

Our Sanctuary

Savannah participated in the great wave of German-Jewish immigration that began about 1840. By 1874 it became apparent that the small synagogue on Liberty Street and Perry Lane was no longer adequate for the growing congregation. On March 1, 1876, the cornerstone was laid for the present building, and the Monterey Square sanctuary was consecrated on April 11, 1878. This magnificent synagogue, designed by the nationally known New York architect Henry G. Harrison, was built in a pure neo-Gothic style, which reflects the fashionable architecture of the Victorian era. On the very same square, not more than 60 feet away stood a neo-Gothic Presbyterian church until it was destroyed by fire in 1929.

A portion of the land that was given in perpetual trust by Mordecai Sheftall in 1773 for use as a Jewish cemetery and as a site for a synagogue had, in fact, been used as a cemetery. On December 16, 1893, the Mordecai Sheftall Trustees obtained permission from the Superior Court to sell the unused portion of the tract and to hold the proceeds of the sale for the purposes expressed in the original trust.

The present sanctuary used only the western portion of the block of land owned by the congregation; however, no provisions had been made for a religious school, meeting rooms, or the like. By the turn of the century the need for these additional facilities was keenly felt. Agreement was reached between the congregation and the Sheftall Trustees for the trustees to construct a building to be known as the Mordecai Sheftall Memorial, which was completed and dedicated in 1902. Title of the land and the complete management, supervision, and control of the new building was vested in the congregation, but title to the building itself remained, as it still does, in the hands of the trustees.

By 1954 the needs of the congregation, once again outgrew the Mordecai Sheftall Memorial. The congregation raised the necessary funds, another arrangement was entered into with the trustees, and on January 11, 1957, the new and enlarged Mordecai Sheftall Memorial was dedicated.

In 2002/2003, the congregation again rebuilt the Mordecai Sheftall Memorial Hall, which houses our museum, school and administrative offices.