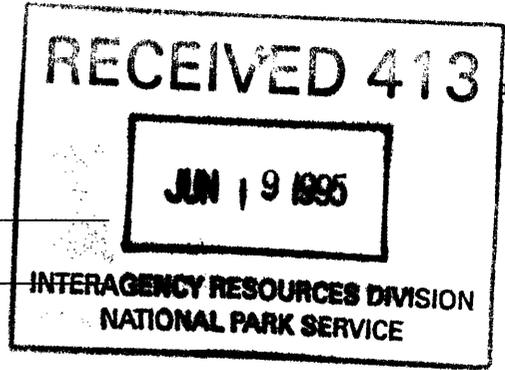


864

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



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Masonic Temple

Other Name/Site Number: Temple B'Nai Israel

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 265 West Main Street Not for publication: NA

City/Town: New Britain Vicinity: NA

State: CT County: Hartford Code: 003 Zip Code: 06052

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 B'Nai Israel, New Britain, CT

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: other Sub: fraternal lodge

Current: religious structure Sub: synagogue

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL/
Beaux-Arts

Materials: Foundation: STONE
Walls: BRICK

Roof: built up
Other: STONE/limestone trim

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Exterior

Temple B'Nai Israel is a large two-story Beaux-Arts brick building with a colossal tetrastyle portico in antis. It faces south on the main street, west of New Britain's central business district. (Photograph 43) Since the site is elevated and occupies a prominent location, the large 108' x 64' building is a commanding presence in the neighborhood. A Queen Anne-style frame church is across Main Street and businesses are nearby, while side streets continue to be residential.

In the imposing facade of Temple B'Nai Israel the central colossal colonnade of four fluted Greek Doric columns in antis protects three double-leaf doors and is approached by a long flight of wide steps. Left and right of the colonnade are shallow brick piers flanked by unbroken brick walls. The limestone columns support a plain architrave and a frieze which contains discs over the columns and triglyphs over the piers. The cornice, with mutules, advances slightly over the colonnade and its flanking piers, under an attic with stepped parapet.

In the other three elevations fenestration is regularly spaced, giving no indication of the function of the building, which was originally a Masonic hall.

Temple B'Nai Israel, New Britain, CT

Interior

The interior of the building is spacious; there are 6,700 square feet per floor. The first and second floors are given over to social rooms, library, chapel, and offices. In the sanctuary on the third floor, under a high ceiling, three sections of pews face two tall Doric columns at the front. The columns are in antis, repeating the scheme of the facade colonnade. The ark is between the two columns. The windows are covered with metal multiple-unit classical screens. (Photograph 44) Although the height of the ceiling is adequate to accommodate galleries, there are none; this being a Conservative rather than an Orthodox congregation, none are required.

8. 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>1929 1945</u>	<u>1929</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Walter P. Crabtree, architect

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

Architectural Significance

Temple B'Nai Israel is significant architecturally because it is a fine example of the Neo-Classical Revival style in the Beaux-Arts mode. While the building is lacking the paired columns and roof-line statuary often associated with the Beaux-Arts, its large scale, generous proportions, and colossal columns reflect the generations of training experienced by American architects in the Paris Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The Beaux-Arts influence spread through American architects who studied there to the profession generally.

Under the influence of the training received by architectural students at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, large institutional buildings of various functions tended to assume similar appearances. Railroad stations, town halls, post offices, and libraries, among others, are building types with examples similar in appearance to Temple B'Nai Israel. They all have the long rectangular facade two or three stories in

Temple B'Nai Israel, New Britain, CT

height, the classically inspired entrance colonnade, and classical entablature. The quality of the design and materials of these buildings, as a class, tends to be high. Temple B'Nai Israel is no exception; the stone blocks in its foundation, for example, are tooled, indicating a high degree of attention to craftsmanship and finish. The design of new synagogues occasionally followed the trend, as in the work of Albert Kahn, the pioneering designer of automobile factories, who drew plans in 1922 for Temple Beth El, Detroit, which strongly resembles Temple B'Nai Israel in overall effect.

The architect of B'Nai Israel, Walter P. Crabtree (1873-1962), was born in Rochester, New York. Information on Crabtree's architectural education is not at hand, but there is no indication that Crabtree studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He was employed from 1901-1904 in the office of William C. Cadwell, New Britain, before beginning an independent practice in New Britain and in Hartford by himself and later with his son, Walter P. Crabtree, Jr., continuing for almost half a century, to 1950.

Historical Background

Temple B'Nai Israel (Sons of Israel) is significant historically because of its association with an early New Britain Jewish congregation and because it is an example of changing function in an architecturally significant building. The Orthodox congregation was organized in 1889 as Aheyu B'Nai Israel (Brethren Sons of Israel). Services were held first in a theater, then in the Talmud Torah on Elm Street before the congregation bought the former Swedish Lutheran Church at Chestnut and Elm streets, ca.1908. In 1924 the congregation reorganized as Conservative, in the wing of American Judaism known as the United Synagogue of America. At that time, George A. Zunner of Hartford designed alterations to the church for synagogue use, original drawings for which exist (in a private collection). Other members of the congregation who held to the Orthodox conviction withdrew, and in 1925 built Tephareth Israel Synagogue (see separate registration form).

Architect Walter P. Crabtree designed the building at 265 West Main Street as a Masonic hall in 1927. It was completed in the spring of 1929, just prior to the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The financial burden proved to be heavy for the Masons, leading them in 1940 to sell the structure for \$40,000 to the Brethren congregation. Since both uses were institutional, with need for meeting rooms and large assembly space, the building well accommodated the change of function. While change of use between church and synagogue is not uncommon, other changes of use are rare; this building at 235 West Main Street is an example of an unusual change of use that was carried out successfully.

Registration Requirements

Temple B'Nai Israel qualifies under Criterion C for inclusion in this multiple property listing as a building constructed to be a church or for other purpose and adapted to become a synagogue by meeting the following requirements:

- Functioned before 1945 as a Jewish house of worship
- Located in an urban neighborhood
- Exhibits integrity of design and workmanship representative of contemporary ecclesiastical architectural styles
- Constructed prior to 1945

Temple B'Nai Israel, New Britain, CT

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Gloria Berson, daughter of a former president of the congregation, interview, March 4, 1991.

Herbert E Fowler, A History of New Britain (New Britain: New Britain Historical Society, 1960), p. 200.

New Britain Assessor's records.

New Britain Herald, 27 April 1929.

New Britain Land Records, 274/535, 536; 282/322, 324.

David F. Ransom, "Biographical Dictionary of Hartford Architects," The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin 54 (Winter/Spring 1989):34.

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

Undated, unidentified newspaper clipping at Jewish Historical Society of Greater Hartford.

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: _____

Temple B'Nai Israel, New Britain, CT

████████████████████

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than five

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting Zone Northing Easting

A	<u>18</u>	<u>4614820</u>	<u>683920</u>	B	__	_____	_____
C	__	_____	_____	D	__	_____	_____
E	__	_____	_____	F	__	_____	_____

Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property is described in the New Britain Land Records at volume 274, pages 535, 536 and volume 282, pages 322, 324.

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 21, 1994

Street/#: 59 South Prospect Street

City/Town: Hartford

State: CT

ZIP: 06106

Telephone: 203 566-3005



1.6 MI. TO CONN 176

New Britain, CT
 Tephareth Israel
 18/684890/4615520
 Temple B'Nai Israel
 18/683920/4614820