

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received JUL 1 - 1983
date entered JUL 28 1983

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Plymouth Congregational Church

and/or common Plymouth Church, Temple Keser Israel

2. Location

street & number 1469 Chapel Street

n/a not for publication

city, town New Haven

n/a vicinity of

state CT

code 09

county New Haven

code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	n/a	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Plymouth Realty, c/o Max G. Carter, M.D.

street & number 670 George Street

city, town New Haven

n/a vicinity of

state CT

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City Clerk's Office

street & number 200 Orange Street

city, town New Haven

state CT

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records CTHistorical Commission, 59 S. Prospect St.

city, town Hartford

state CT

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Plymouth Congregational Church is situated on a flat rectangular lot on the northeast corner of Chapel Street and Sherman Avenue, New Haven. The nominated property consists of the brownstone church (constructed in 1900), and adjoining parish house (constructed in 1894). The monumental church and parish house contrast greatly in materials, scale and siting in relation to the adjacent residential neighborhood east, north and west. St. Raphael's Hospital, a complex of multi-story masonry structures, encompasses the entire block south of the church. The sanctuary is flanked by square projecting towers on the east and west sides of the facade (photograph #s 1,2). The two-story stone-faced hipped-roof parish house abuts the sanctuary on Sherman Avenue (photograph #4).

Constructed of rock-faced ashlar East Haven stone, the side walls of the church and parish house rise from a _____ water table. On the facade, the gable-front midsection of the sanctuary is overshadowed by massive square towers on the east and west sides. The west tower is the larger and more monumental of the two; its polygonal, iron-crested spire is visible from several blocks distance in all directions. Two semicircular-arched entryways set within deep reveals are located at the base of the south and west sides of the west tower. Double-leaf wood-paneled doors are surmounted by a carved stone lintel set within the soffit of the arch. The lintel above the west arch features a rinceaux pattern; the south-arch lintel has carved anthemion. Stone impost columns with foliated capitals flank the entryways and support the arch. The flat walls of the two towers' squat midsections are punctuated by a row of rectangular windows and transoms set within deep reveals. The upper section of the west tower is defined by a narrow coping with projecting, attenuated ends. Above the coping, four squat circular buttresses with ridged, conical caps flank a tripartite composition of slender semicircular arched openings supported by engaged colonettes. The composition is finished by a polygonal, slate-roofed iron-crested spire with gabled dormers centered on each side. The shorter, more modestly detailed east tower features a slate-roofed pyramidal roof, iron-crested at the top. The base of the east tower features a single entrance on the south side (photograph #1). The entryway is of the same configuration as the two entryways on the west tower.

The exterior of the sanctuary is defined by four intersecting gable-end sections which form a cross plan. The steeply pitched slate roofs are covered with asphalt shingles, and retain their decorative flashing ridges. A tripartite composition of semicircular-arched window openings set within deep reveals is centered on the facade. Spandrels with heavy stone dentils divide the upper sash from a series of three lower, square window openings framed by short columns. Sash consists of diamond-patterned colored glass panels, installed in 1948 when the church was converted into a temple. The tripartite arched window on the north elevation of the sanctuary faces a small courtyard which separates the sanctuary from the parish house. This composition retains stained and leaded-glass sash which predates the temple conversion and which is probably original; however, the three windows are buckled and broken in places (photograph #3). Each of the four sanctuary gable ends has a circular louvered opening centered in the tympanum;

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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Dwight Neighborhood Survey, 1980, local.
Filed at CT Historical Commission, Hartford.

7. DESCRIPTION

smooth-faced stone eaves are practically flush with the side walls in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The heavy, asymmetrical massing of the church is further accentuated by short, extended polygonal bays rising on the right side of the sanctuary wall on the south, east and west elevations (photograph #1). These projecting bays are embellished with smooth-faced stone coping and rectangular windows set within deep reveals, and surmounted by bands of circular-patterned tile and brick decoration.

Viewed from Sherman Avenue, the west elevation of the church is distinguished by a two-story flat-roofed vestibule which provides access to both the sanctuary and the parish house. The large segmental-arched entry is surmounted by a row of rectangular sash, above which rises a tall stone-faced chimney. The vestibule section is situated between the gable end of the sanctuary to the south, and a projecting, square crenellated tower to the north. The parish house abuts the crenellated tower. The two-and-a-half-story hipped-roof structure features rock-faced East Haven stone on the facade, and brick-faced elevations on the north (rear) and east sides. A bow centered on the facade of the parish house rises three stories, culminating in a gabled roof dormer with a three-part Palladian-variation window (photograph #4).

The sanctuary interior is distinguished by an octagonal open plan rising to a plaster ceiling now sheathed by acoustic tiles. A suspended lighting fixture, dating from the temple conversion of 1948, is centered on the ceiling (photograph #3). Vacant since 1968, the sanctuary's interior finish has suffered extensive deterioration due to lack of heat, pigeon infestation, and roof leakage. In addition, the temple conversion resulted in the removal of the choir; organ and organ chamber; choir gate, rail and balusters; platform and pulpit; and most original stained glass windows (replaced with diamond-patterned colored glass). Although crumbling, the engaged columns surrounding each of the four tripartite window compositions remain partially intact (photograph #3). The walls are finished with oak wainscot and a heavy dentiled ceiling cornice embellished with a wide band of acanthus-leaf decoration.

The interior of the front section of the parish house (facing Sherman Avenue) is divided into three floors of offices. The rear section of the building was converted into a two-story chapel/auditorium in 1932. The auditorium features a three-sided balcony and a shallow stage framed by fluted pilasters (photograph #5). Used for offices and a school by both Plymouth Church and Temple Keser Israel, the parish house was rented in 1968

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Criterion C

Specific dates 1894, 1900 **Builder/Architect** William H. Allen, Architect.

Sperry & Treat, Masons.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Smith & McQueen, Carpenters.

The Plymouth Congregational Church (1900) and parish house (1894) are fine examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture (Criterion C). Designed by local architect William H. Allen, the monumental stone church and parish house reflect the city of New Haven's prosperity and westward expansion during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The church and parish house remain the best extant examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque style within the city. Converted to a synagogue in 1949 by Temple Keser Israel, the edifice served the needs of its second congregation until 1968. Currently undergoing exterior restoration and interior rehabilitation for office use, the church and parish house retain a high degree of architectural integrity.

Historical Background

The Missionary Church of New Haven was established in 1837 for the purpose "of bringing within the sound of the gospel...a class of persons who are seldom seen in the house of God."¹ The five founders (Amos Smith, Amos Townsend, William T. Truman, James D. Chapman and Horace Mansfield) first met in July 1831 to discuss formation of the new church. Amos Townsend, who presided over the meeting, was elected first Deacon of the church, a position he held for fifty-four years. The group continued to meet through the summer of 1831. The city's three other Congregational churches objected to formation of the new Missionary Church. The First (Center), North, and Third churches believed that the community (population 10,678) could not accommodate another congregation, and that enough seats were available in existing churches. It was feared that the establishment of a new congregation would divide existing churches and lead to the introduction of new denominations such as the Unitarians and Universalists. Mr. Waters Warren conducted the first formal services in September 1831, and he led the congregation until March 1832.

To encourage new memberships and a broader spectrum of community participation in the church, the name Missionary Church was dropped in 1832 in favor of Free Congregational Church. All seats in the church were to be free, a policy which caused severe financial difficulties for the congregation until a new church was erected in 1836. A Sunday School was established in 1834, and membership increased to forty one. The church embraced missionary ideals, and the bulk of its congregation was comprised of commercially successful families, "owners of large businesses of manufacture and merchandising, usually not possessing inherited wealth."³ Church-sponsored associations were actively involved with local charity work, financial contributions to local missions and other community service projects. A Boy's Brigade, organized in the 1840s to promote the interest of youth in the church, was presented in drill formation at parades and other community events. The Whatsoever and Willing Circles of the King's Daughters' Society raised money to fund local charities and to feed the poor. The Ladies Bene-

9. Major Bibliographical References

A History of Plymouth Congregational Church 1831-1942. Published for the Church by the Committee on History. Copy filed at Center Church Parish House, New Haven.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1

Quadrangle name New Haven

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	7	2	0	6	0	4	5	7	5	1	5	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B

Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

Zone	Easting				Northing									

D

Zone	Easting				Northing									

E

Zone	Easting				Northing									

F

Zone	Easting				Northing									

G

Zone	Easting				Northing									

H

Zone	Easting				Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification

As recorded in New Haven Land Records, Volume 2840, Page 127.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jack A. Gold, Architectural Historian

edited by John Herzan,
National Register Coordinator

organization Jack A. Gold
Historic Preservation Consultant

date March 1983

street & number 50 Hubinger St.

telephone 203/389-4590

city or town New Haven

state CT 06511

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date June 20, 1983

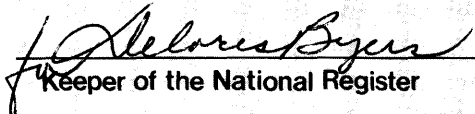
For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

7/28/83


Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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7. DESCRIPTION

to the city of New Haven for use as a school annex. During the middle 1970s, the interior was again renovated for administrative offices for St. Raphael's Hospital. Suspended ceilings, paneled walls and carpeting were installed. The parish house has been vacant for approximately five years.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

volent Society assisted in raising funds to pay off the church debt and to furnish church facilities.

Between 1833 and 1836, services were held in a rented third-floor space in the Exchange Building (corner of Chapel and Church streets). A brick sanctuary was erected in 1836 on the west side of Church Street between George and Crown. The name Free Congregational was changed to Church Street Church. In May 1837, Rev. Henry G. Ludlow, formerly pastor of Spring Street Presbyterian Church, New York, was installed as the first settled pastor. During his pastorate over 355 new members were added. In the 1840s, the church took an advanced stand on the slavery issue, declaring that it would not engage in fellowship with any church which was tolerant of slavery. Membership continued to increase, and in 1848 a larger church was erected on College Street, designed by Sidney Mason Stone.³ William W. McLane was installed as pastor in 1884, and served until 1911. Rev. McLane led the drive to relocate the church quarters to an area west of downtown New Haven.

During the 1880s, the city witnessed a remarkable proliferation of two and three-family frame houses west along Edgewood Avenue and bisecting streets such as Sherman Avenue and the Boulevard. Rev. McLane wanted the church to become a part of this suburbanizing trend, and in January 1884 the congregation purchased a lot on the northeast corner of Chapel Street and Sherman Avenue for \$10,500. The College Street Church was sold to Yale University, and the proceeds were used to construct the parish house on Sherman Avenue at a cost of \$25,000. The cornerstone of the church was laid in the early summer of 1900, and on January 1, 1901, the church was formally dedicated and renamed Plymouth Congregational. Construction of the church, including furnishings, cost \$57,000. The congregation and the surrounding neighborhood continued to grow and prosper through the 1920s. Between 1916 and 1921, 395 new members were added to the congregation. Church membership peaked in 1929 at 778 members, representing the largest Congregational church membership in New Haven.

The continued suburbanization of the city north, west and south caused a dwindling in membership after World War II. In 1949, the church property was sold to Temple Keser Israel, and the Plymouth Church merged with Dwight Street Church to become the Edgewood Church. In 1970, Edgewood Church merged with Center (Congregational) Church on the Green. Temple Keser Israel converted the church to a synagogue in 1949, and conducted services here for nineteen years. In 1968, Temple Keser Israel merged with Temple Beth El; the new congregation, named Temple Beth El Keser Israel, built a new synagogue and school on Whalley Avenue in the Westville section

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of the city. In 1970 the city of New Haven tendered proposals for demolition of the church and parish house, and proposed construction of an office tower and parking facility. The city later encouraged adaptive re-use of the property, culminating with the current rehabilitation plans.

Architecture

Both the church and parish house were designed by William H. Allen, popular local architect whose High Victorian Gothic and Colonial Revival residential designs may be viewed along Sherman Avenue and in the East Rock neighborhood of the city. In partnership with Richard Williams, Allen designed the Neo-classical New Haven County Courthouse, constructed in 1909. Allen's popularization of current architectural tastes is nowhere more apparent than in his design for the Plymouth Church and parish house. He incorporated numerous design features popularized in the U.S. by the Ecole des Beaux Arts-trained architect Henry Hobson (H.H.) Richardson. Richardson, an American, developed a unique refinement of the pre-Civil War Romanesque Revival style which became known in this country as Richardsonian Romanesque. In 1872, Richardson's commission for the design of Trinity Church, Boston, firmly established Richardsonian Romanesque as the popular American design idiom through the 1880s. The style was especially suited for monumental public, ecclesiastical and commercial buildings. One of Richardson's well-known Connecticut designs is the Cheney Building, Hartford (a commercial building constructed 1875-1876).

While deterioration of the sanctuary has affected the integrity of the interior of the church, the striking appearance of the exterior elevations remains completely intact. Although other religious buildings within the city incorporate certain Richardsonian elements, such as massive square towers, none feature the range and sophistication of Richardsonian design elements as represented in the elevations of the Plymouth Church. Moreover, most of the masonry churches constructed within the city are faced with brick, which does not conform with Richardson's popularization of rock-faced stone. The massive size, rock-faced masonry, deep window and arch reveals, and rows of rectangular sash typify the Richardsonian influence in Allen's design. Allen incorporated other Richardsonian Romanesque elements in the exterior elevations, such as squat rounded columns; square, flat-faced towers; short polygonal and extended bays; multiple-gabled roof planes; decorative flashing ridges; eaves flush with side walls; and pyramidal, crested tower roofs. Overall, the elevations convey authority, power and the new found prosperity of the church within the context of a growing congregation and developing neighborhood. Allen's design captured the sense of optimism and accomplishment of New Haven's growing middle class at the turn of the century.

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NOTES

¹A History of Plymouth Congregational Church, New Haven, p.6.

²Ibid., p.22.

³Ibid., p.14.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Cram, Ralph Adams. Church Building. Boston; Small, Maynard & Co., 1914.

Ferguson, George. Signs and Symbols in Christian Art. New York:
Oxford University Press, 1954.

White, James F. Protestant Worship and Church Architecture. New York:
Oxford University Press, 1964.