

**GREATER STRAIGHTAWAY BAPTIST CHURCH**  
(Congregation Ohel Jacob  
Congregation Adath Jeshurun (Jesurum))  
1717 N. Seventh St, east side between Cecil B. Moore & Montgomery Avenues  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6693

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**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### GREATER STRAIGHTAWAY BAPTIST CHURCH (Congregation Adath Jeshurun) (Congregation Ohel Jacob)

HABS No. PA-6693

- Location:** 1717 N. Seventh Street, east side between Cecil B. Moore and Montgomery Avenues, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Significance:** The Greater Straightaway Baptist Church underscores the movement of various ethnic and racial groups in and out of North Philadelphia throughout its history. The church was constructed as a Jewish synagogue late in the nineteenth century and only later became a Christian house-of-worship. The building displays an architectural eclecticism that draws on Islamic and Russian Orthodox sources, as well as inventive brick patterns common throughout North Philadelphia's residential and civic building stock constructed in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

#### Description:

While sharing a form common to its contemporary Christian counterparts—particularly evident in the corner towers, “rose” window on the entrance façade, and evenly-spaced windows on the lateral walls—as a synagogue the structure's detailing and façade fenestration, not surprisingly, is highly personalized. The keyhole door and window openings refer to Islamic sources, while the single remaining onion dome on the north tower indicates a Russian Orthodox influence. While common to both of these architectural traditions, an interplay of patterns present on this building in the brick, molded brick, and stone work directly references many contemporary buildings going up in the 1880s and 1890s throughout Philadelphia.

The building's exterior remains in poor to fair condition. The southern onion dome has been lost and some replacement doors and windows have been introduced. The cornices and soffit are damaged and missing in a number of places. The roof is now covered in asphalt shingles from different roofing campaigns.

#### History:

By 1875, the blocks surrounding the future site of Congregation Adath Jeshurun (also Jesurum)/Congregation Ohel Jacob were already being developed—mainly with houses which likely served laborers working in the industrial plants to the west along the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks and to the east in the vicinity of the Delaware River.<sup>1</sup> While the influx of affluent Philadelphia Jews into the well-heeled sections of North Philadelphia,

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<sup>1</sup>*City Atlas of Philadelphia by Wards, Complete in 7 Volumes*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, 1875).

largely west of Broad Street, did not occur until the first decades of the twentieth century, their working-class counterparts appear to have moved to areas east of Broad somewhat earlier.<sup>2</sup> By 1886, there was a critical mass of Jews in the neighborhood along Columbia Avenue between the railroad and river industrial areas in order to establish a new religious congregation and engage J. Franklin Stuckert for the synagogue's design.<sup>3</sup>

Stuckert was a busy local architect, though his background remains somewhat shadowy. Beyond a drawing course at the Franklin Institute in 1869/1870, little is known about his architectural training; he was in formal practice by at least 1877. As indicated by a list of commissions completed by Stuckert—and after 1894 jointly with his son F. Russell Stuckert—his regular work covered virtually every building type, including a number of religious structures. While the date associated with Stuckert's commission for Congregation Adath Jeshurun's synagogue is 1886, the building was not started by the publication of an 1888 city atlas.<sup>4</sup> This atlas depicts that the entire area near the intersection of N. Seventh Street and Columbia Avenue (Cecil B. Moore Avenue) as fully built-up, and a number of dwellings set deeply back from N. Seventh Street still occupied the synagogue's site. As information in the atlas reflected conditions at a point prior to publication, if the congregation was financially able, then it is likely that the structure was completed by or shortly after 1888.

As recorded in the dedication stone between the main doors, the synagogue housed a new congregation—Congregation Ohel Jacob—after September 10, 1911. The stone contains the name in Hebrew and English script as well as Jewish and western dates: Ellul 17, 5671 and September 10, 1911. By the second and third decades of the twentieth century, white Christian and Jewish residency in North Philadelphia began to lessen: the wealthy departed for new communities in the suburbs and the workers moved on as industry began to decentralize. The residences and institutions in the area increasingly passed onto African-American ownership and stewardship, a physical transformation still reflected in the synagogue's present name/use—Greater Straightaway Baptist Church.

**Historian:** James A. Jacobs

**Works Consulted:**

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<sup>2</sup>See Donna J. Rilling, "Disston House," HABS No. PA-6669, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, 2000, for information related to North Philadelphia's development west of Broad Street.

<sup>3</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all information related to J. Franklin Stuckert and the synagogue at 1717 N. Seventh Street is drawn from Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1985), 773.

<sup>4</sup>*Baist's Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume* (Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1888).

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