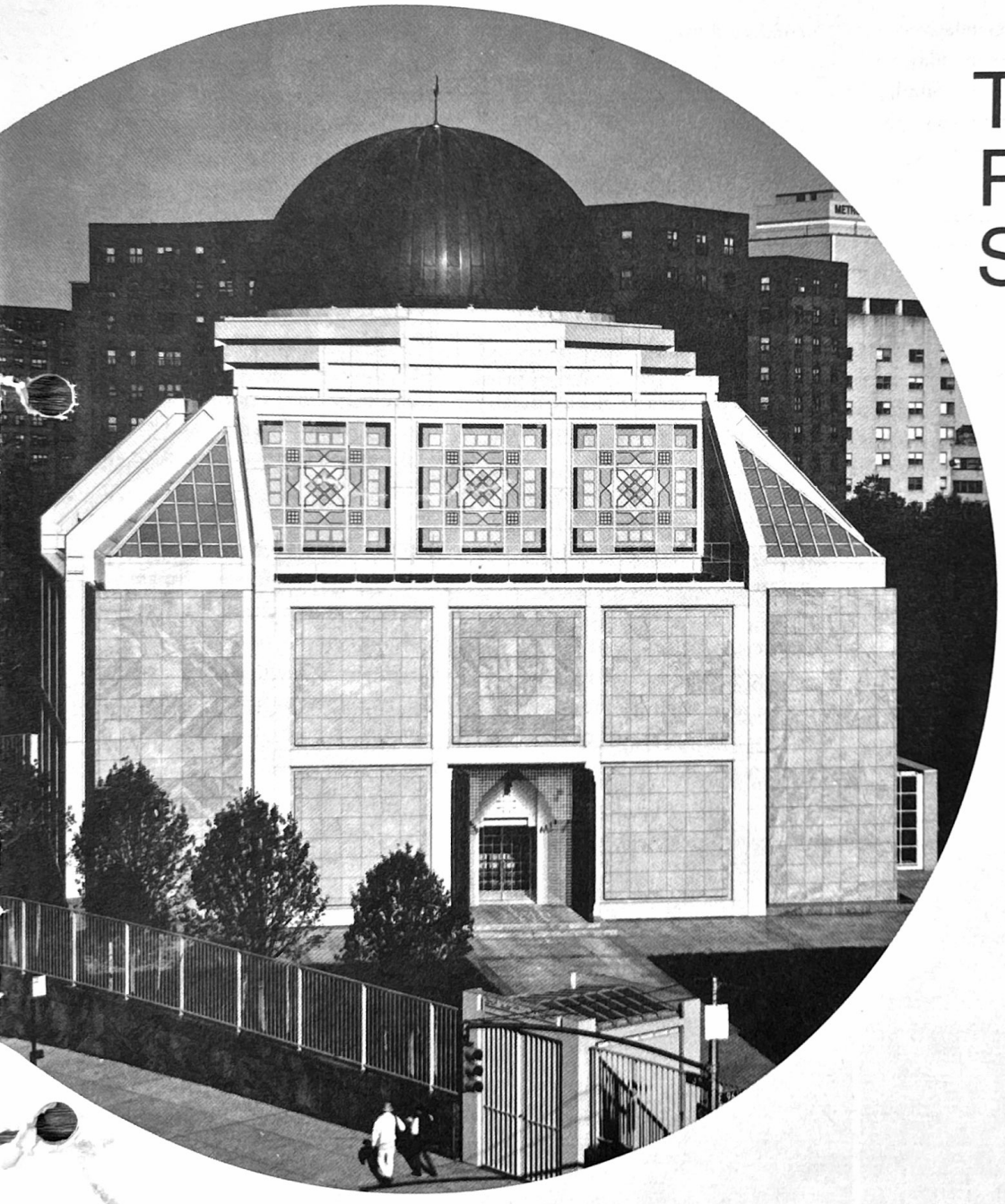
New York Landmarks Conservancy

Common Bond



The Akron Plan Sunday School

Also in this Issue:

- Establishing a Building Archive
- Historic Property Recognition
- Seasonal Decorations
- Native American Sacred Spaces
- The Islamic Cultural Center
- Year-end Index

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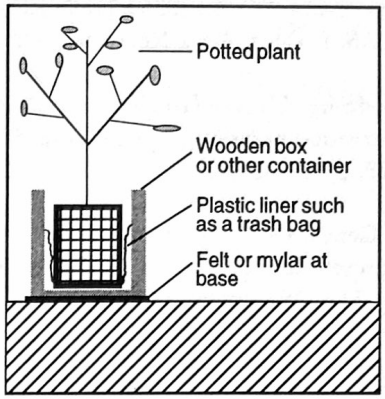
Technical Tips

SEASONAL DECORATIONS

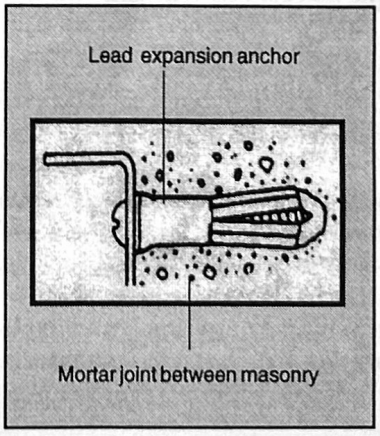
Throughout the year, congregations of all denominations place seasonal decorations, greens, and flowers in houses of worship to mark holidays and important occasions. Certain precautions can be taken which will minimize damage to interior architectural finishes, furnishings, and works of art when installing and maintaining these decorations. Place potted plants inside containers that will not leak. Keep floral arrangements away from paintings and textiles. Place inexpensive plastic or felt, not valuable textiles, between plant container bottoms and easily scratched surfaces. Wipe up spilled water, and protect floors and furnishings from dripping leaves. When misting floral arrangements, protect adjacent materials by holding up a plastic sheet or panel.



Placing potted plants inside plastic-lined containers can help to prevent damage to wood, masonry, and textiles.

Using artificial greens and trees can help to avoid many hazards associated with live materials and save money over time. Select well-constructed, realistic-looking materials without sharp ends or prickly branches. If using live greens and trees, choose locations with care and take steps to avoid damage from sap, sharp ends, insects, spilled water, and fire. Sap is not only sticky and difficult to remove but contains acids that can damage almost any surface including, wood, varnishes, paint, gilt, metal, and textiles. Place clear mylar or another type of impermeable material under live greens and trees. Sharp ends of boughs and wire binding garlands can scratch surfaces. Wrap them with tape or padded material. Insects may be brought into a building on live greens and trees, threatening wood and textiles. Inspect for insects and cocoons, especially if freshly harvested local materials are used. Fire hazard can be reduced by spraying greens with a fire retardant. Greens and trees should be disposed of and replaced as soon as they become dry. Tree holders should be kept full of water, and fallen needles should be promptly removed. Never light candles on or near flammable decorations.

Hang lightweight decorations from columns, balustrades, and other architectural features using monofilament (fishing line) that will support the weight of the decorations. Plastic-coated electrical wire can be used to support heavier items. Avoid using uncoated wire and hard string since these will scratch wood and painted surfaces. To avoid yearly damage to interior wood and plaster finishes, find unobtrusive, permanent locations to secure rustproof hangers. For masonry walls, set stainless steel or other rustproof metal hangers directly into the mortar joints, secured by anchors or expansion shields. Never attach anything to decoratively painted or gilded chancel screens, pulpits, ceilings, beams, and other such features. Painted canvases and panels, picture frames, and other works of art should also be left unadorned.



Lead anchors holding lag anchors and screws in mortar joints are suitable for attaching lightweight items to masonry.

Information for this article was provided by: Heidi Mikseh, Conservator, Bureau of Historic Sites, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; Linda McLean, John Jay Homestead; and John Laubach, Church of the Ascension.