



About

April 24, 2012

JEWISH FIELD TRIP: JEWISH DOWNTOWN DC

Posted by becomingruth in [Field trips](#), [Jewish Travel](#) and tagged with [Adas Israel](#), [Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington](#), [Jewish travel](#), [Jewish Washington DC](#), [Sixth and I Historic Synagogue](#), [temple micah](#), [Washington Hebrew Congregation](#)



I am a Washingtonian. When I'm going about my daily business in DC, I always need to BE SOMEWHERE and the getting there is just the annoying thing I have to do to get to the PLACE I NEED TO BE. Preferably on time. (I hate to be late for anything.) I don't stop and look around, much less think about the history of the city I call home as I'm racing from place to place.

Hence, my love of a good walking tour. Above all, a walking tour helps me see – really see – the history and importance of places I usually rush right past. Generally while looking down at the sidewalk. God forbid I make eye contact with anyone.

I've done the walking tour of the Lower East Side offered by Manhattan's Lower East Side Tenement Museum (www.tenement.org), which is fantastic, so when I saw that the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington (www.jhsgw.org) was doing a tour of downtown DC, I figured I'd take a look.

I also happen to prefer taking my walking tours when it's 48 degrees and pouring down rain, which is excellent because when I took the DC tour this past Sunday, it was...well...48 degrees and pouring down rain.

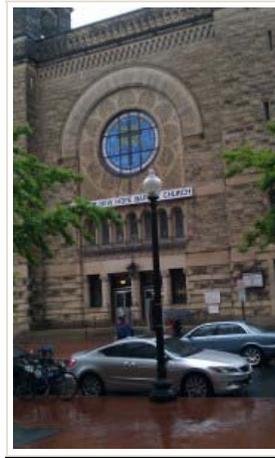
Despite the weather, I had a great time learning about the Jewish history of my city. In particular, I had no idea that both Adas Israel, the largest Conservative synagogue in DC, and Washington Hebrew Congregation, perhaps the city's

largest Reform synagogue, evolved from the same congregation formed in 1852. The photo above is that first synagogue, which is now a Jewish museum. (My own beloved Temple Micah is a spry 49 years young.) The congregation split in 1869 between those who wanted to maintain traditional Jewish observance and those who sought to reform that observance.

I also had no idea that the city's early Jewish population was anchored by the Seventh Street retail corridor. I was under the impression that Chinatown was, you know, always Chinatown. But my intrepid tour guide, Mark Livingston, made it clear that the area known as Chinatown was home to DC's Jews until they began to migrate uptown, which is where Adas Israel, Washington Hebrew, and Temple Micah, among others, are located now. Unfortunately, decades of urban renewal, not to mention the construction of the behemoth Verizon Center, has erased much of the Jewish history of the city.

Much, but not all. There are 4 buildings that remain in what is now Chinatown: the first synagogue in DC, pictured above; the previous home of Washington Hebrew Congregation at Eighth and I Streets; an early home of Ohev Shalom at Fifth and I Streets; and the Historic Sixth and I Synagogue, another previous home of Washington Hebrew.

It is also fascinating to me that houses of worship change both legal and religious ownership over time, though I know the practice is commonplace. This was abundantly clear on the walking tour of the Lower East Side and examples can be seen in DC, as well.



The photo at left was the home of

Washington Hebrew Congregation at Eighth and I Streets in 1890. The photo at right shows this building today, the Greater New Hope Baptist Church. If you can see them, there are a series of Stars of David visible below the sign. As much angst as there is in the world between different religions, I guess people can get past those differences when faced with the practical questions of buying and selling real estate!

Many thanks to the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington for a terrific tour and for the photos you see in this post.

Share this:

0

Like this:

Be the first to like this.