

= East Midwood Jewish Center =

East Midwood Jewish Center is a Conservative synagogue located at 1625 Ocean Avenue , Midwood , Brooklyn , New York City .

Organized in 1924 , the congregation 's Renaissance revival building (completed in 1929) typified the large multi @-@ purpose synagogue centers being built at the time , and was from the 1990s until 2010 the only synagogue with a working swimming pool in Brooklyn . The building has been unmodified architecturally since its construction , and in 2006 was added to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) .

Membership dropped during the Great Depression , and the synagogue suffered financial hardship , but it recovered , and by 1941 had 1 @,@ 100 member families . In 1950 the congregation built an adjoining school ; at its peak its enrollment was almost 1 @,@ 000 . As neighborhood demographics changed in the late 20th century , and Brooklyn 's Jewish population became more Orthodox , the East Midwood Jewish Center absorbed three other Conservative Brooklyn congregations .

The East Midwood Jewish Center has had only four rabbis since it was founded . Reuben Kaufman served from 1924 to 1929 , Harry Halpern from 1929 to 1977 and Alvin Kass from 1976 to 2014 . In 2014 , Matt Carl became the rabbi .

= = History = =

= = = Founding = = =

East Midwood was organized in 1924 by Jacob R. Schwartz , a dentist who was concerned that his two sons had no nearby Hebrew school which they could attend . From the start his intention had been to create a Conservative synagogue : Conservative Judaism was seen as a compromise between Orthodox and Reform , providing the familiar (and lengthy) Hebrew services of Orthodox Judaism , but , like Reform , adding some English prayers . East Midwood differed from earlier Ashkenazi synagogues in New York , as services were to be conducted in Hebrew and English only (not Hebrew and Yiddish) , and the members were to come from immigrants from all over Europe , not just one city or region .

East Midwood held its first annual meeting on November 18 , 1924 at the Jewish Communal Center of Flatbush (also known as the Flatbush Jewish Center) , and there elected its first president , Pincus Weinberg . Weinberg , who was also chair of the Real Estate Committee , was the father of Sidney Weinberg , who rose from the job of assistant porter to head Goldman Sachs from 1930 to 1969 . Prior to moving to Flatbush , Pincus Weinberg had been president of Congregation Baith Israel Anshei Emes .

East Midwood 's first rabbi was Reuben Kaufman , and its first cantor was Jacob Schraeter . Kaufman , a Brooklyn native , had celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at Baith Israel Anshei Emes .

= = = Building construction = = =

The Real Estate Committee almost immediately purchased land located on Avenue L between East 26th and 27th Streets . Most members , however , felt a location on Ocean Avenue would be more desirable . Issues arose with developing the land on Avenue L , and in 1925 the Committee purchased the current location at 1625 Ocean Avenue in Midwood , Brooklyn . The cornerstone was laid in 1926 , and , although not complete , the building was fully enclosed by the autumn , and High Holiday services were held there that year . The Center 's Talmud Torah , which had been created in 1925 and held in a temporary structure , also moved into the new building .

Designed in the Renaissance revival style , the building was finally completed in 1929 at the cost of \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 (today \$ 13 @.@ 8 million) . It typified the new " synagogue @-@ centers " being built at that time , combining the functions of both a synagogue and community center , and included " a synagogue , auditorium , kitchens , restaurant , classrooms , gymnasium , and

swimming pool " . That year Kaufman left the Center to become the rabbi of Temple Emanu @-@ El in Paterson , New Jersey , and Harry Halpern became East Midwood 's rabbi . Halpern , who also became an adjunct professor of pastoral psychiatry at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA) , would go on to serve as rabbi for 49 years , until his retirement in 1977 , four years before his death in 1981 .

= = = Great Depression and school building = = =

The Great Depression took its toll on the congregation , and membership dropped . In order to cope with the financial burdens , dues were raised , teachers were given endorsed notes rather than paychecks , the Executive Secretary was laid off , pews were sold , and individual members provided mortgage guarantees . The synagogue survived , and membership recovered ; by 1934 there were 300 members , and by 1944 there were 1 @, @ 100 .

In 1950 , East Midwood built a three story school building and a two @-@ story bridge link between the school and synagogue . At its peak in the early 1950s the school had an enrollment of almost 1 @, @ 000 .

East Midwood later created a Conservative Jewish day school , serving students from kindergarten to Grade 8 , and also providing " afternoon religious instruction for public school students through high school . " The school was subsequently renamed the Rabbi Harry Halpern Day School , in honor of Rabbi Halpern .

In October 1968 , then Mayor of New York City John Lindsay was booed and jeered by a huge crowd at the East Midwood Jewish Center , in an infamous incident during the 1968 New York City teachers strike . Lindsay had supported a school decentralization plan that had pitted mostly black parents against mostly Jewish teachers and school administration ; after the administrator of the Ocean Hill ? Brownsville school board dismissed 13 teachers and 6 administrators (mostly Jewish) for opposing decentralization , the United Federation of Teachers " called a strike that closed 85 percent of the city 's 900 schools for 55 days " .

When Lindsay arrived he was met by a mob of 2 @, @ 000 people outside the synagogue , who shouted " Lindsay must go " and " we want Shanker " . Halpern admonished the protesters , asking " Is this the exemplification of the Jewish faith ? " , but many replied " yes " . Lindsay was heckled off the podium by the audience inside , and his limousine was " pounded on " and " pelted with trash " by the mob outside (which had grown to 5 @, @ 000) as he drove away . The strike , which was marked by " threats of violence and diatribes laced with racism and anti @-@ Semitism " , ended when the New York legislature suspended the administrator and the board .

Following Halpern 's retirement in 1977 , East Midwood hired as rabbi Alvin Kass , a graduate of Columbia College and the JTSA , with a Ph.D. in philosophy from New York University .

= = = Late 20th @-@ Early 21st century = = =

As Brooklyn 's changing demographics have made non @-@ Orthodox institutions less viable , East Midwood has absorbed three other congregations , including the Jewish Communal Center of Flatbush , where East Midwood had held its first annual meeting , and , in 1978 , Flatbush 's Congregation Shaare Torah . In 1996 , membership was 1 @, @ 000 families .

The synagogue building has remained architecturally unchanged since its construction , and was from the 1990s until 2010 the only synagogue in Brooklyn with a functioning swimming pool . In June 2006 , it was added to the NRHP . That year the congregation received a \$ 300 @, @ 000 loan from the New York Landmarks Conservancy for repairs for " masonry and steel repairs on the side and rear facades . " It also raised \$ 40 @, @ 000 in order to receive a 2 : 1 " matching grant " of \$ 20 @, @ 000 from the Conservancy , and completed the repair work in 2007 . In November 2007 East Midwood was awarded a \$ 409 @, @ 575 New York State Environmental Protection Fund grant to " restore features of the sanctuary including stained glass windows , stained glass dome and skylight . "

Aaron Pomerantz joined as associate rabbi in 1978 . Born in Poland , he had escaped Europe after

the outbreak of World War II , moving to Canada and then the United States . There he graduated from Manhattan 's Washington Irving High School , and in 1952 received his rabbinic ordination from Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin . From 1948 he had served as ritual director and then rabbi of Congregation Shaare Torah , joining the East Midwood Jewish Center when the two congregations merged . He served until his death in May 2009 .

Dr. Alvin Kass served as Rabbi from 1976 @-@ 2014 . Kass has also been a New York City Police Department chaplain for over 40 years , and had previously served as a United States Air Force chaplain for two years . At one point during his service as Police Department chaplain he and his family received months of 24 @-@ hour security after death threats , and at another he defused a hostage situation by providing the hostage taker with sandwiches from the Carnegie Deli . Kass , who teaches ethics at the Police Academy , was instrumental in getting Jewish police officers time off to observe the Sabbath . He also convinced the NYPD Shomrim Society (the fraternal organization of Jewish members of the New York City Police Department) to admit David Durk . Durk , along with the more famous Frank Serpico , had been the source of the allegations of police corruption that led to the formation of the Knapp Commission . In 2014 , Rabbi Kass retired from the position of Rabbi at East Midwood Jewish Center and currently serves as Rabbi Emeritus .

As of 2014 , Rabbi Matt Carl and Cantor Samuel Levine serve as the clergy of East Midwood Jewish Center .

= = Architecture = =

The East Midwood Jewish Center building 's architect is uncertain . The design is officially credited to the Building Committee and Irving Warshaw , the construction superintendent . The architect 's name is not recorded in synagogue records , nor on the building 's dedicatory plaque . The Center 's National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination form , however , argues that the architect was Louis Abramson , based on visual evidence and one piece of written evidence .

Abramson was a leading architect of synagogue @-@ centers at that time . He designed a number of New York examples , including the original synagogue @-@ center , the Manhattan Jewish Center (1918) , as well as the Brooklyn Jewish Center , the Flatbush Jewish Center , and the Ocean Parkway Jewish Center (all constructed in Brooklyn between 1920 and 1924) . While the Flatbush Jewish Center has been completely remodeled , the Brooklyn and Ocean Parkway Jewish Centers are visually similar to the East Midwood Jewish Center , and the Brooklyn Jewish Center in particular has an identical layout . The written evidence consists of an entry in a souvenir journal commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Flatbush Jewish Center , stating that Abramson drew East Midwood 's plans . The NRHP nomination form speculates that Abramson drew the basic plans for the East Midwood Center , and that the Building Committee completed them , in order to save money .

Alternatively , Maurice Courland 's 1957 obituary claims the East Midwood Jewish Center as his work . Courland also designed a number of synagogues and New York landmarks , including Brooklyn 's Magen David Synagogue .

= = Famous members = =

Author and talk show host Dennis Prager taught at East Midwood 's Hebrew Day school , and famous congregational members have included Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg , who was confirmed at East Midwood , and filmmaker Marc Levin . Levin 's grandfather , Herman Levin , had been a president of the East Midwood Jewish Center , and had also helped found , and been a long @-@ time lay @-@ leader of , the Reconstructionist movement .

East Midwood has also had members who have died under tragic circumstances , including Jason Sekzer , who was killed in the September 11 , 2001 attacks , and Danny Farkas , a New York police lieutenant and National Guard soldier who died while stationed in Kabul , Afghanistan .