

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form, Multiple Property Listing  
Historic Synagogues of Connecticut

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OCT 13 1995

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Temple Beth Israel

Other Name/Site Number: \_\_\_\_\_

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 701 Farmington Avenue Not for publication: NA

City/Town: West Hartford Vicinity: NA

State: CT County: Hartford Code: 003 Zip Code: 06119

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Category of Property

Private: x  
 Public-Local: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Public-State: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Public-Federal: \_\_\_\_\_

Building(s): x  
 District: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Site: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Structure: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Object: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing  
1  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
1

Noncontributing  
 \_\_\_\_\_ buildings  
 \_\_\_\_\_ sites  
 \_\_\_\_\_ structures  
 \_\_\_\_\_ objects  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: NA

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: Historic Synagogues of Connecticut

Temple Beth Israel, West Hartford, CT

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  X  nomination   request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  X  meets   does not meet the National Register criteria.

John W. Shannahan 10/12/95  
Signature of Certifying Official Date  
John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property   meets   does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain):

Edson A. Beall

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

Temple Beth Israel, West Hartford, CT

**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

|           |                            |      |                  |
|-----------|----------------------------|------|------------------|
| Historic: | <u>religious structure</u> | Sub: | <u>synagogue</u> |
| Current:  | <u>religious structure</u> | Sub: | <u>synagogue</u> |

**7. DESCRIPTION**

|                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Architectural Classification: | Materials:                    |
| <u>20 CENTURY REVIVAL</u>     | Foundation: <u>CONCRETE</u>   |
| <u>Byzantine</u>              | Walls: <u>STONE/Limestone</u> |
|                               | Roof: <u>CERAMIC TILE</u>     |
|                               | Other: _____                  |

**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

**Exterior**

Temple Beth Israel is a large polygonal limestone building in the Byzantine style. It faces north on a main street in a mixed residential/commercial neighborhood that was densely developed in the early to mid-20th century. The sanctuary is an 88' x 102' two-story structure built in the shape of a 12-sided polygon, symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel. The domed tiled roof of the temple rises 80 feet above street level.

In front of the polygon an entrance structure is approached by a long flight of granite steps 44 feet wide. At the head of the steps three tall carved round-arched openings, each with two double doors, lead in to the vestibule. Above the doors in the tympanum of the central arch is a Decalogue. Other Judaic symbols adorn the entranceway. The doorknobs of the massive doors are carved with a circle suggesting the unity of God, a candelabra symbolic of the menorah of the Temple of David, and a Magen David. All doorknobs in the temple are of this description. This extreme attention to detailed Judaic iconography continues throughout the building, and is described at length in the dedication publication.

The 1933-1936 building program provided for the sanctuary, a three-story school along the east border of the property behind the sanctuary, a library, and offices. In the early 1950s, further construction was undertaken for the Silverman Chapel, facing the street west of the sanctuary; Feldman Hall, a small social room; Haas Hall, a large auditorium and banquet hall, the largest such facility in the Greater Hartford area; and additions to the classrooms, library, and offices.

Temple Beth Israel, West Hartford, CT

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally:\_\_\_ Statewide:\_\_\_ Locally: x

Applicable National Register Criteria: A\_\_\_ B\_\_\_ C x D\_\_\_

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A x B\_\_\_ C\_\_\_ D\_\_\_ E\_\_\_ F\_\_\_ G\_\_\_

| Areas of Significance: | Period(s) of Significance |             | Significant Dates |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| <u>ARCHITECTURE</u>    | <u>1933</u>               | <u>1945</u> | <u>1933</u>       |
| _____                  | _____                     | _____       | _____             |
| _____                  | _____                     | _____       | _____             |
| _____                  | _____                     | _____       | _____             |

Significant Person(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder: Charles R. Greco

**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**

**Architectural Significance**

Temple Beth Israel is architecturally significant because it is an excellent example of Byzantine revival architecture executed with fine materials on a large scale and in great detail. The Byzantine style of architecture was seldom selected for historic Connecticut synagogues, although it was popular elsewhere. Beth El Synagogue, Waterbury (see separate registration form) is another example in Connecticut. The Byzantine style was considered appropriate for synagogue design because of its association with the East, where Judaism had its origins, and the probability that early synagogues in that region were built in the Byzantine style.

The architect, Charles R. Greco, specialized in the Byzantine style and in synagogue architecture. In Connecticut he designed the school addition to Rodeph Sholom Synagogue, Bridgeport (see separate registration form), and a modern synagogue in Meriden.

Temple Beth Israel, West Hartford, CT

████████████████████

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreeage of Property: less than five

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting Zone Northing Easting

|   |           |                |               |   |     |       |       |
|---|-----------|----------------|---------------|---|-----|-------|-------|
| A | <u>18</u> | <u>4625960</u> | <u>689530</u> | B | ___ | _____ | _____ |
| C | ___       | _____          | _____         | D | ___ | _____ | _____ |
| E | ___       | _____          | _____         | F | ___ | _____ | _____ |

Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property is described in the West Hartford Land Records at volume 75, page 36.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property encompasses land that has gone with the building since it was erected.

████████████████████

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: David F. Ransom, Consultant, reviewed by John F.A. Herzan, National Register Coordinator

Org.: Connecticut Historical Commission

Date: September 3, 1994

Street/#: 59 South Prospect Street

City/Town: Hartford

State: CT

ZIP: 06106

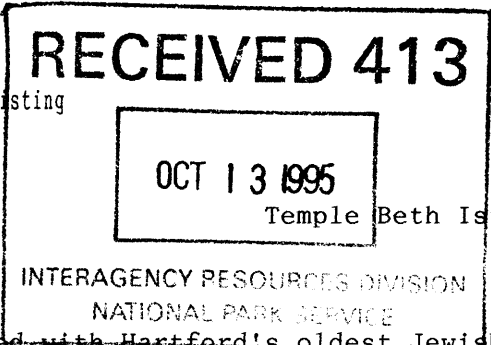
Telephone: 203 566-3005

Temple Beth Israel, West Hartford, CT

**Interior**

The vestibule establishes the character of the interior as a whole. Its vaulted ceiling is lined with amber-colored travertine marble over a floor of Tennessee marble laid in an ornamental pattern. At each end of the vestibule is a memorial stained-glass window representing, in the east, the prophet Malachi and, in the west, the prophet Micah, with Hebrew inscriptions selected from the words of the prophets.

The sanctuary continues in like manner on a larger scale and in greater depth of detail. The room, 84 feet in diameter, is encircled by 12 great blind arches in the form of a monumental arcade of variegated marble. Above the arcade the spring line of the dome is a carved molding in polychrome. A pair of tall round-arched stained-glass windows, part of a group of 24 in all, each with a religious meaning, pierces the dome over each arch of the arcade. The climax of the interior is the ark, which occupies the arch opposite the entrance. The ark and the altar in front of it are of onyx embellished with carving and mosaic ornament. The Lions of Judah guard a Decalogue over the doors of the ark, which are of gilt bronze. The inner surfaces of the closet of the ark are cedar. Other details include the Eternal Light in bronze grille work and candelabra reminiscent of the menorah of the Temple of David. The auditorium seats 816 people.



Temple Beth Israel, West Hartford, CT

### Historical Background

Temple Beth Israel is associated with Hartford's oldest Jewish congregation, founded in 1843, which erected Temple Beth Israel, Charter Oak Avenue, Hartford (individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places). Being the first congregation to build a synagogue in Hartford, indeed in Connecticut, it was appropriate that the congregation was the first to construct a new building in a suburb, leading an exodus from center city to the suburbs by Jewish congregations in general, following the trend of the times in American cities in the post-World War II era. The Farmington Avenue site chosen by Beth Israel is just over the city line on a main thoroughfare in a densely built up neighborhood of urban character.

An ecumenical event involving Temple Beth Israel and the First Church of Christ occurred in the 1940s. On January 3, 1942, the meetinghouse of the First Church of Christ (Congregational) in West Hartford was destroyed by fire. On the same day Temple Beth Israel was offered to that congregation to be used by it for Sunday services, free of any cost, for so long as needed. The offer was accepted and the premises used for 22 months during the years of World War II. On the Sunday following September 21, 1947, when the new meetinghouse of the Congregational Church was dedicated, identical bronze tablets memorializing the incident were unveiled in the two houses of worship.

### Registration Requirements

Temple Beth Israel, West Hartford, qualifies under Criterion C for inclusion in this multiple property listing as an urban building constructed as a synagogue in Connecticut by meeting the following requirements:

- Constructed as a Jewish house of worship
- Located in an urban setting
- Exhibits integrity of design and workmanship
- Constructed prior to 1945

Temple Beth Israel, West Hartford, CT



9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Abraham J. Feldman, "A Modern Synagogue" (West Hartford: Congregation Beth Israel, 1985, seventh printing of 1945).

Hartford Courant, May 27, 1933.

David F. Ransom, "1843\*1943 - One Hundred Years of Jewish Congregations in Connecticut: An Architectural Survey - 5603\*5703," Connecticut Jewish History, 2(Fall 1991)1.

Harold S. Silver, Rabbi of Temple Beth Israel, interview, October 27, 1991.

"Temple Beth Israel," dedication publication (West Hartford: Temple Beth Israel, 1936).

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

\_\_\_ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

\_\_\_ Previously Listed in the National Register.

\_\_\_ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

\_\_\_ Designated a National Historic Landmark.

\_\_\_ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

\_\_\_ State Historic Preservation Office

\_\_\_ Other State Agency

\_\_\_ Federal Agency

\_\_\_ Local Government

\_\_\_ University

\_\_\_ Other: Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_



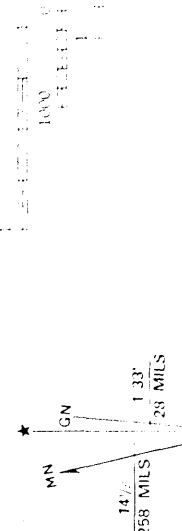


3  
 TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL  
 WEST HARTFORD, CT  
 18/4625960/689530

Mapped by the Geological Survey and City of Hartford  
 Edited and published by the Geological Survey  
 Revised in cooperation with Connecticut Highway Department

Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA and Connecticut Geodetic Survey  
 Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1941. Topography by planetable surveys 1943. Revised 1964  
 Polyconic projection. 10,000-foot grid ticks based on Connecticut coordinate system  
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue  
 1927 North American Datum  
 To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines 5 meters south and 38 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks  
 Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown  
 There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map

NEW BRITAIN  
 84°37'31" W



UTM GRID AND 1992 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET  
 Revisions shown in purple and wood and compiled from aerial photographs taken 1941 and other sources  
 Contours not revised. This information not field checked  
 Map edited 1992  
 Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

41°45' 72°45' 688 1.2 MI. TO U.S. 6 689 610 000 FEET 42°30' 691