

**KEHILA KADOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE**, 280 Broome Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1926-27; Sydney Daub, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Block 414, Lot 27.

On April 20, 2004, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Kehila Kadosha Janina Synagogue and the proposed designation of the related landmark site (Item No. 5). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of law. There were eleven speakers in favor of designation, including representatives of State Senator Martin Conner and Assemblyman Sheldon Silver. Several members of the congregation, including the president spoke in favor of designation as did representatives of the Historic Districts Council, the Landmarks Conservancy, the Municipal Arts Society, the Society for the Architecture of the City, Preserve and Protect, and the Lower East Side Conservancy. The Commission has also received several favorable letters: from Councilperson Alan Gerson, and other members of the congregation.

#### Summary

The Kehila Kadosha Janina Synagogue was constructed in 1926-27 for a small group of Romaniote Jews who had emigrated from the town of Ioannina in northwestern Greece. They had begun moving to the United States in 1905 and established a small community on New York's Lower East Side, alongside numerous other recent Jewish immigrants. Adhering to neither the Ashkenazy nor the Sephardic traditions, this group came with their own religious and social customs developed in Greece over the course of many centuries. In New York, they established their own synagogue, first meeting in rented quarters, until they were able to construct their own building. The Kehila Kadosha Janina synagogue, designed by architect Sydney Daub, is a two-story, brick-faced structure embellished with symbolic ornament, such as Tablets of the Law, Stars of David and a cusped arch, suggestive of the middle-eastern origin of the congregation. As the only surviving Romaniote synagogue in the Western hemisphere, Kehila Kadosha Janina continues to have an active congregation, despite its small numbers, with few members living nearby.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Jewish New York and the Romaniote Community

In 1654, the first Jewish colonists arrived in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam. They came on a French frigate which had been contracted to take the twenty-three individuals from the West Indies to Amsterdam. Why they ended up in New Amsterdam is unclear, but they eventually prospered in the new colony and over time were joined by many other co-religionists. These early Jewish settlers were part of the Sephardic tradition, meaning their ancestors had come from Spain where they had developed a specific Spanish-Hebrew language (Ladino) and distinctive religious rituals, before being expelled from that country during the Inquisition. Sephardic Jews established communities in several cities along the east coast of America, with synagogues, burial societies and other communal institutions. Sephardic Jews represented Judaism in America until the early nineteenth century, by which time the majority of immigrant Jews were from Germany. By the end of the century they came primarily from Eastern Europe, especially Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and Russia. Although these later arrivals shared a religion with the Sephardim who came first, these Jews followed Ashkenazic traditions. They tended to be stricter in their interpretations of ritual and had developed their own German-Hebrew dialect (Yiddish) and specific customs. In 1825 the Ashkenazic Jews established their first synagogue in New York, and were soon followed by many others. By the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ashkenazic Jews formed the vast majority of the many thousands of Jews emigrating to the United States. Today, most Jews around the world consider themselves to be of either the Sephardic or Ashkenazic traditions.

### Romaniote Jews<sup>1</sup>

A third, small subgroup of Jews follows the Romaniote tradition whose unique customs were established many centuries ago in Greece. The term Romaniote is taken from the Venetian name for Greece, or Romania, which was then modified into Hebrew. The oral tradition of these people asserts that they are the descendants of a group of Jews who were being transported from Palestine to Rome to become slaves, sometime after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D.<sup>2</sup> The boat in which they were traveling capsized in a storm off the western coast of Greece and the Jewish captives were allowed to swim ashore. Escaping from the Romans, they settled in Greece and established their own

communities where their own traditions developed without direct influence from those of other areas.

There is little documentary evidence as to when Romaniote Jewish communities were actually established in Greece, but Jews lived in Thessalonika as early as c.140 A.D. Other communities were located in Corfu, Larissa, Delos, Aegina and Athens. Early written records are sparse, but when the Spanish rabbi, Benjamin of Tudela traveled in Greece in 1170, he visited twenty-eight Romaniote communities. By c.1500, there were Romaniote communities beyond the borders of Greece, in Bulgaria, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, among other places.<sup>3</sup>

One of the largest and most well-established Romaniote communities was in Ioannina, a town in the province of Epirus in northwestern Greece. Ioannina was first mentioned as a city in documents from the seventh century, and there is evidence of a Jewish synagogue within this walled city in the ninth century. Between the sixth and twelfth centuries when the Normans sacked Ioannina, the area was invaded numerous times by Slavs, Bulgarians, Uzes and Petchenegs (two different Turkic peoples).<sup>4</sup> This was followed by a series of rulers who were more or less tolerant of the Jews in this area. After a long siege in 1430, the city of Ioannina surrendered to Sultan Murad II of the Ottoman Empire. Under Ottoman rule, Jews and other distinct groups were allowed to practice their own religions, conduct their own law courts, and engage in commerce, as long as they paid extensive taxes.<sup>5</sup> In spite of this heavy taxation, these communities thrived under their own leadership, and there was considerable commerce and communication between the various Greek towns with Jewish populations. Ioannina was the commercial center for all of Epirotic Greece, with banking houses and international trade. Jews there were engaged in many different trades, including silver and goldsmithing, the production of silk braid, blankets and scarves, as well as all the commodities of daily life.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Jews were being expelled from Spain and other European countries, the Ottoman Empire welcomed them for the trade and wealth they could bring. Many Jews from Spain (Sephardim) settled in Greece (including some in the town of Ioannina), but they often came into conflict with the Romaniote communities already there. In Ioannina however, the newcomers assimilated to the existing community, eventually accepting Greek instead of Ladino as the common language, and learned to use the Romaniote liturgy.<sup>6</sup> The memoirs of a Turkish traveler who

visited Ioannina in 1670 recorded seeing 160 Jewish households (about 800 people) and found the Jews “fanatic, bigoted, and mean,” as well as insular and lacking in social graces.<sup>7</sup>

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Albanian despot Ali Pasa created an almost autonomous state comprised of large sections of Macedonia and the Peloponnese, as well as Epirus and Albania. Although taxation was heavy and enforcement of laws severe, there was no religious persecution and the area enjoyed stability and economic growth. Schools prospered, books were available, and Jews as well as Christians served on governmental councils. Ioannina became a model of progressive life in the Balkans and the Jewish population surged, outgrowing their assigned quarters within the city walls and creating the need for a new synagogue in 1840. The execution of Ali Pasa in 1822 led to the beginning of the Greek War of Independence in the Peloponnese. Greek Christians tended to identify with the new Greek state, while Jews tended to support the Ottomans who had allowed them to freely practice their religion during all these years. Worsening relations between Jews and Christians led to a major riot against the Jews in 1872, and several people were killed and wounded. In 1897, a renewal of hostilities between Greeks and Turks had bad consequences for the Jews and some began to move to other Greek towns such as Arta, Preveza and Athens.<sup>8</sup> Despite the emigration, in 1904 the 4,000 Jews in Ioannina were able to support a school to provide education to all Jewish children, the Alliance Israelite Universelle. There was also a group called “Working for Zion” which helped to create a strong Zionist movement and led many to think about emigrating to Palestine. This movement was given further impetus when, in 1905, twelve Jewish merchants from Ioannina, traveling to a nearby village, were killed by thieves. The next day when the synagogue in Ioannina was opened for morning prayer, congregants found the ears of the slain merchants. By the end of that year, over 500 Jews from this town had left, many emigrating to Constantinople, Athens, Alexandria, Palestine and New York. By 1906, another 1,000 were gone, having responded to shipping agents who offered cheap passage to America.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the First Balkan War in 1913, Ioannina was part of the area that was annexed to Greece. Many Jews from Ioannina supported Greece during the First World War, while others continued the significant emigration trend. In 1941, when World War II started, there were 1,950 Jews in Ioannina which was then “the largest uniformly Romaniote

community in Greece and was one of the leading Jewish centers in the Levant.”<sup>10</sup> When war broke out, many Jews fled to nearby mountains. Those who stayed fell under Italian occupation until 1943. In 1944, Germans came and sent those remaining to Larissa and then Auschwitz, where almost all were annihilated. As of 1992, there were 62 Jews living in Ioannina, supporting one synagogue and a cemetery.<sup>11</sup> Today, only three Romaniote synagogues exist outside of Greece: in Manhattan (Kehila Kadosha Janina), and in Israel (Beth Avraha and Ohel Sara).<sup>12</sup>

### Romaniote Jews in New York

Even though there were some Jews in New York from its earliest days, the largest influx did not arrive until the late nineteenth century. During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, approximately half a million Jews from Eastern Europe moved to the United States, with an additional 1.5 million more coming between 1900 and World War I.<sup>13</sup> Most of these people settled in New York. Those who had arrived earliest (mostly from Germany) generally prospered and moved to more comfortable neighborhoods such as the East Village, while the new arrivals, mostly from Eastern Europe, filled the tenements of Manhattan’s Lower East Side with new languages and customs. In an effort to create some semblances of their old lives, immigrants often chose to live close to others who came from the same towns, and established their own communal organizations to support each other, such as synagogues and burial societies. The Lower East Side came to be known as a “cosmopolis” of individual Jewish groups. “Clustered in their separate Jewries, they were set side by side in a pattern suggesting the cultural, if not the physical geography of the Old World.”<sup>14</sup>

Jews from the Romaniote communities of Greece were among those arriving in New York in the early twentieth century. “After 1907, Levantines, last on the scene and even stranger than the rest, for they were alien to Yiddish, settled between Allen and Chrystie streets among the Roumanians with whom they seemed to have the closest affinity.”<sup>15</sup>

### Synagogues

Jews in Biblical times were nomadic herders and their religion required them to bring sacrifices to the Temple in Jerusalem several times a year. After the Temple was destroyed for the second time in 70 A.D. it was not rebuilt, but was replaced by synagogues which developed as locations of prayer and study. Ruins of synagogues dating from the first centuries after the destruction of the Temple have been found throughout the Holy Land as well as in Rome, Turkey,

Syria and Yugoslavia. The Bible contains no prescription for how these buildings were supposed to be constructed or specific layouts or furnishings they should contain. They required only an *Ark* (special cabinet) to hold the *Torah* (the written law) and a reading desk to place it on when it was read during services. Beyond this, the synagogue could take any form the congregation desired. Through custom, these buildings usually faced east, toward Jerusalem, although not always. On the exterior, they tended to conform to the architectural forms that were commonly used in the local community. In a reaction to periodic incidents of persecution, it was usually deemed important to have small, unobtrusive synagogue buildings, so as not to draw attention to the activities of the Jewish groups using the structure.

In New York, with the large waves of Jewish immigrants filling the Lower East Side, individual groups were forced to use any available space for their synagogues. Often small congregations held services in a single rented room until the group increased in size and prosperity enough to rent larger quarters. It was also not unusual for a growing congregation to move into the building of a church that had moved away. The exterior design of the building was less important than having a place to congregate with other people of a common heritage.

#### Kehila Kadosha Janina Congregation

Since the Romaniote Jews had their own language, customs and prayers which were different from other Jewish immigrants, they naturally formed their own group. The congregation, founded in 1906, was formally incorporated as the Jewish Community of Janina, Inc. in 1914.<sup>16</sup> It was named after the Greek town of Ioannina from where most congregants had emigrated. One of their first activities was the founding of a burial society, called the Society of Love and Brotherhood, which is known today as the United Brotherhood Good Hope Society of Janina. Originally this congregation used rented space for their worship, a storefront in the building located at the same address as their future synagogue. Finally, in 1924, they were able to purchase this tenement building with storefront from Jack and Rebecca Orenshtein<sup>17</sup> to build their own synagogue. The structure on the site had been constructed originally as a single family dwelling in the early nineteenth century, but had previously been enlarged. The original plans for the synagogue called for partial demolition of the existing building and reuse of walls and foundations when possible. It is unclear exactly how much of the original building was used in the final construction.<sup>18</sup> Although the building

permit was issued in 1925, construction took place between December, 1926 and October, 1927.<sup>19</sup>

With the construction of the synagogue and the large numbers of Romaniote immigrants during this period, the congregation prospered. After World War II however, many congregants began moving away from the Lower East Side. Other Romaniote communities were established in Harlem and the Bronx. In Brooklyn, Romaniote Jews opened the Sephardic Jewish Center in the Maplewood section, but none of these later groups survive as Romaniote congregations. Congregation Kehila Kadosha Janina is the only remaining Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>20</sup>

#### Sidney Daub (b. 1894)<sup>21</sup>

Sidney Daub was graduated from Cooper Union in 1915. While still a student, Daub worked for the firm of Goldner & Goldberg, and upon graduation, was employed by Peter J. McKean. A member of the New York Society of Architects and the American Institute of Architects, Daub practiced alone from 1919, during which time he was hired by the Kehila Kadosha Janina congregation to design their new synagogue building. In 1960, after his son Gerald graduated from Pratt Institute, they formed a partnership under the name of Daub & Daub. Together, they designed numerous residential, commercial, educational and religious structures, some of which are included in the Upper West Side/ Central Park West Historic District, the Ladies Mile Historic District, and the Upper East Side Historic District.

#### The Building

Making the most of its narrow city lot, the synagogue building completely fills the twenty-foot frontage and comes almost up to the street line. Following traditional New York synagogue buildings of the late nineteenth century, the three-bay wide facade is symmetrical with a central entrance and a raised basement. Its brick and cast stone facade uses elements from both the Classical and Moorish traditions, including semi-circular, keyed arches over the windows of the second story and a cusped arch motif around the main entrance. Elements with religious significance are featured prominently, including copper Stars of David surmounting the peaks in the parapet and large stone Tablets of the Law set within a stone arch in the center of the second story, with a smaller version located directly above the entrance, flanked by lions and topped by a crown. All the windows originally held stained glass windows containing Jewish symbols. Only one survived until recently and they have all been restored.

### Description

The synagogue of the Kehila Kadosha Janina congregation fills its narrow lot on Broome Street. The building is faced with brick, with cast stone trim. Three bays wide and two stories tall, the building sits on a raised basement and is symmetrically arranged. The roofline features a stone-edged parapet with a central round arch and triangular pediments above each side bay, each topped by a copper Star of David. Inset within each triangular area is a diamond-shaped stone ornament, while the central area contains a large, round-arched form in cast stone, inset with Tablets of the Law and an incised Star of David.

At the basement level there is a small grille-fronted window in the western bay and a non-historic service door in the eastern bay. The central entranceway is reached by three stairs with non-historic iron railings and holds a pair of non-historic doors. The doorway is set inside a stepped brick molding which rises above the door to become a cusped arch with a keystone. Inside this arch is a stone

Tablet of the Law flanked by lions and topped by a crown (traditional Judaic symbols). In the center bay of the second story is a keyed round window with stained glass featuring a Star of David. At the first and second stories of each side bay are rectangular window openings, each containing paired casement windows topped by a narrow transom. These sashes are filled by recently restored stained glass. The openings of the each side bay are linked vertically by a brick molding that rises from the base to enclose keyed semi-circles of stone inset into the brick above the second story windows. The spandrels between the windows of the two main stories are formed of header brick to contrast with the rest of the facade.

Report Prepared by  
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### **NOTES**

1. Information on the Romaniote communities comes from Rae Dalvin, *The Jews of Ioannina* (Philadelphia: Cadmus Press, 1990) and Nicholas P. Stravroulakis & Timothy J. DeVinney, *Jewish Sites and Synagogues of Greece* (Athens: Talos Press, 1991).
2. Jews use the abbreviations C. E. For Common Era instead of A. D.
3. Stravroulakis & DeVinney, 15
4. Dalvin, 3-4.
5. Dalvin, 14.
6. Dalvin, 15-19.
7. Stravroulakis & DeVinney, 106.
8. Stravroulakis & DeVinney, 107-113.
9. Stravroulakis & DeVinney, 114.
10. Dalvin, xii.
11. Stravroulakis & DeVinney, 114-115.
12. Dalvin, xii.

13. Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews 1870-1914* (New York: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), 20.
14. Rischin, 76.
15. Rischin, 76.
16. "Kahila Kadosha Janina Synagogue," Registration Form, National Register of Historic Places, 1999, Section 8, p.2, submitted July 23, 1999.
17. Office of the Register, New York County, Conveyances and Liber Deeds, Liber 3442, p.120, Sept. 23, 1924.
18. National Register Registration Form, Section 8, p.2.
19. New York City Department of Buildings, NB 748-1925.
20. [www.Kehila-Kadosha-Janina.org](http://www.Kehila-Kadosha-Janina.org)
21. *American Architects Directory*, George S. Koyl, ed. (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1962), 152; Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Architects' Appendix," *Ladies Mile Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1609) (New York, 1989); "Architects' Appendix," *Upper East Side Historic District Report* (LP-1051) (New York, 1981); and *Upper West Side/ Central Park West Historic District Report* (LP-1647) (New York, 1990).

## **FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION**

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

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Congregation Kehila Kadosha Janina is the only surviving and active Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere; that this building, constructed in 1926-27, was the first synagogue built in the Western Hemisphere by and for Romaniote Jews; that those who established this congregation originally came from the town of Ioannina in the province of Epirus in Greece, where this sect of Jews developed almost two thousand years ago; that these Jews shaped their own customs and adhere to neither of the more common Sephardic nor Ashkenazic traditions of Judaism; that members of this community came to New York early in the twentieth century to escape persecution in their home country; that they settled among other Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side but wanted to establish their own synagogue; that the congregation was formed in 1906 but was not able to purchase its own building until 1924, after which they hired architect Sydney Daub for this design; that the exterior of this small brick building follows the tradition of early twentieth century synagogue building in New York; that the immigrant congregation built a small structure to accommodate the specific rituals of their faith; that the facade incorporates important Jewish symbols such as Stars of David and Tablets of Law in its stained glass windows and applied ornament, as well as a cusped arch to show its Middle Eastern derivation; that, despite the death or departure of many congregants, Kehila Kadosha Janina continues its unique religious traditions in a beautifully restored building.

Accordingly, pursuant to provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Congregation Kehila Kadosha Janina, 280 Broome Street, Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 414, Lot 27, as its Landmark Site.



Kehila Kadosha Jaina Synagogue  
280 Broome Street  
Manhattan

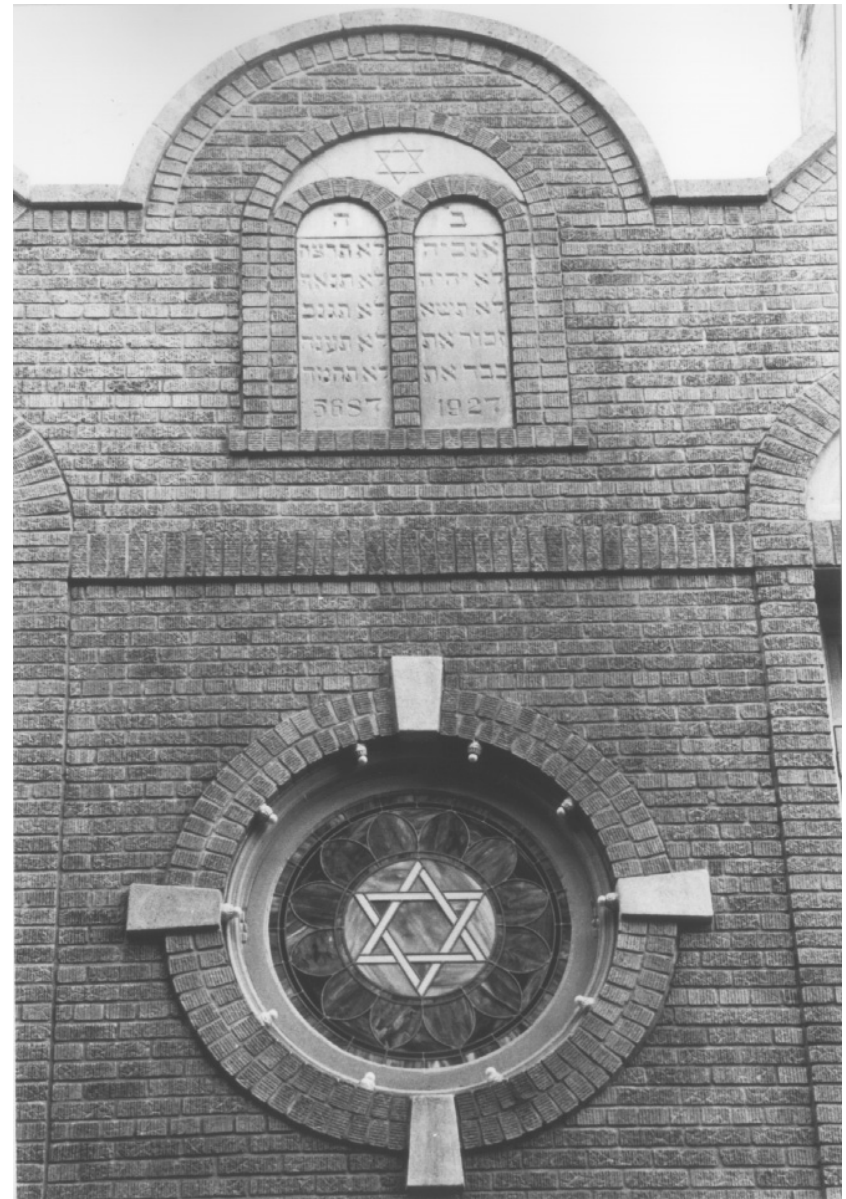




Kehila Kadosha Janina Congregation  
Decorative Details

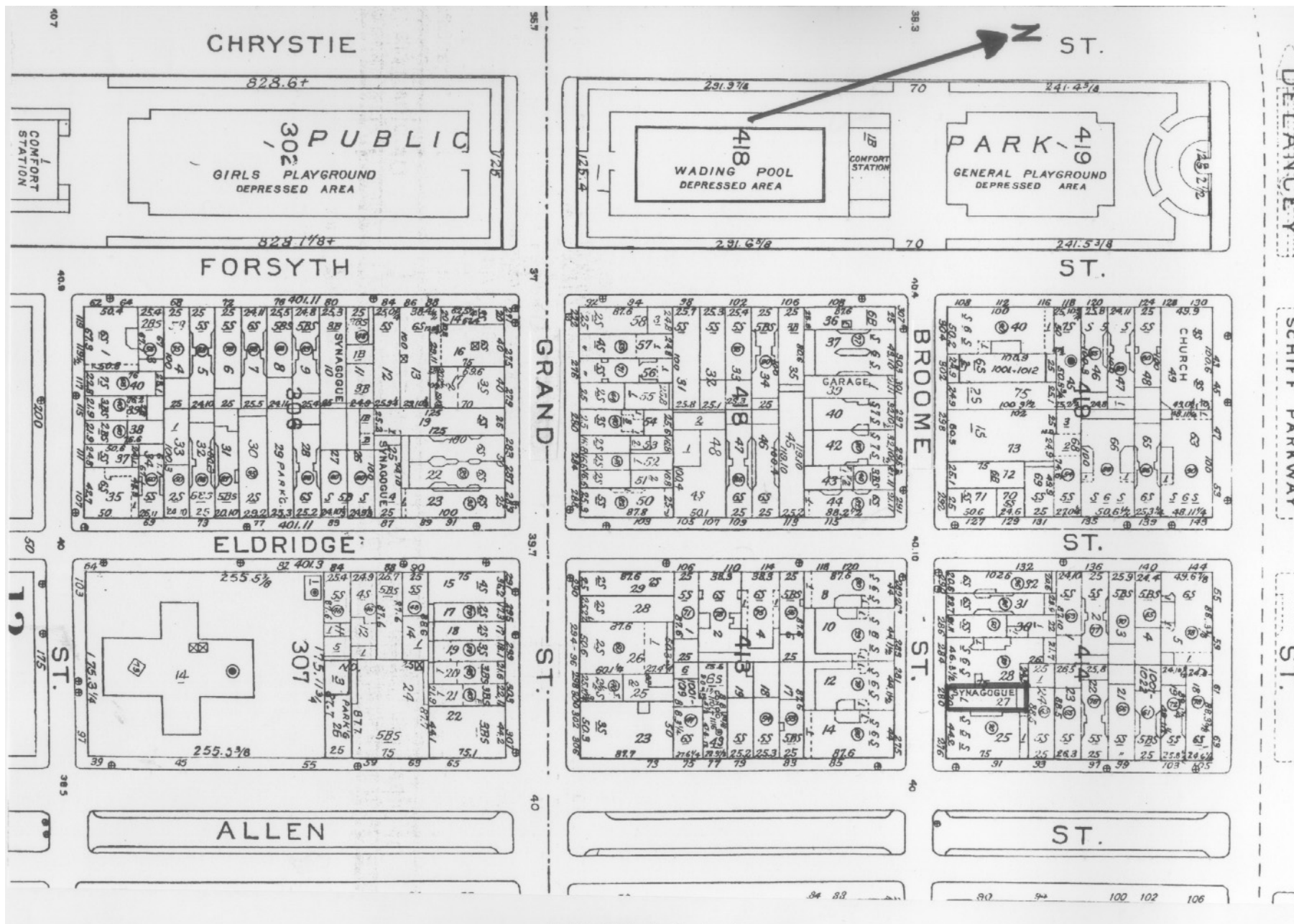


*Photos: Carl Forster*



Kehila Kadosha Janina Synagogue  
Door and Parapet Details

*Photos: Carl Forster*



Kehila Kadosha Janina Symagoge  
 280 Broome Street, Manhattan  
 Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 414, Lot 27  
 Source: Sanborn Manhattan Landbook, 2004, Plate 18

