanctuary in memory of Rabbi Berkowitz. Aside from the Ark, the sanctuary was considered to be in "fairly good shape."[55] Next, the tour moved to Strouss Hall, which could accommodate 200 people with a dance floor, or 240 without. The group discussed removing the stage to fit more tables. Following the tour, the group was in favor of renovating the existing structure rather than purchasing new. However, the estimated cost of renovations totaled $850,000. They reached a general consensus—prioritize projects and gradually make renovations.

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

While the majority favored staying in their known building, some committee members felt that it was useless to invest money in a building "that is located in an area that is going nowhere."[56] At the same time, they noted that they could never duplicate the "warmth and richness" of the sanctuary. The frequent mention of the feelings that the sanctuary provokes reiterates how important the worship space is to the synagogue. One member's notes from the meeting end abruptly with, "Our present temple is adequate. Sanctuary is irreplaceable."[57] The decisions being made at the series of Long-Range Planning Committee meetings were emotive. They extended beyond finances and geography into the feelings and emotions of the congregants. People were nostalgic for the sanctuary. At times of uncertainty, the space was welcoming and reminded them that they are a part of a long-standing community with origins in 1867.

As synagogue members argued for maintaining their current synagogue, some raised concerns about the potential plan of utilizing the five acres on Logan Way. They deemed the property inappropriate due to its close proximity to El Emeth and Saint Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church and considered selling the land. The minutes note that the location is not ideal for a temple, and that "you don't want to be next to another temple"—in reference to Temple El Emeth.[58] The notes also reference the state laws regarding traffic, stating, "3 religious churches/temples etc… within a few blocks."[59] The notes expand:

> Do you think we would have difficulty putting a third Religious Institution on Logan Ave? … Because of traffic --- Godfrey Anderson on the Zoning Board and he wouldn't approve

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

> it. There should not be three Religious Institutions on that street -- so close together. Would cause a traffic bottleneck. It would just be a problem.[60]

The group was logistically and legally concerned with the location of their synagogue, as well. Relocating to their Logan Way property was not as simple as redesigning a synagogue. There were already two religious institutions on Logan Way and though they were different denominations, there would be traffic issues on holidays and during service times.

Overall, the notes from the meeting reveal a deep consideration for their building. They were focused not only on the aesthetics, but with their commitment to the city of Youngstown and their congregation. During a meeting, then rabbi, Rabbi Powers, expressed apprehension about having two synagogues within such close proximity. The notes read, "Rabbi was anxious at first—in NY people wouldn't drive past one synagogue to get to another—but it's different here— people aren't like that."[61] Rabbi Powers' initial reluctance, then reconsideration, confirms the commitment that the Jewish community in Youngstown displayed for their temple. It expanded beyond a matter of convenience and location and into the values and sense of community. Rodef Sholom's Long-Range Planning Committee meetings show how the congregation responded to negative factors in the community. Unideal conditions such as decreasing membership and the demographic and socio-economic changes of Youngstown's Northside created new issues for the group to respond to. Opting to stay on Elm Street and continue to renovate and make improvements shows a level of attachment to the space and location.

[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

The congregation felt rightfully committed to their synagogue. The building, designed as a synagogue-center, had served the purpose that Rabbi Philo expressed hopes for in 1915. The temple continued to be the "center of the Jewish Community—a house of prayer, a house of study, and a house of assembly combined…"[62] The series of remodels and additions permitted the design to grow with the congregation as they became further acquainted in the Jewish community of Youngstown. Each time committees and contractors met, they considered the needs of the congregation, the trends of the Jewish community, and altered the building to accommodate both. The renovation of the social hall is a prime example of this. As the Jewish community in Youngstown grew and developed the Jewish Community Center, Rodef Sholom no longer needed a gymnasium in their social hall. Members were playing basketball outside of the synagogue with other members of the Jewish Community. Instead of a gymnasium, they needed a larger space for parties and dancing. They also reacted and followed the trends of the broader Jewish community in the United States, seen specifically in the addition of the Tamarkin Memorial Chapel. In continuously expanding upon their synagogue-center, they met their priorities and thus made them manifest to themselves and available for analysis to historians.

The Long-Range Planning Committee meeting notes are interesting in that they show the committee discussing the potential of relocating their synagogue. While there were changes following the war—such as the rise of intimate worship in chapels—this was the first time that the building can be used to read a response to an outwardly negative situation in Youngstown. Rather than adjusting to increased membership and success, the congregation was faced with the city's economic fast slide and decreased membership. The Jewish population in Youngstown

[62] Ozer, et al. *These are the Names,* 32.

decreased by half in thirty years and the congregation was faced with realistically assessing their future. Ultimately, the Long-Range Planning Committee decided that their current building would suffice and the wider congregation would be unhappy with relocating to a new space. At this point, they opposed the trends seen in not only the Jewish community but the white, middle-class community, and avoided flight. After thorough analysis, they were well aware that it was in their best interest to stay in Wick Park and adapt their building as needed. The meeting notes serve as a valuable resource in understanding the process behind the decision to stay in the Elm Street synagogue.

Following a series of dramatic remodels and renovations, the Elm Street synagogue continued to meet the needs of Rodef Sholom's congregation and the Jewish community. As the community changed, the building was able to change. Peter Blake, editor of *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow,* believes that the new American synagogue, in 1954 when the work was published, should be both a functional community center and a focal point of the community's aspirations.[63] A *good* synagogue with longevity in mind, then, is a building both of efficiency and dignity, concerned with both fine construction and fine art. Rodef Sholom's synagogue has proven to be a sound example of a *good* synagogue as it is still evolving with the community it serves.

[63] Peter Blake, *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guide Book to Synagogue Design and Construction,* (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954).

Conclusion: A Shift to Preservation

This concluding chapter begins with a recent history of Congregation Rodef Sholom in Youngstown, Ohio. It demonstrates that the trends identified in the body of this work continue today. In her master's thesis, Sarah Wilschek, who was hired as Rodef Sholom's Executive Director in 2019, wrote:

> One of the most efficient use of funds, based on the duplicate services and roles in the community, would be the consolidation of the local religious institutions. In interviews with each leader of their respective congregations, it was made clear that within the next ten years synagogue consolidation will be inevitable.[1]

In November 2021, Rodef Sholom finalized a merger with Boardman synagogue, Ohev-Tzedek. The new entity worships in the Elm Street synagogue. Recent initiatives of the congregation bring to light a new goal: preserving their past. In 2020, the congregation oversaw the establishment and cataloging of its archives, and in 2021, with the help of YSU Professor Emerita Donna DeBlasio, they began working to nominate the building for the National Register of Historic Places. The congregation and synagogue that had once witnessed increased membership and consistent growth began shifting its focus to historic preservation efforts. Both the Register listing and development of an archival space show an awareness of their deep history as Reform Jews in Youngstown, Ohio.

[1] Sarah Wilschek, "The Future of the Jewish Rust Belt: A Critical Analysis of One Rust Belt Jewish Community" (master's thesis, Gratz College, 2018), 57.

Between 1970 and 1980, Youngstown's population fell by 20.4 percent, from 140,509 to 112,146 people.[2] This was a direct response to the collapse of the steel industry. The fall began on September 19, 1977—or "Black Monday"—when Youngstown Sheet and Tube announced that the company's Campbell Works, then the area's largest steel mill, would be shut down by Friday. Youngstown Mayor, Jack Hunter, called it the "the worst possible" news that he could have received as a public official.[3] The shutdown resulted in the loss of four thousand jobs in the area. Following Campbell Works in 1979 was U.S. Steel's Ohio Works and Brier Hill, and then Republic Steel in 1984. Welsh and their co-authors state:

> Thus, in the course of several years, the "Steel Valley"—a one-time industrial zone comprising Mahoning and Trumbull Counties as well as portions of western Pennsylvania —lost an estimated 400,000 manufacturing jobs, 400 satellite business, $414 million in personal income and from 33 to 75 percent of the school tax revenues.[4]

Youngstown's Jewish population experienced even more dramatic decreases. It was less than half of the size that it was in the 1940s when the population peaked at approximately four thousand people. Congregations in the Youngstown area knew that consolidation and reconfiguration was inevitably on the horizon.

In 1970, the local synagogues and the Youngstown Jewish Federation commissioned a study to assess the feasibility of a functional Jewish Day school as congregations were struggling to maintain their own separate religious schools due to financial burdens and a decline in enrollment.[5] Two years later, the American Association of Jewish Education (AAJE) advised the

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[2] Thomas Welsh, Joshua Foster, and Gordon F. Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown and the Steel Valley*, (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2017), 141.

[3] Stan Boney, "40 years later, effects of Black Monday still apparent in Youngstown," WKBN News, September 16, 2017, https://www.wkbn.com/news/40-years-later-effects-of-black-monday-still-apparent-in-youngstown/.

[4] Welsh, Foster, and Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown*, 147.

[5] Ibid, 147.

local community to combine programs and adopt an integrated approach to increase efficiency.[6] Anshe Emeth and Emanu-El, both located in Youngstown, merged religious education programs and then formally merged as congregations in 1973. They named the new entity El Emeth to pay respects to the congregations' respective identities and histories.[7] An additional consolidation occurred in western Pennsylvania when the Orthodox congregation in Farrell, B'nai Zion, merged with Beth Israel, a Reform congregation in Sharon.

As decreasing membership loomed over the congregation, they were faced with a series of questions: whether to merge with neighboring temples, and if so, what building to use. In the case of Anshe Emeth and Temple Emanu-El, they chose the latter. In 2013, Sharon's Temple Beth Israel merged again, this time with Congregation Rodef Sholom. They joined them in the Elm Street synagogue. The synagogue in Sharon was listed for sale and sold to the Greater New and Living Way Temple of the Apostolic Faith in 2014.[8] Sharon's newspaper, *The Herald,* reported on the closing and interviewed the president of Temple Beth Israel, Stanley Bard. Bard said, "When I walked in the first time and I saw them taking the windows down it grabbed my heart. I can only imagine what was going on in the minds of people who have been here all their lives."[9] Bard described similar emotions experienced by Rodef Sholom's members who were present for the de-consecration service in 1960, proving yet again that the sanctuary spaces, both of which designed by Morris Scheibel, were extremely effective in reaching the members that worshiped

[6] Ibid, 141.
[7] Ibid, 142.
[8] Joe Wiercinski, "Worshippers will again fill former synagogue," *The Herald*, October 26, 2021, https://www.sharonherald.com/news/local_news/worshippers-will-again-fill-former-synagogue/article_598cdd1e-e5e1-5813-b026-5ffa9cf7aa2b.html.
[9] Michael Roknick, "Temple Beth Israel in Sharon closing," *The Herald,* Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle, July 18, 2013, https://jewishchronicle.timesofisrael.com/temple-beth-israel-in-sharon-closing/.

from it. The sanctuaries invoked feelings of belonging and community as it was a reminder of services, funerals, and High Holy Days.

On November 1, 2021, Congregation Rodef Sholom and Boardman, Ohio's Ohev Tzedek-Shaarei Torah—itself a product of consolidation—finalized their merger. The new community renamed itself Congregation Ohev Beth Sholom to honor the three congregations that had come together between 2012 and 2021. The merger combined Ohev Tzedek's eighty-five members with Rodef Sholom's 220 members.[10] Due to size and historical significance, the Elm Street synagogue was selected as Congregation Ohev Beth Sholom's home.

The Jewish community in Youngstown has entered a new stage, evident from the merger and its turn to history. Examining the synagogue at present reveals the same patterns seen in 1915 and during the series of remodels between 1948 and 1960. In 1984, prior to their mergers, Rodef Sholom began a course of Long-Range Planning meetings to assess their priorities. They conducted a study of their building with architects and weighed two options: rebuilding on land they owned in Liberty Township or staying in their Elm Street synagogue. They decided to stay on Elm Street, though grew progressively aware that the space would no longer be utilized as it once was. This shows the congregation responding to their changing population yet again. 1984 marked the beginning of a protracted process of wrestling with demographic and neighborhood changes.

[10] Ellen Braunstein, "Shrinking population leads to Youngstown synagogues merger," Cleveland Jewish News, November 4, 2021, https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/news/local_news/shrinking-population-leads-to-youngstown-synagogues-merger/article_e5b9f202-3d7c-11ec-9841-fbf8e626b056.html.

The first of the changes, concerned with disability and an aging congregation, came in 1993, when the elevator wing was added. Though membership looked different, the 1993 addition was a positive change. The elevator wing, located on the Elm Street side of the sanctuary, allowed congregants to enter directly from the street and access the sanctuary or social hall. Prior to 1993, the spaces were accessible by stair lift. With the elevator wing, Rodef Sholom became more fully accessible. While it was accommodating to disabled individuals, it also served the aging population. Welsh, et al., quoted business leader Paul Schwebel regarding the lack of young Jews in the area:

> "They've done a great job with the people that are here, but if you look at the population under 40, it is… extremely small. It's hard to develop leaders, or to find leaders. The question becomes: 'What leaders, or how many leaders, are going to lead in the Jewish community if they're very few under 30?"[11]

Thus, to modernize the synagogue, the building committee had to consider the mobility needs of the members and how they would continue to change as the population aged. In 2020, the memorial hall was renovated to include a ramp that created an inclusive entrance to the synagogue from the east side of the building, further increasing accessibility.

In 2010, a generous donation from Milton and Cecilia Handler created Handler Hall, a smaller social hall that the congregation utilizes for *Oneg Shabbats*—celebratory meals that follows Shabbat services—and other programs, such as the meals after funerals and Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.[12] The space is used for social programming when Strouss Hall proves to be too large.

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[11] Welsh, Foster, and Morgan, *A History of Jewish Youngstown*, 172.

[12] "Our History," Congregation Ohev Beth Sholom, accessed March 27, 2022, https://www.ohevbethsholom.org/our-history.html.

Handler Hall is the result of a remodel on unused classrooms. At present, the building makes use of four classrooms total, ten less than at its peak.

In 2020, the gift shop operated by the temple's Sisterhood was emptied to create an archival space as a response to the temple's own history or changes. It was known that the Jewish community was entering a new period of change and the temple displayed a level of self-awareness in the formation of space in its rich history. The process began a year after the newly hired Executive Director, Sarah Wilschek, "discovered boxes and shelves full of documents, objects, ledgers, and more tucked away in a utility closet on the lower level of the synagogue."[13] The conceptualization and eventual creation of an archive showcases a shift in values in the Jewish community in Youngstown. Faced with population decreases, focus moved to the past and how best to preserve their history. Producing a space for archival materials grants students and visiting scholars the opportunity to learn about the impacts local congregations have had in the region and the greater Jewish community. The archive was the result of a collaboration with Youngstown State University's Applied History Program. The materials housed in the archives include:

> Framed/mounted art and photographs; membership ledgers, financial ledgers, deeds, documents, and maps for Congregation Rodef Sholom's cemeteries (Briar Hill and Tom Homestead, 1967-present); Sisterhood records from 1867 and Brotherhood records since 1924, including programs, photographs, scrapbooks, meeting minutes, correspondence, etc.; original architectural blueprints for the temple by notable architect M. Scheibel; Board of Trustees and all other committee meeting minutes (1867-present); records accumulated by previous Rabbi; congregant birth, death, and marriage records (1867-present); confirmation records (1913-present); library accession records; and other significant historical documents, including the petition for the founding of the Reform

[13] Sarah Wilschek and Kayla Metzger, "Congregation Rodef Sholom: A History and Lesson in Collaboration and the Creation of an Archive," *Association of Jewish Libraries: News and Reviews* 2, no.4 (2021): 5-6, accessed April 20, 2022, https://jewishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AJL-2021MayJune_v4.pdf.

Judaism movement in the United States (Cincinnati, OH) of which Congregation Rodef Sholom is the first signatory.[14]

In spring 2022, Rodef Sholom, now Ohev Beth Sholom, hosted another YSU History course. This time, graduated students used the plethora of primary sources found in the archives to create an exhibit highlighting the individual histories of Congregation Rodef Sholom, Ohev Tzedek-Shaarei Torah, and Temple Beth Israel, and their consolidation. The primary documents have also been used to nominate the 1915 synagogue to the National Register of Historic Places—the process began in 2021 and as of April 2022, is still ongoing. In addition, many of the materials listed above proved to be invaluable to this project.

An analysis of the primary sources from Rodef Sholom's archives in relation to the synagogue explains that the congregation had four main factors in mind when designing the building: its social desires as a community of Reform Jews in America, the cultural trends of the greater Jewish community, the city's socioeconomic trends, and fluctuating membership counts and membership demographics. When they constructed their first temple in 1884, Rodef Sholom was primarily concerned with integrating into the city of Youngstown while still maintaining distinction as a new Jewish community. They hoped to dispel feelings of antisemitism by opening their synagogue to the general population.

As they established themselves as a Jewish congregation in Youngstown socially and economically, they developed a new set of wishes and needs. When Rodef Sholom built a new place of worship in 1915, they did so inspired by trends in the broader Jewish community. They were influenced by the increasing popularity of the synagogue-center—a type of synagogue that

[14] Ibid.

expanded beyond the sanctuary space. It served to create a second home and sense of community in the synagogue. The center served to engage Jews who were acculturated in America, while assisting in their children's re-culturation into Judaism.[15] Rodef Sholom's synagogue-center was unique to their congregation's desires as a group of Reform Jews in the city of Youngstown as there were seemingly "Youngstown" elements in the space, such as the motion picture room. In 1887, the city became home to the Warner family who eventually created the Warner Bros. Company, a leader in the American film industry. The inclusion of a motion picture room in the synagogue not only shows that they were following the trends of the broader Jewish community by designing a center to aid religious worship, social activity, and education, but that they were motivated by their larger community in Youngstown.

The congregation continued to develop their synagogue-center over time, most significantly between 1947 and 1960. The changes made over those thirteen years, again, reveals how the Jewish community in Youngstown responded to the greater cultural trends of the Jewish community in the United States. In 1948, the congregation rededicated their social hall as the Strouss Memorial Hall. The remodel omitted the gymnasium and turned the hall into a larger reception area. This was in response to the development of the Jewish Community Center in Youngstown. The JCC took on some of the previous functions of the synagogue, such as recreational activities. It encouraged the members of Rodef Sholom to engage in social activities with the entire Jewish community in the city. The addition of the Tamarkin Chapel in 1954 followed the pattern seen in many synagogues across the American Jewish community as they

[15] David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999), 2.

struggled in balancing an "acceptable mix of Jewish and secular life."[16] As the Jewish community began to favor intimate settings over big buildings, many existing congregations erected smaller chapels in addition to their sanctuary space. Rodef Sholom following this trend in 1954 proves both a knowledge and desire to follow the greater Jewish community.

As the population in Youngstown steadily decreased, the congregation assessed their needs and how best to assure the longevity of their community. They recommitted to their synagogue building in 1984 after a series of Long-Range planning meetings. The meeting notes explain that the members were attached to the sanctuary space and that the "warmth and richness" would not be replicated if they rebuilt a smaller synagogue on their owned property.[17] While the estimated cost of renovations totaled $850,000, the Elm Street synagogue was still favored as it reminded the shrinking congregation that they are part of a long-standing community with origins in 1867.

The Elm Street synagogue has served Congregation Rodef Sholom for 107 years. It has been altered as the community adapted to growth, decline, shifts in the Jewish and local community. The building continues to serve the Jewish community as it is now home to Congregation Ohev Sholom and will continue to be adapted as the consolidated congregation creates a new identity. While priorities and congregation have changed over the century, the Jewish community of Youngstown has remained concerned with one thing： the future. Through various renovations, the building committee and congregation has recurrently prioritized

[16] Samuel D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.), 120.

[17] Long-Range Planning Committee Meeting Notes, 1984, Building Construction, Box 3, Folder 17, Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives, Youngstown.

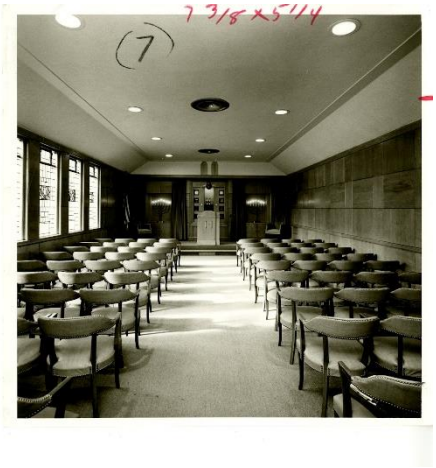
ensuring what would be best for future members. While answers have ranged from new classrooms, a chapel, or an elevator wing, a clear commitment to the longevity of the congregation has always been a priority. The Elm Street synagogue, then, is an architectural manifestation of the goals, challenges, and priorities of Congregation Rodef Sholom over the decades, as they found their place in the American scene and in the city of Youngstown. In addition, the building reflects the needs of the Jewish community as they adapted, and continue to adapt, to shrinking populations and consolidating congregations.

Illustrations

Construction of Congregation Rodef Sholom (1914)
Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives

Congregation Rodef Sholom's *bimah* (1926)
Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives

Congregation Rodef Sholom (circa 1950)
Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives

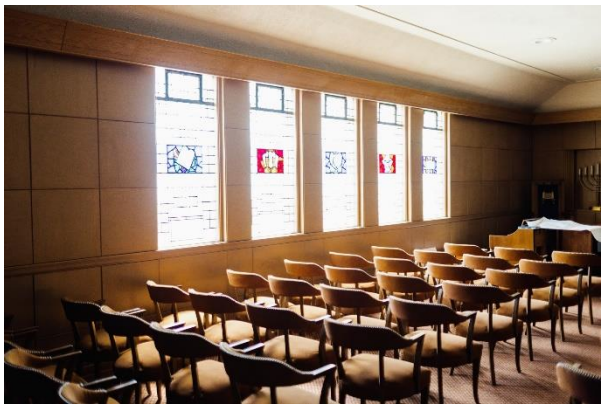


Tamarkin Chapel (1954)
Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives

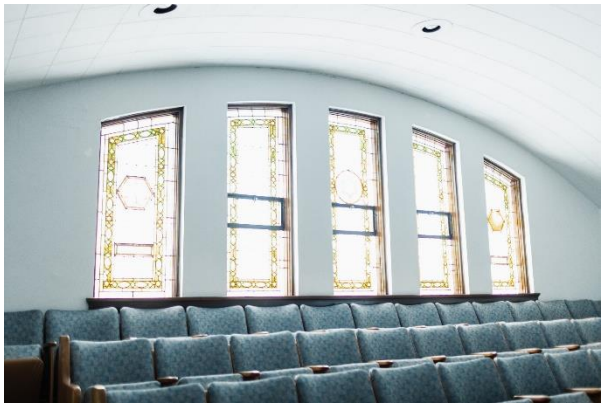
Congregation Ohev Beth Sholom (2022)
Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives

Bimah (2022)
Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives

Ceiling of the Sanctuary (2022)
Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives



Tamarkin Chapel (2022)
Congregation Rodef Sholom Archives



Stained-glass panels exposed during the 1960 sanctuary remodel
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