CONGREGATION BETH EL SYNAGOGUE


Location: Sunbury, PA

Client: Congregation Beth El

Area: 8,500 sf

Distinctions: ABC Excellence in Construction (awarded to contractor Zartman Construction)

Congregation Beth El supports Jewish life in Pennsylvania’s Central Susquehanna Valley.

Our design for the synagogue features a double-height, light-filled, 106-seat sanctuary, a social hall for 138 people, three classrooms, a library, office, and kitchen -- all surrounding an exterior courtyard.

The exterior takes its cues from the site’s historic neighbors: brick commercial buildings along the railroad tracks, houses, and civic buildings. We used red brick with masonry accents and incorporates a large-scale “two-dimensional” arcade to exude friendliness and hospitality. A circular ornament represents the dome which was often a part of American synagogues in the recent past. The sloped roof derives from the interior space where direction toward the Bimah is accommodated.

We designed Beth El’s interior with an emphasis on modesty of materials, an abundance of natural light, and multifunctional uses for all spaces. Windows, as in many religious buildings, are placed high in order to admit daylight from above. Ornamentation can nurture a sense of community, so text is incised along the interior walls -- but appropriately, no representational or symbolic content is employed.

For more than 80 years, the Congregation met in a building originally built in 1836 as a church. Although additions had been made to the facility over the years, time finally caught up with the aging structure. The new Congregation Beth El creates an exciting focal point for Jewish life in the community. We hope that gatherings of 10 people as well as 200 people feel welcomed and comfortable.
Views of the Synagogue, inside & out