

# THEN & NOW



(1980)



(Today)

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Can you spot 6 differences in our building between then and now?**

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Can you spot 6 differences in our building between then and now?**

- ① Beth Jacob Congregation Plaques & Sign
- ② Beth Jacob Social Hall Sign
- ③ Striped awnings at both building entrances

- ④ Jewish Museum of Florida Sign
- ⑤ Stained Glass Windows
- ⑥ Glass atrium connecting the buildings

# A CLOSER LOOK

## How does a building tell a story?

- 1 The Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU is located in two historic buildings that were once **synagogues** for Miami Beach's first Jewish **congregation**, Congregation Beth Jacob.
- 2 The first synagogue was built in 1929, and as the Jewish community grew bigger, a new larger building was built next door. When it was finished in 1936, this building became the “grand” **sanctuary**, while the other became a **social hall**.

On busy days, the building could hold up to 850 people! The men sat in theater-style seats on the ground floor, and women and children, in the balcony upstairs.



In the 1980s, as the Jewish community began getting older and the young generation of Jews moved away from the neighborhood, the congregation began to dwindle. While some other nearby synagogues were turned into nightclubs, our building was abandoned and fell into disrepair.

- 3 In August 1992, Hurricane Andrew destroyed the roof, taking with it the striped awnings. The rise in water levels and flooding damaged the ceilings, walls, foundation, decorative **plaster moldings** and oak floors. The stained glass windows became the target of **vandalism**, and shortly thereafter, the building was slated for **demolition**.

# A CLOSER LOOK

## How does a building tell a story?

- 5 Up until 1940, the building did not have air conditioning, so to keep cool, transparent glass windows had to be opened, letting in street noises and the beach's blowing sand and dust. When **Rabbi** Mescheloff led services with the windows and doors open, he had to speak so loudly that he could be heard a block away!

With the windows wide open, the sun shone so brightly that it was impossible for community members to read their prayer books. When air conditioning was invented in the late 1930s, it was decided that **stained glass windows** would be installed as a solution to the blinding light. All 77 windows were designed by Rabbi Mescheloff and each one included graphic symbols honoring Jewish holidays and values.



- 4 In 1993, a deal was made between the empty synagogue and an organization that would later become the Jewish Museum of Florida. The organization led a two-year **restoration** at a cost of nearly \$2,000,000 and purchased the building in 2005, making it the permanent home for the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU.

- 6 In 2008, the two buildings were connected by a **glass atrium**, creating a walkway so that visitors could go from one to the other and a gallery named after Bess Myerson. In 1945, as World War II came to an end, Bess Myerson uplifted the mood in the Jewish community when she was crowned Miss America. Never before, and not since, has a Jewish girl received this recognition. Facing much **discrimination** during and after the pageant, Bess Myerson became an **activist** for civil rights, and later donated funds and her archive to the museum.



# A CLOSER LOOK

**SYNAGOGUE:**

A Jewish house of worship, used for prayer and celebrating holidays.

**CONGREGATION:**

A group of people brought together for common religious worship.

**SANCTUARY:**

A building or room for religious worship.

**SOCIAL HALL:**

A space where members of a community gather for group activities, social support, and celebrations.

**RABBI:**

A Jewish leader of the congregation and teacher of the Torah.

**STAINED GLASS WINDOW:**

Colored pieces of glass arranged into an image or design and held together by a lead frame.

**PLASTER MOLDING:**

A detail that is carved, painted or added to a building for decoration.

# VOCABULARY

**VANDALISM:**

Intentional destruction of or damage to property.

**DEMOLITION:**

The act of deliberately destroying a building or structure, often in order to build something else in its place.

**RESTORATION:**

The act of returning something to its original condition.

**GLASS ATRIUM:**

A room with a roof or skylight made out of glass.

**DISCRIMINATION:**

The practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people because they are different from you.

**ACTIVIST:**

An individual who feels so passionately about a topic, they can't help doing something to learn more, to raise awareness among others, and to bring about change.