

# FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

21-103-A

Boston  
North

CD

BLM.174

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

**Town/City:** Belmont

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*):

## Photograph



**Address:** 2 Concord Avenue

**Historic Name:** Beth El Temple Center

**Uses:** Present: religious

Original: religious

**Date of Construction:** 1954

**Source:** temple history, building permit

**Style/Form:** Contemporary

**Architect/Builder:** Israel Nigrosh, David J. Abrahams & Assoc., Arch.; Lilly Construction Company, bldrs.

### Exterior Material:

Foundation: concrete

Wall/Trim: brick, fieldstone, granite

Roof: tar and gravel

### Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

none

### Major Alterations (*with dates*):

ca. 1990 – stained glass windows by Lyn Hovey  
2009 – sanctuary renovation  
2011 – new windows

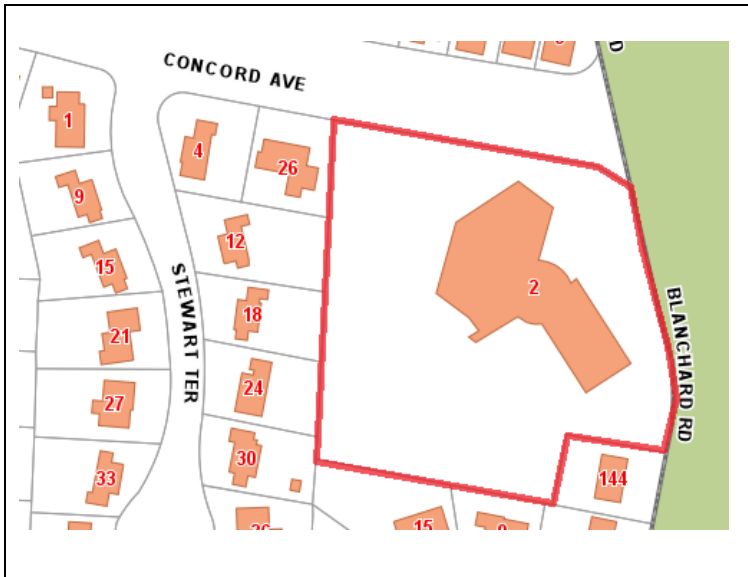
**Condition:** good

**Moved:** no  yes  **Date:**

**Acreage:** 134,045 SF

**Setting:** large landscaped corner lot off major commercial thoroughfare at Cambridge border

## Locus Map (north at top)



**Recorded by:** Lisa Mausolf

**Organization:** Belmont Historic District Commission

**Date** (*month / year*): June 2016

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

2 CONCORD AVENUE

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Located at the southwest corner of Concord Avenue and Blanchard Road, on the Belmont-Cambridge line, the Beth El Temple Center is a Contemporary brick and stone structure constructed in 1954. The attached complex of flat-roofed buildings includes the sanctuary at the north end, set closest to Concord Avenue. Consisting of an elongated hexagon in plan, the sanctuary is constructed entirely of brick with a stone/concrete rectangular sculptural panel on the north end (a ca. 2010 addition) identifying the structure. The walls of the sanctuary display long rectangular stained glass panels installed ca. 1990. To the east the main entrance is faced with ashlar stone and features a curved portico supported by oversized stone-faced posts. The entrances consist of aluminum framed doors topped by transoms consisting of rectangular panes of colored glass arranged in vertical rows. Extending to the southeast of the entrance is a single-story brick office structure that connects to a two-story brick school building with overhanging eaves and bands of fixed single-pane windows with hoppers below. A colored glass transom also caps the set of metal double doors at the south end of the main school elevation.

A curving driveway extends in front of the entrance. There is a landscaped lawn area in front of the building and paved parking lots to the west and south.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

This property is of interest historically as the site of a late 18<sup>th</sup> century inn and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for its associations with Belmont's Jewish population.

This parcel of land was originally the homestead of Richard Richardson who was a major investor in the Concord Turnpike and built an inn here in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The property was sold to Archibald Johnson between 1875 and 1898. When Concord Avenue was widened in 1934 the house was moved back on the lot. It was later demolished in 1954 when Temple Beth El purchased the property.

The Jewish Community Center of Belmont and Watertown was formed in the fall of 1931 by a handful of local residents. The first meeting was held in a room over the fire station in East Watertown. Early in 1932 thirty-eight children gathered for Sunday School in Payson Hall, located over the Winters Hardware Block in Cushing Square. The group which still had no building of its own had ninety members by 1938. The Sunday School also used the American Legion building in Watertown and part of Grant School in Watertown.

In October 1945 a private residence at the corner of Lexington and Belmont Streets (220 Lexington Street) was purchased. An auditorium was added to the building in 1947 which allowed for the congregation to hold High Holiday services in their own building. In 1951 Rabbi Earl Grollman became the leader of the congregation, a position that he held for thirty-seven years until his retirement.

In 1953 following a major fundraising effort this parcel of land was acquired and ground was broken for the temple center in June 1954. The temple was constructed at an approximate cost of \$400,000 and served 300 families. It was dedicated in 1955 and on May 9, 1955 an open house was held for the community, attended by more than 4,000 persons.

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The temple was designed by local architect Israel Nigrosh of the Boston firm of David J. Abrahams & Associates. Israel Nigrosh (1911-1982) was born in Boston and graduated from MIT in 1934. He designed homes, commercial and public buildings as well as houses of worship – others include Temple Beth El in Newton and Temple Emmanuel in Worcester. Nigrosh lived at 90 Brighton Street in Belmont with his wife Frances. He designed the house in the early 1940s and lived there the remainder of his life. Israel Nigrosh served many years on the Belmont Planning Board and the Park Commission and was also a trustee of Temple Beth El.

In the 1990s twelve stained glass windows, created by artist Lyn Hovey, were installed. The panels depict the history of the Jewish people. In November 1995 the final window, a memorial to the Holocaust, was dedicated. A new accessible entrance was added to the building in 1999. Soon thereafter various spaces within the building including classrooms, the library, the main entrance and the Rabbi's study were renovated. In 2009 the sanctuary was renovated according to plans by architect Robert Luchetti of Somerville. The sanctuary was rededicated on September 13, 2009. In 2011 new windows were installed in the non-sanctuary portions of the building.

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<http://www.betheltemplecenter.org/aboutus/history>

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Main entrance



Stained glass windows

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Classroom wing