

**CONGREGATION AGUDATH ACHIM ANSHE SFARD  
(UNITED BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEPHARDIC RITE)  
2230 CARONDELET STREET**

Landmark Designation Report  
June 9, 1998

Architectural Rating:	Blue
Construction Date:	1926
Architect:	Emile Weil
Contractor:	Hymen Rabinovitz

Site Description

Square 235, Lot - 9 or 10 or A Lot Size: 69' 10" front on Carondelet  
Same width in rear and  
9' 10" front on Carondelet by  
109' 10" in depth, taken from lot #11 adjoining.  
4th Municipal District, 12th Assessment District  
Zoning: RM-2A Multiple Family Residential  
Owner: Congregation Agudath Achim Anshe Sfard

Nomination Information

Date Nominated:	September 10, 1985
Nominated by:	Dr. John Ernst
Seconded by:	Mrs. Jacqueline McPherson Mrs. Jane Brooks

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural significance. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining whether a property is worthy of or meets the qualifications for landmark status, as outlined in City Ordinance #5992 M.C.S., will be examined.

History of Property

In 1890 Mr. William Cressey sold three lots of land with improvements in square 235 to Mrs. M. L. Whitney. At her death the property was passed to her husband, Morgan Whitney. His sister-in-law, Sarah Eliza Whitney, became owner at Mr. Whitney's death. In 1925 the congregation bought the lots of land from Mrs. Whitney. In 1926 the existing buildings on the site were demolished and construction of the new temple began. Later that year the Congregation Agudath Achim Anshe Sfard was dedicated.

## Architectural Significance

This is a two-story masonry building raised on a full basement with a concrete base. The front facade is dark red brick with white cast stone trim and ornamentation. It is also accented with cobalt blue tiles. Its architectural style is basically Italian Renaissance in form, but it has many Moorish or Byzantine decorative details, a style that the architect, Emile Weil, was famous for. The style is similar to the former Beth Israel Synagogue at 1616 Carondelet and to Touro Synagogue on St. Charles Avenue, which are also by Weil.

The main entrance is a set of three arched doorways, with the center one being slightly wider, set in a slightly recessed one-story section. The doors are paired and topped by arched transom windows. These transoms are divided into three sections, and the middle section of each contains a stained glass emblem of the Judaic faith. The one over the center door is a Star of David. The doors are set deeply recessed into molded door frames of cast stone with elaborate ornamented archways supported on groups of pilasters. The one-story section that contains the three doorways is clad in white, scored stucco. A round medallion of blue with yellow trim emblazoned with a white Star of David appears on both sides of the center doorway. Above this, set just below a banded cornice, is the name of the synagogue written in Hebrew, in black letters on a white background, on a rectangular plaque trimmed in yellow.

The entrance doors are reached by a set of concrete double stairs. At ground level in the center of these stairs is a double entrance door to access the ground floor of the building. The insertion of this entrance appears to be an alteration to the original design, which probably had one monumental set of stairs leading up to the doors, as do Weil's two previously mentioned temples. At the top of these doors the concrete is painted white and a sort of segmentally arched tympanum is formed under a row of glazed blue tiles. The tympanum is ornamented with three diamond-shaped, decorated blue tiles, one large one between two small ones. (The large tile is actually four of the smaller tiles pieced together.) Three more of these small blue tiles form a line down each side of the tympanum area. The insertion of this entrance caused an inside railing to be added to the stairway. This inside railing is simple wrought iron, which terminates in two decorative cast iron light standards at the foot of the stairs. The original, exterior railings are an elaborate cast stone design, reflecting the Moorish feeling of the entrance door surrounds. Each baluster is a small round column complete with a Corinthian-like capital, connected to each other by simple arches topped with a molded handrail. The entire railing rests on a cast stone base. The railing terminates at the foot of the stairs with an elaborate cast stone volute on each side.

On either side of the entrance section is a square brick tower, punctuated by a central panel containing two stacked windows separated by a raised panel. The bottom window has a cast stone sill. A cast stone band runs below this, separating the ground floor level from the rest of the tower. There is one window on the front facade in ground floor level of the tower. The roof of the towers is not visible due to the high parapet with elaborate cornice that surrounds each of them. The molded entablature is accented with diamond-shaped cobalt blue tiles. Brackets support the deep overhang of the parapet. Behind the Jackson Avenue side tower rises a brick chimney with cast stone coping. At the foot of the opposite tower, just above the concrete base, is the cornerstone, which bears the inscription in black, "CONGREGATION AAA SFARD,

1926 - 5686," along with a line written in Hebrew and the Star of David.

The main building is recessed behind the towers and entrance section and rises to a two-storied front gable. This gable is punctuated by a large round cast stone medallion which features a white Star of David against a blue background. In the center of the star is a small Torah. The cornice and parapet along the gable matches that of the towers, with a deep entablature accented with cobalt blue tiles, and brackets supporting the overhang. At the peak of the gable stands a stone representation of two tablets, etched in black, encased within an elaborate arch.

The side facades of the building are very obviously secondary facades. They are clad in a light brown brick and are quite simple compared to the fine details of the front. The first and second floors each have two bands of 1/1 windows, with a panel between the two floors. A recessed entry door in the center of the side facade interrupts the two bands of windows.

#### Architect

Emile Weil, a major New Orleans architect from approximately 1905 to around 1930, was the designer of 2230 Carondelet, Congregation Agudath Achim Anshe Sfard, as well as 1616 Carondelet (former Beth Israel Synagogue, 1924), just a few blocks up the street. Another temple he designed is the Touro Synagogue on St. Charles Avenue (1907), for which he won a design competition. This garnered him recognition for his Moorish or Byzantine details, which he went on to employ in both of the later temple projects. He was the local architect for the Whitney Bank Main Branch on St. Charles Avenue in 1911, with New York architects Clinton and Russell. He was also the architect for the former First NBC building at 210 Baronne (1927). One of his most famous designs is that of the Saenger Theater (1927).

#### Historic Personages

None

#### Cultural, Political, Economic and Social History

From about 1890 to 1930 Jewish immigrants settled in the area bounded by Melpomene, Jackson, Carondelet and Dryades Streets. The majority were Eastern European Orthodox. The immigrants settled in with the Irish, Italians and African Americans already there and placed their mark on an already thriving neighborhood. In time this area became a largely Jewish district with kosher butchers, delicatessens, bakeries, shops, stores and craftsmen. There was the Communal Hebrew School for after-school Hebrew lessons and preparation for bar mitzvah. The Young Men's Hebrew Association offered English Language classes and activities for children such as tap dancing, music and play acting.

The Jews in the Dryades Street area were not the only Jews in New Orleans. There was another group centered in Uptown New Orleans. These were Reform Jews of German and Alsatian extraction who settled in New Orleans several generations earlier. This older group set up charitable organizations like the Hebrew Benevolent Society, Touro Infirmary and the Jewish

Children's Home to help care for their brethren. But there was division between the two groups. The Germans had their own synagogues, social clubs and social life. At the time of the newcomers' arrival, anti-Semitism was rearing its ugly head and New Orleans society was beginning to exclude the old Jewish community. These acculturated Jews were afraid of arousing further anti-Semitic feelings and they basically kept a distance between themselves and the newcomers.

As the newcomers gained a financial foothold in the city they began to build their own places. Within a few blocks of each other were a handful of Orthodox synagogues - Beth Israel, Chevra Thilim and Anshe Sfard. Congregation Agudath Achim Anshe Sfard was founded by Russian, Polish and Galacian Jews. Although they began meeting in 1896 their charter was not obtained until October 25, 1900. The congregation was re-incorporated on January 7, 1906. The group met in various places around the city - the 200 block of South Rampart Street, the corner of South Rampart and Julia and 1309 South Rampart. In 1925 the congregation purchased the site of the present temple. The cornerstone was laid in 1926 and on September 5, 1926, the new temple was dedicated.

Of some interest is the name of the congregation. Congregation Agudath Achim Anshe Sfard translates to the United Brotherhood of the Sephardic Rite. The Sephardic Rite is generally associated with Spanish and Western European Jewish groups. This congregation, however, was Eastern European and Orthodox. At no time have they considered themselves Sephardic, yet to this day they still follow the Sephardic Rite.

Within two generations the immigrants grew prosperous and began to move up and out of the old neighborhood. Another two generations and the stores and businesses around Dryades began to close. Then the congregations began to move. Beth Israel moved to Canal Boulevard and Chevra Thilim moved to South Claiborne. Only Congregation Agudath Achim Anshe Sfard remains.

#### Staff Recommendation

Few vestiges remain of the Jewish culture that once thrived in this Central City neighborhood. Anshe Sfard is one of them. They have refused to leave their neighborhood and their synagogue. 2230 Carondelet Street is an outstanding work by an architect whose individual ability has been recognized as one of New Orleans foremost architects. The staff recommends that this property be designated as a landmark based on its architectural significance, its design by a notable architect and its importance to the cultural and social significance of the area.

#### Endnotes

Louisiana Historical Records Survey, Works Projects Administration. Inventory of the Church and Synagogues Archives of Louisiana, 1941.

"Genesis and Exodus." *Times Picayune*, May 28, 1997, pg. E1.

"Soul Survivors." *Times Picayune*, Aug. 15, 1993, pg. D1.

"Once Lively Synagogue Keeps Hushed Dignity." *Times Picayune*, Sept. 20, 1987.

Irwin Lachoff, Xavier University Archives, Telephone Interview, May 19, 1998.

Cecil Levin, Telephone Interview, May 12, 1998.