

How Donald Trump's developer dad and a Brooklyn rabbi saved a synagogue

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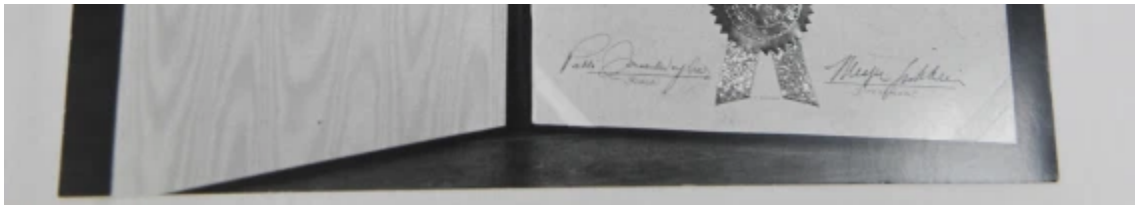
By Jon Levine

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Rabbi Shimmy Silver holds a plaque dedicated to Fred Trump inside the Beach Haven Jewish Center on Avenue Z in Gravesend, Brooklyn.
Helayne Seidman





A testimonial certificate for Fred Trump on the opening of the Beach Haven Jewish Center.
Helayne Seidman



A photo of Fred Trump (right) and founding Rabbi Israel Wagner and a plaque dedicated to Fred Trump.
Helayne Seidman





Rabbi Shimmy Silver outside the Beach Haven Jewish Center.
Helayne Seidman



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When congregants enter the Beach Haven Jewish Center in Gravesend, Brooklyn, they pass a small plaque hanging just outside the main sanctuary.

“Fred Trump. Humanitarian,” declare the gold embossed, all-caps letters. “Let this plaque be a token of our sincerest appreciation, never to be forgotten, always to be a shining light to all men who have faith.”

The plaque, inscribed Dec. 15, 1956, is the most visible reminder of an unlikely and mostly unknown friendship between the Lutheran real estate developer — and father of President Trump — and this enclave of Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn.

“I would say that the Beach Haven Jewish Center would not be what it is today, if not for Mr. Fred Trump,” Rabbi Shimmy Silver told The Post. “We are grateful for his kindness and forever indebted to him for what he has done for our community,”

In the 1950s, Brooklyn's Jewish community was exploding as new arrivals — many of them Holocaust survivors — tried to begin new lives.

This presented a dilemma for Rabbi Israel Wagner, whose congregation was starting to outgrow the garage of a building in Fred Trump's Beach Haven development complex where it had been previously meeting.

So in 1955, he set out to meet the landlord.

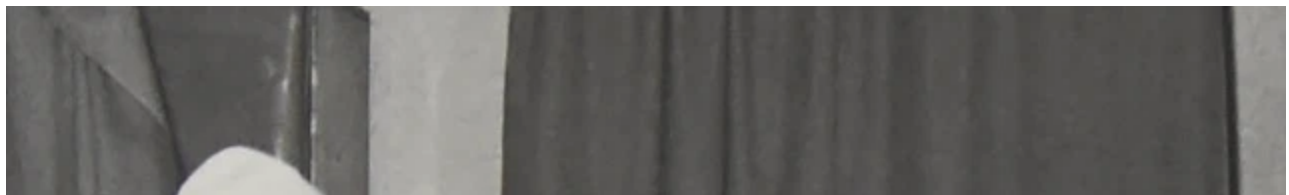
Wagner, a native of Poland, wasn't sure what to expect when he met Fred Trump. They had never spoken and the rabbi only knew the real estate magnate by his tough reputation.

The two hit it off immediately. Trump donated the land on Brooklyn's Avenue Z, to Wagner's congregation. A deed of sale from October 1955 shows the land officially transferring from Fred to the new Jewish center for \$10. The elder Trump also financed much of the construction costs, as the new house of worship was born a year later.



Fred Trump (left) receiving a certificate of appreciation from a congregant at the opening of the Beach Haven Jewish Center on Avenue Z in Gravesend.

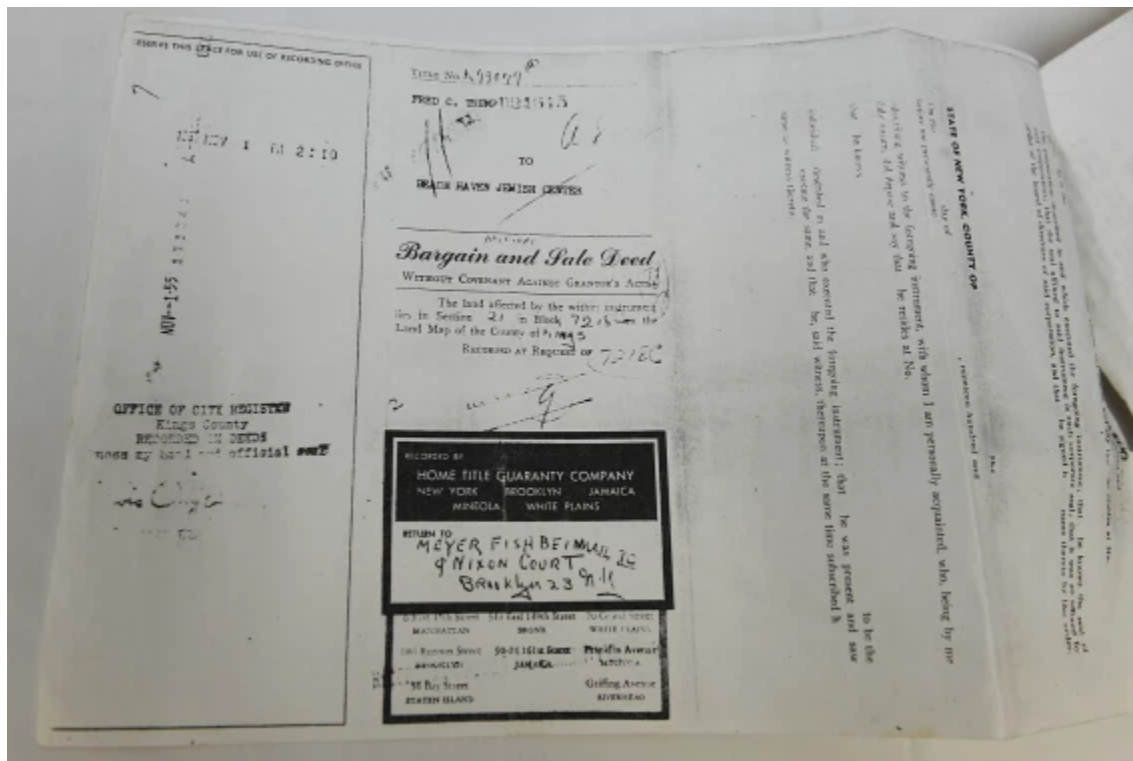
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Fred Trump (left) and Rabbi Israel Wagner at the opening of the Beach Haven Jewish Center

on Avenue Z in Gravesend, Brooklyn.
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The deed of the Beach Haven Jewish Center.
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The congregation at the opening of the Beach Haven Jewish Center on Avenue Z in Gravesend, Brooklyn.
Helayne Seidman



Fred Trump speaks at the opening of the Beach Haven Jewish Center. At Fred's right is Rabbi Wagner, the founding rabbi who became a friend of Fred.
Helayne Seidman

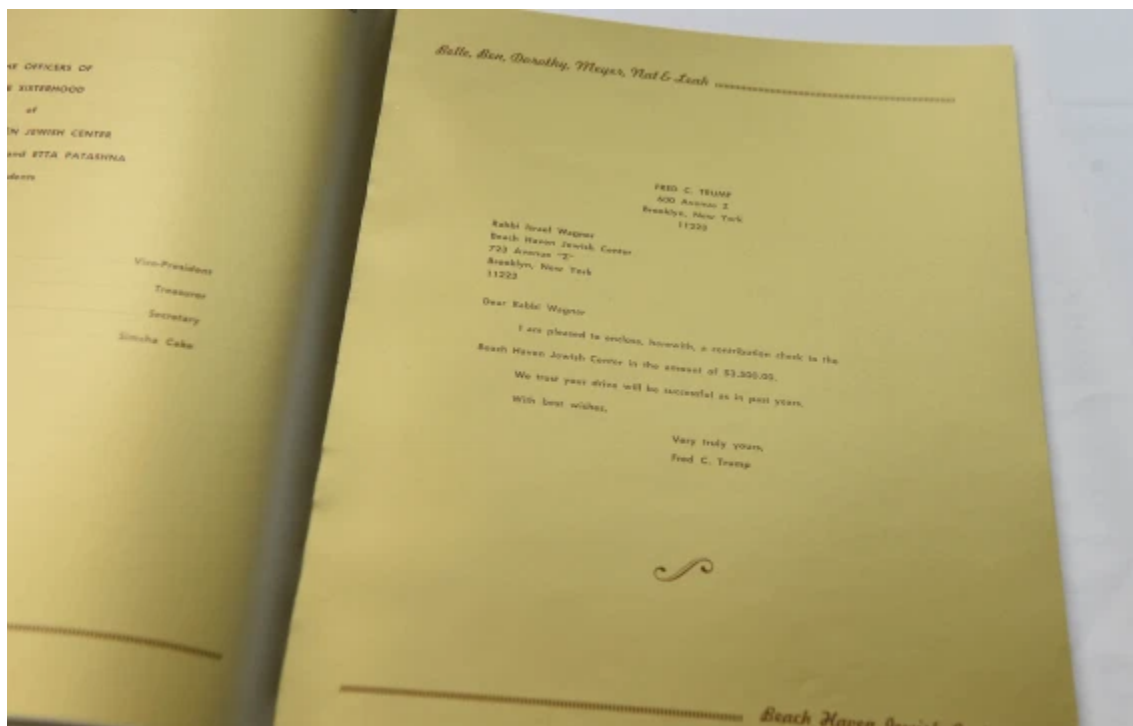




Photo of a fundraising dinner journal from The Beach Haven Jewish Center.
Helayne Seidman



The real estate of the Beach Haven Jewish Center when it opened in 1956.
Helayne Seidman

Trump and Wagner's "mutual love, respect, and friendship only deepened over the next 48 years," reads the synagogue website — where the story is prominently featured.

Inside a small synagogue archive, contemporary records and photos tell more of the story.

Trump never missed the synagogue's annual fundraiser dinner, which he attended throughout the 1970s and 80s — often cutting checks for \$2,500 and \$3,500.

Pristinely preserved black and white photos show a beaming Trump standing alongside Wagner, the man he called "my rabbi."

The temple continued good relations with the Trump family even after Fred Trump's death in 1999. When Wagner's widow turned 90 in Israel in the mid-2010s, Donald Trump sent birthday wishes, according to Rabbi Silver.

Some older members still have memories of Fred Trump, and his sons Donald and Fred Jr., bouncing around the old family offices just down the street on Avenue Z.

As for current politics, Rabbi Silver said he was pleased with new Israel security treaties secured by the president, but was otherwise mum, declining to opine about next month's election.

"We are a synagogue and Jewish community center. Our sole focus is strengthening the Jewish identity and observance of our community," he said.