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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Temple Sherith Israel  
other names/site number Temple Israel

### 2. Location

street & number 2266 California Street  N/A not for publication  
city or town San Francisco  N/A vicinity  
state California code CA county San Francisco code 075 zip code 94115

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this  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  meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

*M. J. Wachs*  
Signature of certifying official  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
Title

8 FEB 2010  
Date  
Office of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- other (explain:)
- determined eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register

*Jose Edison H. Beall*  
Signature of the Keeper

3.31.10  
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		district
		site
		structure
		object
1		<b>Total</b>

Name of related multiple property listing  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION Religious Facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION Religious Facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Beaux Arts  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Byzantine  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Romanesque  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: brick  
\_\_\_\_\_  
walls: sandstone  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof: slate  
\_\_\_\_\_  
other: glass (colored)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### SUMMARY

Temple Sherith Israel is a large domed synagogue in Pacific Heights, a well-to-do residential neighborhood of San Francisco, surrounded mostly by late nineteenth century and early twentieth century houses and apartment buildings. It is located in a conspicuous location near the top of a ridge so that it overlooks and can be seen from a wide area. Its structure is in two parts, brick exterior walls and an interior cage of steel that supports the dome, the roof, and most loads. Stylistically it mixes Byzantine and Romanesque imagery, composed in the Beaux Arts manner. The most notable features of its exterior are its high dome, stone veneer with carved details, and large-arched pavillions on each facade that enclose a textured concentration of architectural ornamentation and colored glass. The most notable features of the interior are along the sequence of ceremonial spaces — vestibule, main stairs, foyer, and sanctuary — with rich materials and fine craftsmanship. The culmination of the interior sequence is the space under the dome. There, clear light from windows in the drum that supports the dome, filtered light through a myriad of colored glass windows on three sides, and electric light from over a thousand bulbs that outline interior features create a dazzling effect as they illuminate the brilliant colors and features of the interior — especially painted, frescoed, and stencilled plaster surfaces and the carved Ark wall. Among interior details, the great arched west window in stained glass of Moses at Yosemite is a masterpiece of American stained glass art, notable in its size, its craftsmanship, and its unique expression of the Promised Land in California. Although there are some alterations — notably the painted stone exterior, removal of iron gates and wood doors at the main entry, and remodeling of some secondary interior spaces — the building retains a high degree of integrity.

#### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

##### SITE

Temple Sherith Israel is located in the northeast quadrant of San Francisco at 2266 California Street at the northeast corner of Webster Street. It is located in an extension of the original street grid of the city called the Western Addition, surveyed after 1858. Today, its neighborhood is usually called Pacific Heights, the name derived from the east-west ridge across the Western Addition that was developed as a residential neighborhood for the well-to-do beginning in the late nineteenth century both because of the views from the heights and because of the direct connections to downtown established by transit lines.

Temple Sherith Israel is located just south of the center point between two hilltop parks, Lafayette Square and Alta Plaza. It is on the south slope of the Pacific Heights ridge so that there are views of the city to the south and views of the synagogue from a wide area.

Temple Sherith Israel is located on Western Addition Block 271. The assessor's office designated it Block 947. By 1913, it was renumbered as Block 637. Today, the assessor's parcel number is 0637-011.

By 1890, the neighborhood around Block 637 was well served by transit lines going east-west along California Street and north-south on Fillmore Street one block west, leading to the residential development of the area, primarily with large, two-story wood houses for families with servants on twenty to forty foot wide lots. At least two houses on the block were designed by Pissis & Moore in 1885 — the Bowie house at 2202 California Street (since remodeled) and the William Vale house at 2226 California Street (San Francisco Landmark Number 168, designated as the Morgan House).

At the time Temple Sherith Israel was built, Cooper Medical College was located one block north at the northeast corner of Sacramento and Webster streets. Damaged in 1906, it was repaired and taken over by the Stanford Medical Department in 1908. In 1911, the Lane Medical Library, designed by Albert Pissis, was built as part of the Stanford Medical Department at the southeast corner of Sacramento and Webster streets.

Temple Sherith Israel was built on a square parcel assembled from three lots that altogether measured 132 feet 6 inches on a side. (*Minutes* 1902: 156) The building itself occupies most of the two westernmost lots, measuring 132 feet six inches on Webster Street and 105 feet along California Street, leaving an area 27 feet six inches wide with no improvements along the east side. The purchase of these lots and the houses on them was completed in October 1902, and after November 1902 houses at 2266 and 2268 California Street were demolished or moved. (*Minutes* 1902: 195) An option to buy the lot to the north on Webster Street was never exercised. (*Minutes* 1902: 198)

In 1935, an addition for an elevator was built on the east side of the synagogue, protruding a few feet into the area that was part of the property but had never been built upon.

From the time of its completion in 1905 until 1947, there were no changes to the property boundaries. In January 1947, the congregation bought the two adjacent lots to the east on California Street, measuring 60 feet along the street by 132 feet six inches. Two buildings on these lots were demolished: a two-story house at 2252 California Street and a two-story house converted to a school at 2264 California Street. This was followed by the construction of a school and community building called Temple House, completed in 1949.

Temple House covered most of the two new lots and extended into the formerly open area on the east side of the synagogue so that the irregular west edge of Temple House and the irregular east edge of the synagogue faced each other without touching.

While there are two buildings on the parcel, only the synagogue is included in the boundaries of the National Register property.

## **BUILDING**

### **Plan**

Except for minor variations, Temple Sherith Israel is rectangular in plan, measuring about 100 feet along California Street by 128 feet along Webster Street. As a whole, the building is a rectangular box 63 feet high with a gable on each facade that rises 16 feet above the height of the main walls to 79 feet at its peak. This rectangular box is surmounted by a drum and dome that rise another 25 and 50 feet, respectively, so that the whole building is 140 feet high. Thus, the building is as high to the top of the dome as it is wide on California Street. And, the height of the main box of the building without the gables is equal to that of the entire structure of the roof and dome from the top of the box to the top of the dome. (*Pissis* 1903)

There are three principal floor levels in the building: the ground floor entry level, the second floor with the main sanctuary, and a third floor that faces the center of the space of the main sanctuary with a gallery on three sides. In addition, there are two secondary levels: a partial basement in the northwest corner, and a circular floor inside the drum of the dome for a choir and parts of the organ.

The building was designed to be free-standing so that it was exposed to light and air on all four sides, although the east side and rear exposures are constrained. The east side and rear are each bordered by a concrete sidewalk enclosed by a wall. Beyond the property line at the rear is a three-story wood residence (now offices) that was there when the synagogue was built. On the east side there was originally an open lot owned by the congregation; since 1949 when Temple House was built, there has only been a narrow paved open space.

As a free-standing structure, there are entrances on all four sides. The principal entrance to the sanctuary is from California Street through a three-arched entryway and outside vestibule. There is another public entrance on Webster Street. As shown in a photograph in the 1905 dedication program, this entrance was originally through the central arch below the large main window in that facade. However, at an unknown date (by the 1920s judging from an undated photograph) this entrance was relocated to a single arch two openings to the south.

On the east side there is an original entrance through the central arch below the large main window in that facade, mirroring the original conditions of the Webster Street facade. In addition, a second entrance was created when the



elevator addition was built in 1935. Today this is linked by a covered corridor to Temple House. This linkage interrupts the continuous flow of space that originally existed around the building at the ground level.

The interior was planned to serve the liturgical requirements of the congregation and was generated from Beaux-Arts planning principles and selective consideration of traditional aspects of synagogue design. The liturgical requirements were to provide a space where the congregation could see and hear the reading of the Torah, the rabbi speaking, and the cantor leading in prayers and songs. The scrolls of the Torah — the religious text — are kept in a cabinet called the Ark. In an orthodox synagogue, the Torah was removed from the Ark and carried across the prayer hall to be read at the Bimah, a reading desk usually on a raised platform, often with the congregation in seats facing the axis of this movement. However, in this synagogue, influenced by the Reform movement, the Bimah was adjacent to the Ark and included a fixed lectern for reading the Torah and a movable pulpit for speaking. This arrangement served both the traditional function of the Bimah and additional functions of a reform synagogue. In this type of synagogue the congregation sat in seats facing the Ark, and Bimah, less like the participants in prayer in an orthodox synagogue and more like members of an audience watching a theatrical performance.

Because there was no definitive model for the design of a synagogue, many elements of synagogue architecture that were considered traditional had emerged over centuries in different regions, influenced by the larger societies in which they were built. In the nineteenth century many of these traditions were challenged by the Reform movement in Europe and America. For example, the long-held idea that the Ark should be in the east wall of the synagogue (facing Jerusalem) was not followed here, even though it appears that would have been equally possible by orienting the building east-west and entering on Webster Street. In Sherith Israel's two earlier synagogues, the Ark was placed in the east wall. Similarly, the traditional placement of twelve windows representing the tribes of Israel and of two columns representing Solomon's Temple were not done.

Other traditions were followed, including construction on a high point, larger than the houses around it; the placement of a vestibule between the building entrance and the sanctuary; the placement of the main sanctuary on an upper level above a smaller chapel; and the provision of light from above.

A synagogue also typically included offices for rabbis and cantors, a library, and school rooms for children.

So, the plan of Temple Sherith Israel incorporates all of these things from a mix of traditions along with modern facilities and mechanical systems that were given to the architect in the program for the building. The architect then organized these things according to Beaux-Arts principles of symmetry, logical circulation, functional and utilitarian composition of parts, and access to light and air.

On the ground floor, this resulted in a central chapel surrounded by circulation spaces, offices, and amenities around the perimeter of the building. When it was first built, the symmetry was more perfect and more evident. The chapel at the center was on axis with the main entrance and preceded by a large vestibule. Long interior corridors ran down both sides of the chapel and across the rear of the building behind the chapel. The vestibule was a primary organizing space for circulation with openings from it leading to the chapel, to the corridors which lead to the library and offices on the periphery, and to the wide stairways at either end leading up to the main sanctuary floor. Two secondary staircases on the rear corridor provided behind-the-scenes access to the organ and choir loft, the dome, and other spaces.

While the main organization of spaces and circulation on this floor is still evident, there have been a number of changes over the years. The first change may have been associated with the relocation by the 1920s of the Webster Street entry which also probably involved creation of what is now called Bart Memorial Hall from two or more smaller spaces. At that time or later, the partition wall that separated Bart Memorial Hall from an interior corridor was also removed.

Construction of the elevator in 1935 involved conversion of classrooms and the library to a hallway. In 1937, a stage was built in Bart Memorial Hall, classrooms were altered, and the kitchen was moved from a room in the northwest corner to a room off the center of the rear corridor. More alterations to the floor were made in 1945 and from 1947 to 1949 including conversion of classrooms to offices, location of reception in the southeast corner off the vestibule, and redesign of the chapel area into what is now known as the Morris Goldstein Chapel and the Tree of Life Room. In 1976, Bart Memorial

Hall was remodeled including removal of the stage installed in 1937. In 1988, offices were remodeled. (Ranon 1995: History 8-9)

Stairs from the entry vestibule lead up to a large foyer above the entry vestibule that opens into the main sanctuary. These stairways and the foyer are lit by light from colored glass windows. The main sanctuary fully occupies a large, almost square space that spans the width of the building. Slightly curving pews broken by three interior aisles are focused on the Ark and platform in the center of the north wall. Galleries overhang the sides and rear of the sanctuary floor leaving a perfectly square space, 60-feet on a side including the platform, that is open clear to the top of the dome. In other words, the dome is centered on this space and brings light into it from above, lighting the Bimah and the Ark and focusing attention on them as the most significant place in the sanctuary. In addition, filtered light comes into the sanctuary through colored glass windows on the sides and rear of the space, specifically through rows of relatively small windows under the side galleries and through large arched windows above the side galleries and the rose window above the rear gallery.

Behind the sanctuary on the same floor is a service zone with a corridor providing access to a toilet room, organ machinery room, two rear stairways, and corner rooms.

The main stairways at either end of the foyer on the sanctuary level lead up to the gallery level. Stepped seating, like grandstands, looks into the lower space of the sanctuary on the east and west sides and the south end. Also looking into the space is an area above the Ark for a choir and the organ console; this area is behind the front wall of the Ark and is therefore just outside of the square area directly under the dome. Rising behind the organ-choir loft are the organ pipes themselves, visible from the sanctuary. At either end of this organ-choir area and behind the gallery level of the sanctuary are the rear service stairways and rooms in each corner.

The rear service stair near the northeast corner of the building continues upward in several flights to the drum just under the dome. The drum level floor is a twelve-foot wide peripheral ring with a railing; from here there is a view down to the floor of the sanctuary through an opening about thirty feet in diameter. This space is brightly lit through an arcade of windows that encircles the drum. The drum floor provides space for a choir and a second unit of the organ.

### **Structure**

The structure of Temple Sherith Israel can be visualized as two separate but linked structural systems, one inside the other. On the outside are brick masonry walls clad in sandstone. These walls support themselves and a relatively small proportion of the interior loads. On the inside is a steel cage that supports the dome, the roof, and most of the interior loads including the galleries. The interior steel cage and the exterior masonry walls are tied together by steel beams.

The exterior walls are brick masonry on brick footings. The bearing walls of brick are clad in a sandstone veneer by steel anchors. In an attempt to control spalling of the gray-green stone, the walls were painted a light salmon color at an unknown date after the 1940s.

The steel cage consists of six columns that support roof trusses whose bottom chords are arched and whose top chords are pitched to carry the gable roofs. Four of these columns and their trusses form a square that carries the cylindrical drum and the dome. The other columns and roof trusses form a bent that stands between the dome and the south wall of the building where the roof stretches for a longer distance than elsewhere. The columns of the drum structure and the separate bent on the south side are also each spanned by trusses that support the galleries. The ceilings are hung from the lower chords of the roof trusses.

Interior structures — floors, galleries, and partitions — are built of wood joists and framing. Interior walls and ceilings are wood lath and plaster.

### **Architecture**

Following Beaux Arts principles, the public face of this building is an expression of its plan, function, structure, and interior decoration; all of these elements are strongly integrated into a unified whole. As Pissis' teacher Guadet said, the design of the exterior is the last task of the architect, after everything else has been worked out.

### **Interior**

On the ground level the most important and most richly decorated space is the first space entered by the congregation coming to services — the vestibule. The vestibule is a rectangular room with a polished floor of black-and-white marble, marble wainscoting, richly stenciled plaster walls and ceiling, arch orders across the north and south walls, colored glass windows and transoms, oak doors, and bronze light fixtures and hardware. The long axis of the vestibule, the first step in a ceremonial procession, directs the congregation to the marble staircases at either end, leading up to the main sanctuary level.

The short axis of the vestibule leads through the central of five arched openings to a sequence of two spaces now called the Tree of Life Room and the Rabbi Morris Goldstein Chapel. Both of these spaces were created in 1949 and afterwards. Both are entirely interior spaces without exterior exposures or outdoor light.

The Tree of Life Room, the more recent of the two spaces, forms a vestibule to the chapel. It is lit, faintly, by two colored glass windows in the north wall of the vestibule. Recent artworks in the theme of the Tree of Life are displayed.

The chapel is paneled in a plywood veneer with curving corners in the Moderne style. It is a rectangular space focused on a raised Bimah and Ark at the north end. The wood Ark was previously used in the 1870 synagogue of Congregation Sherith Israel. Its pointed arches are in the Gothic Revival style of that synagogue. The room is partly lit by colored glass windows that are illuminated by fluorescent lights.

The remaining spaces on the ground floor — corridors, utilitarian spaces, and rooms for the rabbi, the cantor, the library, and other purposes — were originally designed simply, with painted plaster walls, baseboards, chair rails, eave cornices, and oak window and door trim. Some of these spaces including Bart Memorial Hall, have been largely remodeled. In others, such as the current office of the executive director on the west side, the trim has been painted. But many of the spaces, including the east and north corridors, the rooms at the north end, and some of the rooms on the east side retain their original dimensions and character.

From the ground floor vestibule, the stairs lead up to the sanctuary level foyer. The foyer is somewhat simpler than the vestibule below but is also a richly decorated space. It has painted plaster walls and a vaulted ceiling with stenciled decoration and bronze light fixtures. Arches that lead from the foyer to the sanctuary are decorated with inscriptions. Colored glass windows in the south wall of the building produce a subdued natural light in the foyer.

The foyer opens into the main sanctuary, the most important space in the building. One enters the sanctuary under the ceiling of the gallery, which is lit from the sides by rows of colored glass windows, and is drawn forward toward the Ark and Bimah by the area at the front of the space that is lit by the clear light of the dome above.

The steel frame of the illuminated space is enclosed in lath and plaster to create a composition familiar in Byzantine, Romanesque, and Renaissance architecture of an ecclesiastical space of piers, pendentives, a drum, and a dome. The side and rear arches that frame this central space are vaulted, framing large colored glass windows and covering the galleries. The arch motif is repeated and each arch together with the ring of the drum and the front edges of the galleries, are outlined in incandescent light bulbs, totaling more than one thousand in all.

The space is closed at the north end by a focal composition of Bimah, Ark, and organ. The Bimah is a simple raised platform with a fixed lectern, a moveable pulpit, and large upholstered chairs. The Ark is a carved mahogany wall with round arches and a menorah; a traditional ner tamid, or perpetual lamp recalling a feature of Solomon's Temple, hangs from the menorah. At the center of this wall is the Torah cabinet with a sliding door.

Everywhere, the plaster surfaces are painted, stenciled, and frescoed. Highlights of this decoration are the area around the arch that encloses the Ark and the organ, stenciled with curvilinear designs, frescoed inscriptions and Jewish symbols in the pendentives and the drum, and the frescoed dome itself. Apart from the dominant blue of the dome, the palette of colors elsewhere emphasizes rust reds, ochres, golds, and yellows — characteristic colors of the contemporary English Arts and Crafts movement.



In addition to the incandescent bulbs that outline the arches and other features, the sanctuary is lit by bronze fixtures under the galleries, by the filtered light of many colored glass windows, and by the clear light from the drum. The highlight of the many fine windows is the large arched window above the gallery in the west wall called "Moses Presented the Ten Commandments to the Children of Israel," with its unique depiction of Jewish history as if Moses presented the ten commandments to some of the Children of Israel near Half Dome in Yosemite Valley.

The combined effect of these diverse elements — domed space, brilliantly colored surfaces, varied natural light through clear and colored glass, arts-and-crafts (Pre-Raphaelite) palette, and many incandescent light bulbs — is analogous to a Byzantine church or mosque in its dazzling quality.

Behind the sanctuary are spaces with ordinary finishes — painted plaster walls, baseboards, and chair railings.

The gallery level is largely the upper level of the sanctuary, described above. At the front of this space (the rear of the building) are utilitarian spaces with the same ordinary finishes found elsewhere — painted plaster walls, baseboards, chair railings, and cove cornices.

### ***Exterior***

The exterior of Temple Sherith Israel was designed with an overlay of imagery from different sources. The form of the building as a whole with its prominent round dome recalls the architecture of Byzantine churches. The composition of parts and organization of the facades is Beaux Arts, the round arches with squat columns are Romanesque. The details of the large arches are a mix of classical and Romanesque, and the concentration of ornament in the large arches — in contrast with largely plain walls — is Byzantine. In the absence of any clear stylistic model for synagogues, Temple Sherith Israel, like many others, is a building whose architecture and congregation were searching for a style. (Schwartz 2009)

Following the Beaux-Arts admonition to "represent the truth" (Nelson 1981: 36), the facades are like a preview of the interior. The dominant feature of each of the four facades is a slightly projecting gabled pavilion with a large central arch that, on the south front and east and west sides, encloses three tiers of arches and windows. The width and location of each of these pavilions indicates the precise location and size of the sixty-foot square sanctuary space that is directly under the dome. The three ground level arches represent the entry level to the building and the beginning of the path to the sanctuary; on the south front the three arches are the main entry, on the east and west sides the central arch was originally an entry. The balcony tier of arches represents the entry to the upper level sanctuary itself; rows of five low arches represent the entry under the gallery level. The large rose windows in the south front and the large arched windows in the sides represent both the vaulted space under the dome and the experience of passing into the high space lit from above.

These pavilions project from larger expanses of walls that are punctured by round arches with deep reveals and are divided vertically by a cornice that encircles the building at the springline of the large arches. This cornice corresponds to the top of the gallery level. It also has a purely aesthetic function, dividing the wall proportionally and giving it a human scale.

The side walls have a slight recess near the south end. This preserves the symmetry of the projecting pavilions. It reveals the depth of the ground floor vestibule, the sanctuary level foyer, and the main stairways on the outside. In addition, it interrupts the horizontality of the south end of the building, without which it might look like a basilica, a linear and hierarchical form strongly associated with Christian, especially Roman Catholic, churches. By this means, it reinforces a centralized image of the building.

Above the box of the synagogue, the structure of the dome rises in three parts. The lower part, visible only from a block north on Webster Street and from the east on California Street is in plain stepped blocks as if it were a primitive masonry structure (instead of the covering of a steel frame). The drum appears to rest on these masonry blocks. The drum itself is encircled by an arch order and terminated by a cornice. The slate-shingled hemisphere of the dome sits on the drum.



The main part of the building and the dome complex are related to each other in their materials, details, and proportions. The main box of the building is the same height from the ground as the top of the dome is from the top of the main cornice. The springline cornice divides the main part of the building proportionally exactly as the cornice at the top of the drum divides the upper part of the building. This strengthens the relationship between the upper and lower part, it establishes an analogy between the upper part of the sanctuary and the dome, and it extends a human scale to the upper reaches of the building.

Everywhere the architectural detail is carved sandstone.

In most respects, the exterior of Temple Sherith Israel is little changed since it was built. The principal changes are the relocation of the Webster Street entrance by the 1920s, the removal of decorative iron gates with Jewish symbols from the three entrance arches on California Street in the 1950s, the replacement of three wood doors from the open air vestibule on California Street to the main vestibule with steel doors in the 1950s, and the painting of the stone exterior after the 1940s.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LAW

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1905

1906-1908

**Significant Dates**

1905

1906-1908

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Pissis, Albert

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance is 1905, the year the building was completed, and 1906-1908, the years in which the San Francisco Graft Prosecution was held in Temple Sherith Israel.

**Criteria Consideratons (explanation, if necessary)**

Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties. Temple Sherith Israel qualifies for the National Register under Criteria Consideration A because it derives its primary significance as the site of the 1906-1908 San Francisco Graft Prosecution under Criterion A, and as the work of a master, Albert Pissis, under Criterion C.

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

Temple Sherith Israel is eligible for the National Register under criteria A and C at the local level of significance. Under Criterion A, it is significant in the area of Law as the principal site of the San Francisco Graft Prosecution of 1906-1908. The Graft Prosecution was a turning point in San Francisco's political history and influenced other cities to undertake similar prosecutions. Under Criterion C, the building is significant in the area of Architecture as the work of a master, the architect Albert Pissis. Pissis was one of the leading architects in San Francisco from the 1880s to his death in 1914. This building is the culmination of his work for Jewish clients, one of his principal client groups from the beginning of his career. It is also significant as a distinctive design in a body of work dominated by classical imagery, at the same time remaining representative of his work in the transparent application of Beaux Arts principles. The period of significance is from 1905, the year the building was completed, through 1906 and 1908, the years of the Graft Prosecution.



**Narrative Statement of Significance** (provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance)

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT, CRITERION A: LAW

#### POST-QUAKE SPACE CRISIS

The earthquake and fire of 1906 left San Francisco with a near complete absence of public facilities. The City Hall with its offices, law library, court rooms, sheriff, district attorney, etc.; the Hall of Justice and its court rooms; meeting halls for clubs, fraternal groups, unions, and other organizations; theaters, churches and synagogues — all were destroyed. All of these were critical to the functioning and recovery of the city. Almost immediately, surviving spaces were commandeered by the city government. Before long private organizations were renting any space they could find.

Temple Sherith Israel has frequently been called the largest surviving public building in the city. Because of this and because of its numerous rooms of various sizes — its dignified character was a bonus — it was among the first taken over for public use. It was the most prestigious building taken over by the city, and its temporary use — for the Superior Courts — was among the most prestigious.

Among other buildings taken by the City government were a two-story brick building on Eddy Street for the Hall of Justice; a building at Grove and Laguna for the Coroner; at least seven houses west of Van Ness Avenue for the Auditor, Assessor, Sheriff, District Attorney, City Attorney, Mayor and Fire Department; Mowry Hall at Geary and Franklin for the Board of Supervisors and the Department of Elections, Beth Israel Synagogue on Geary just west of Octavia Street for the Recorder; and the Weston National Bank for the Treasurer. (*San Francisco Call* 7 January 1907; San Francisco Board of Supervisors 1908: 742)

Two days after the fire was extinguished on 21 April 1906, eight Superior Court judges met at Temple Sherith Israel, "courtrooms and chambers were selected," and "A resolution of thanks was voted Congregation Sherith Israel for the use of the building." (*San Francisco Call* 24 April 1906) In addition to the courts, the Law Library also moved into Temple Sherith Israel. Over the next year and a half, the city struggled to bring all of its departments from scattered locations back to a more efficient grouping in the vicinity of the destroyed City Hall. The Law Library stayed in Temple Sherith Israel for over a year, even though it was inconvenient for all: "The Law Library of the city is quartered in a manner that entirely destroys its usefulness. The 50,000 books are lying on the seats in one of the galleries of the temple. As Judge Lawlor is continually holding court in the auditorium it is impossible to go to the library to consult a legal tome without, as one of the judges expressed it, 'being distracted by the wranglings of Heney and Delmas' [antagonists in a prominent case]. The consequence is that the judges make little use of the library." (*San Francisco Call* 30 August 1907)

Temple Sherith Israel was not an ideal courthouse and there were ongoing efforts to find facilities that were better suited to the purpose. An article in the *Call* on 27 December 1906 described the situation: "At present the twelve departments of the Superior Court are scattered in such a way as to materially interfere with their work and to make them hard of access to attorneys and others having any great quantity of legal business to transact. The accommodations are of the poorest nature, the courtrooms small and the chambers, where they do exist, inadequate. Eight of the departments are located in the Temple Israel . . . two in the residence at 2240 California Street, another in a residence at 2210 Clay Street and the other in the Salvation Army barracks on Fillmore street near Post . . ." (*San Francisco Call* 27 December 1906) By August 1907 another "meeting to consider the question of obtaining more suitable court chambers" showed that three of the original eight had already moved from the synagogue "and all but one or two of the judges are complaining." Judges Seawell, Graham, Lawlor, Coffey, and Mogan hold court at the temple . . ." (*San Francisco Call* 30 August 1907)

In late October 1907 four judges moved to the Grant Building on Market Street. Five others remained — Lawlor, Dunne, Cook, Hunt, and Truitt — making part of the problem worse. Now they were "in two gaps about a mile apart" (*San Francisco Call* 27 October 1907) — until the end of February 1908 when the courts finally vacated Temple Sherith Israel.

During this crisis period, the synagogue was also used for other purposes, some of them associated with larger efforts of great importance. On 25 April 1906, four days after the fire, "The Bar Association met . . . in Sherith Israel to discuss legislative relief measures" to provide state aid to San Francisco. (*San Francisco Call* 26 April 1906) On 31 May 1906, "Policy holders in the Trader's Insurance Company, now in the hands of a receiver, gathered to the number of at least 500 . . . in the Sherith Israel Temple . . . in response to the invitation sent out by Insurance Commissioner F. Myron Wolf. It was a great meeting in other respects than its size, being the first meeting of the underwritten since the conflagration . . ." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 1 June 1906) This was followed by a second meeting at the synagogue at which the policy holders organized themselves "to defend their interests." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 12 June 1906)

Events of lesser importance were also held. There were civil weddings. Judge Graham hosted meetings of local Republicans including Rabbi Nieto in his courtroom hoping to defeat the Union Labor Party. (*San Francisco Call* 10 August 1906; *San Francisco Call* 11 September 1906; Burke 1906) On 14 October 1906 the Native Sons of the Golden West held a memorial service to "honor its dead" (presumably from the earthquake and fire) in the synagogue, at which Rabbi Nieto spoke.

### **SUPERIOR COURTS IN THE SYNAGOGUE — THE GRAFT TRIALS**

From 24 April 1906 to 28 February 1908, a substantial portion of the work of the Superior Court of the City and County of San Francisco was held at Temple Sherith Israel. There were other courts in the city, but the most important and most complex local cases were held in Superior Court. Out of a total of twelve departments — each department was headed by a judge and each judge had his own court room and chambers — eight were initially located in Temple Sherith Israel, with the number diminishing over time as departments moved out.

The Superior Court heard a wide variety of cases at Temple Sherith Israel including divorces, insurance cases, and murder. In May 1906, the Grand Jury met "in the court room of Judge Thomas Graham in Temple Israel . . . many municipal matters demanding attention will come up for consideration." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 5 May 1906) From April to October 1906, the Superior Courts in Temple Sherith Israel were full of the ordinary cases of the city. But the cases that are best known and that have had the largest lasting effect are several of a number of cases collectively known as the Graft Prosecution or the Graft Trials, the first phases of which began in October 1906. Deliberations at that time of the second Grand Jury held in Temple Sherith Israel and the trials that followed the Grand Jury's indictments were held at Sherith Israel until courts moved out of the building in February 1908. At that time, some trials had been completed, some were in progress and would be completed elsewhere, and others had not yet begun.

The Graft Trials were an outgrowth of the city's politics in the years since "the great strike in the summer of 1901" which was broken by the police. (Rawls and Bean 1998: 249) Following this event "San Francisco's work force became one of the most unionized in the nation." (Cherny and Issel 1981: 44) The newly energized labor voters elected a Union Labor Party mayor — Eugene Schmitz — in the next three elections, 1901, 1903, and 1905. The organizer of Schmitz's success was Abe Ruef, a lawyer who had begun his career as a reformer, but had learned to manipulate the political process for his own benefit as an advisor to the mayor. The labor-supporting electorate was also manipulated; their role was largely to put Ruef in a position of power. "Attorney Abraham Ruef provided 'access' to Mayor Schmitz and the supervisors for a substantial legal fee. That access was essential for anyone seeking city contracts, favorable rates, and utility franchises, or protection from the police. Such favoritism provided opportunities for those seeking to develop land in the southern and western reaches of the city. With each subsequent election, the Schmitz-Ruef machine grew more boldly corrupt." (Brechtin 1999: 188)

In his first two terms, Schmitz was supported by a minority of supervisors (the Board of Supervisors was San Francisco's version of a city council), but in his third term all eighteen supervisors were also members of the Union Labor Party — not so much because of increased support for the ULP as because of confusion resulting from the first use of voting machines in San Francisco. This set the stage for corruption on a much greater scale. Prior to this time, Ruef characteristically received payments from French restaurants seeking liquor licenses: "The term 'French restaurant' then had a special connotation in San Francisco. On the first floor there was a conventional restaurant serving excellent food at moderate

prices, but on the second floor there were private supper bedrooms and the upper floors were houses of prostitution." (Rawls and Bean 1998: 252)

After the election of 1905, corruption escalated to a much larger scale involving major corporations, notably United Railroads, a builder and operator of streetcar lines in association with real estate investment; Pacific Gas & Electric Company, the city's largest utility; and Pacific Telephone, at that time engaged in a fight for dominance with Home Telephone.

By the time of the earthquake on 18 April 1906, reformers were already organizing to expose this corruption. The reformers were led by the editor of the *San Francisco Call*, Fremont Older; James D. Phelan, a wealthy former mayor; and "the millionaire capitalist Rudolf Spreckels" . . . Older persuaded President Theodore Roosevelt to lend the services of the federal government's ablest prosecutor, Francis J. Heney, and also of its star detective, William J. Burns, who was the head of the Secret Service of the Treasury Department. Heney was appointed assistant district attorney of San Francisco." (Rawls and Bean 1998: 252)

In June 1906, Burns began the investigation of corruption. In October 1906, the investigation was formalized with the seating of a new Grand Jury in Temple Sherith Israel. Indictments were soon brought against Ruef and Schmitz for bribery schemes involving French restaurants. The 1907 trials in the synagogue on these charges — which were relatively minor — resulted in confessions from most of the supervisors, Schmitz, and Ruef in exchange for immunity to provide evidence against corporate officials who paid bribes in the more important cases. Schmitz was convicted and removed from his position as mayor in June 1907 in a trial that was moved to the Bush Street temple of congregation Ohabai Shalome. (Thomas 1962: 248) Although tried elsewhere, Schmitz was sentenced at Sherith Israel where "a large crowd filled the Sunday School of the temple." (*San Francisco Call* 9 July 1907) "Ruef confessed at length to having used his influence in return for cash . . . Ruef's testimony led to indictments against twelve of the city's leading businessmen." (Cherny and Issel 1981: 45)

Of these twelve, the trials of at least two were held from start to finish in Temple Sherith Israel. Louis Glass, "vice president and general manager of the Pacific States Telephone Company" was convicted of paying bribes in the first of the graft trials. He was the only one of the corporate executives convicted and his conviction was later overturned. Glass was mostly tried in "the big auditorium of the Temple Israel" (*San Francisco Call* 9 July 1907), but like the others, appears to have moved to different rooms at times.

Newspaper accounts of the trial (and all the other trials and proceedings) included colorful descriptions of scenes in and around the synagogue. For example, describing events in one of the ground floor rooms along Webster Street: "In Judge Dunne's courtroom in the Temple Israel, occupied by Judge Lawlor during the evening session, the scene was a dramatic one. While assistant District Attorney Heney was delivering his closing argument the room was thronged with a solid wedge of men and women straining to catch his every utterance. Not a seat was vacant. The aisles were packed. Through the transom over the door several women perched on a ladder, were peeping, and over the edge of the windows opening on Webster street protruded the heads of men clinging to the outer window sill." (*San Francisco Call* 31 August 1907) And, at Glass's sentencing: "The scene in the great auditorium of the Temple Israel was deeply impressive while the final scene in the tragedy of Louis Glass was being enacted. The usually brilliantly lighted room was in semidarkness, not a light showing except the single bulb which shed a glow over Judge Lawlor's desk, and the somberness was heightened by the great wooden screen thrown before one of the large cathedral windows by workmen who are placing new glass in the frame. The tap-tap of the workmen's hammers was the only sound which broke the intense stillness of the auditorium when the defendant and his attorneys, Delmas, Coogan, and McPike slipped into the seats before the bar . . ." (*San Francisco Call* 5 September 1907)

The next trial to be completed in Temple Sherith Israel was that of Tiry L. Ford, general counsel for United Railroads. As numerous commentators had written, public enthusiasm and sentiment in the newspapers changed during the course of the trials. When the "bribe takers" were on trial, there was little sympathy for them. However, when the "bribe-givers" — all corporate executives and pillars of the community — were on trial, elite segments of the population and many of the



newspapers turned against the prosecution. Thus, Ford and all the rest were freed. The excitement over Ford's fate was captured by the *Call*: "Until nearly midnight last night several hundred people waited in the streets surrounding the Temple Israel for the verdict of the jury in the Ford trial, which was expected momentarily." (*San Francisco Call* 5 October 1907)

In addition to the trials themselves, there were numerous other proceedings related to them: In the last few weeks before the courts moved out of Temple Sherith Israel for example, were two hearings that epitomize the period of the graft trials in the synagogue. In one, "an array of graft notables" and their attorneys and two judges, prosecutors, investigators, and witnesses were all present, including Ruef and Schmitz, moved to a smaller room from the auditorium because of religious services: "The very atmosphere of the place reeked of sensation, but nothing happened." (*San Francisco Call* 26 January 1908) Later, there was another in a long series of hearings that delayed Abe Ruef's trials and prolonged them once they started, this one having to do with the issue of his immunity from prosecution. (*San Francisco Chronicle* 15 February 1908) Rabbi Nieto had just previously published an article describing his role in negotiating an immunity agreement for Ruef in numerous conversations with him, in an emotional meeting with Ruef's parents who were member of Congregation Sherith Israel, and in meetings with the investigators, the prosecutors, and each of the judges. (Nieto 1908)

After the graft trials moved out of Temple Sherith Israel, they continued until an anti-prosecution district attorney was elected to office in 1909. The trials appeared to change more than they did. They succeeded in sending Ruef to prison, removing the mayor, and replacing the corrupt government with new officials aligned with proposals for reform. They also inspired other cities to prosecute graft (Los Angeles) and enact reforms (Sacramento, Palo Alto, Santa Barbara). (Caughey 1940: 508-509) At the same time, lasting reforms in San Francisco were not achieved. (Brechin 1999: 190)

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT, CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURE

### JEWISH ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTURE IN SAN FRANCISCO

None of the earliest synagogues in San Francisco were designed by Jewish architects — in fact, no Jewish architects are known to have been in San Francisco until after 1890. The first two synagogues were both built near each other in 1854, on the north side of Broadway in what is now called North Beach. The synagogue on Stockton Street between Broadway and Vallejo for Congregation Sherith Israel, a 400-seat brick building with Gothic details, was designed by Miner F. Butler. The synagogue on Broadway between Powell and Mason streets for Congregation Emanu-El, an 800-seat brick building with Gothic details, was designed by Craine & England, architects of St. Mary's Cathedral at California and Grant. The exterior designs of both synagogues were barely distinguishable from churches and represented an effort to blend in.

Nothing is known about the early synagogues of Congregation Beth Israel which was established in 1860, except that it was first located on Sutter near Stockton Street.

In 1865-1866, Congregation Emanu-El built a new synagogue at 450 Sutter Street. This was designed by William Patton, architect of the First Unitarian Church and the first synagogue of Ohabai Shalome: "Both were designed in the familiar style of a Gothic Church," Patton having been a student of "the most famous Gothic Revivalist of the time, Sir Gilbert Scott" (Kaufman 2003: 45) The new synagogue for Congregation Emanu-El was a large and prominent building that combined stylistic elements from Gothic and Byzantine architecture, notably its pair of towers with onion domes. The appearance of this building was a confident assertion of the important role of Jews in San Francisco, and also a measure of their acceptance.

In 1870, Congregation Sherith Israel moved to a new synagogue at the northeast corner of Post and Taylor streets designed by Eisen & Schmidt. (Meyer 1915: 48) This was in the Gothic Revival style and was similar in appearance to a church. A drawing made about 1896 showed a fan vaulted ceiling in this synagogue characteristic of the Gothic Revival. (Congregation Sherith Israel 1870: Souvenir Program of the Library Fund)

In 1892, Congregation Chevra Thillin was established. Nothing is known about its early synagogues.

In 1895, Congregation Ohabai Shalome built a large and striking new synagogue at 1381 Bush Street, designed by Moses J. Lyon, a Jewish architect — perhaps the first in San Francisco. This was the first synagogue known to have been designed by a Jewish architect in San Francisco. Lyon was only 26 years old at the time he designed the building and had previously worked for Willis Polk. The previous year he had designed a large shingled apartment building on Van Ness Avenue. Later he was in the news for his strong pro-labor politics. (*San Francisco Chronicle* 16 February 1910) Temple Ohabai Shalome was an exotic looking structure that combined elements of Romanesque, Moorish, and Venetian architecture, a characteristic effort of the time to find an appropriate style for a synagogue. With its twin towers and assertion of its Jewish identity, this building followed the example of Temple Emanu-El on Sutter Street.

When Congregation Sherith Israel chose an architect for its new synagogue in 1902, the Committee on Architecture began conversations with six prominent architectural offices in San Francisco. Of the two partnerships — Bliss & Faville and the Reid Brothers — and four individual practitioners — Clinton Day, Julius E. Kraft, George A. Wright, and Albert Pissis — none of the principals were Jewish although a Jewish draftsman, Bernard Joseph, worked for Julius E. Kraft.

Apart from any other considerations, a Jewish architect would be more familiar with the design, appearance, and traditions of synagogues. It is not known why Moses J. Lyon wasn't consulted. Perhaps his association with another congregation and his exotic design for that congregation's synagogue were not appealing to the Committee on Architecture at Congregation Sherith Israel, which would ultimately choose a design that was far more restrained.

Among other Jewish architects in that era, only one, Sylvain Schnaittacher, had his own practice at the time. Schnaittacher was only 28 years old in 1902, but he had received his license to practice architecture the previous year, in 1901. Later, Schnaittacher designed the Argonaut Club, a Jewish club on Powell Street. He was also part of the team of architects who designed the new Temple Emanu-El at Arguello and Lake in 1924. (*Architect & Engineer* 1926)

Three others who would soon come to prominence were still in school or working with others. G. Albert Lansburgh was at the École des Beaux Arts; Albert Henry Jacobs was at M.I.T.; and Bernard J. Joseph was working for Julius E. Kraft.

Lansburgh was orphaned as a child; his guardian was Rabbi Voorsanger at Temple Emanu-El. After the earthquake of 1906, he designed a new synagogue for Emanu-El at Sutter and Van Ness. When this was not built, he designed renovations for the synagogue in the surviving shell of the old building. Later he designed the Concordia Club, another Jewish Club, and the B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge in San Francisco. He was best known as a theater architect who designed theaters for the Orpheum chain all over the country, which was run by his brother. He was also one of the architects of the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco. (Stern and Kramer 1981)

After graduating from M.I.T. and studying at the École des Beaux Arts, Jacobs opened his own practice in 1909. During his career he designed the Religious School House for Congregation Emanu-El at 1337 Sutter Street in 1910; Homewood Terrace for the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum in 1920; and a memorial for the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum at the Home of Peace Cemetery in Colma. Jacobs also designed several theaters (Jacobs 2009)

Bernard Joseph was working as a draftsman, perhaps completing his apprenticeship to Julius E. Kraft to whom "he gives most of the credit for his technical knowledge." (Brown & Power 1910) Joseph practiced in partnership for many years with Lansburgh.

## DESIGNERS AND BUILDERS

### Albert Pissis, Architect

Albert Pissis (1852-1914), architect of Temple Sherith Israel, was one of San Francisco's leading architects from the late 1880s until his death in 1914, a period that included the post-1906 reconstruction boom when the character of much of the city was established. A student of Julien Guadet at the École des Beaux-Arts, Pissis had a rigorous training from one of the most influential architectural theorists of his day. According to a critical review of his work in 1909, five years after the completion of Temple Sherith Israel, he was "an architect who has been responsible for more graceful, dignified, and well-

planned structures on the streets of San Francisco than any single practitioner in the Bay City." (Architect and Engineer 1909: 35)

In addition to his skill as a designer, Pissis was a member of a prominent family, a leader in professional activities, a successful businessman who was reputed to be the richest architect in San Francisco at his death, and he had a life-long commitment to architectural education. He was also socially adept — a member of establishment clubs and at the same time active in French, Latin American, and Jewish business and social circles. Pissis was the embodiment of the cosmopolitan San Franciscan of his era.

Albert Pissis was born on the coast of the Gulf of California, in Guaymas, Mexico in 1852. (*San Francisco Examiner* 6 July 1914) His father, Joseph (or Jose) Etienne Pissis, was a physician born in France who may have been among many French who came first to California in the Gold Rush and then went to Sonora when gold and silver were discovered there. (Chalmers 2007: 43) His mother, Juana Bazozabal de Bustamente (California 1940), was born in Mexico. Albert was the oldest of five children, followed by Emile, Margaret, Marie, and Eugene. (U.S. Census 1870, 1880) When Albert was six, in 1858, the family moved to San Francisco.

In San Francisco, the Pissis family was part of the large and active French community — the largest foreign-born group in San Francisco in the 1850s. (Nelson 1986: 17-21) Albert's father's investments and income as a physician meant advantages in the education of the children. According to the 1860 census, he owned real estate worth \$90,000 at that time, and he was among the relatively few in San Francisco who earned enough to be subject to a federal income tax during the Civil War. (United States 1863; United States 1864) Albert probably attended a French language elementary school in San Francisco where his brother, Emile, went. (Raguin 2005: 3) Thus, Albert grew up with three languages — Spanish, French, and English.

Presumably through connections in the French-speaking community, in 1871 when he was nineteen, Pissis went to work for William Mooser, Sr., a Swiss-born architect trained in Geneva. (Parry 2001) On Mooser's advice, Pissis went to Paris to study architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the leading school of architecture in the world. He was admitted to the atelier of Julien Guadet as a student of the second class 17 August 1872, and advanced to the first class 5 November 1874. Pissis had an "exceptional" record and progressed quickly through his course of studies — he finished in 1875, before the Ecole began granting diplomas. (Nelson 1986: 41)

Pissis' teacher, Julien Guadet (1834-1908) was one of the most influential teachers at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at first through lectures that Pissis would have attended and later through his book *Les Elements et Theorie d'Architecture* (1901-1909). Following his years as patron of an atelier where he taught Pissis and many others, "As Professor of Theory from 1894 to his death . . . , Guadet essentially directed the architectural education of the Ecole. Through his *Elements* he influenced a far larger audience, particularly Americans." (Nelson 1986: 37)

Guadet first came to prominence as a student radical leader advocating classicism and artistic freedom. He won the Grand Prix de Rome in 1864 with a design for *Un Hospice dans les Alpes*. (Drexler 1977: 254-257)

This project bears an interesting comparison to Pissis' Temple Sherith Israel. Both Guadet and Pissis were primarily classicists yet the Hospice and the synagogue were treated in a similar round-arched style. The chapel in the Hospice and the synagogue both had round-arched entrances below a rose window. The facades were articulated horizontally and vertically to express interior spaces and functions through proportions. And, contrasting with monochromatic stone exteriors, the interiors were brilliantly colored in a manner inspired by Byzantine architecture.

Guadet's principles of design have been summarized as follows: "The program demands that a composition be constructible; it must be faithful to the materials used; it must have light and air; the decoration should be integral and not applied; the circulation must be logical; the composition must be . . . functional and utilitarian." Also, beauty "is accomplished through the art of composition" and "composition begins with the plan." Finally, "Beauty is also achieved



through proportions" and "the key to the proportion . . . composition and beauty is to be found in the great monuments of the past." Guadet's teaching resulted in architecture characterized by a "combination of Beaux Arts planning and composition with an increasing eclecticism in the use of various appropriate historic and modern styles." (Nelson 1986: 33, 38-41)

For most of his time in Paris, Pissis lived with his brother, Emile, who was there studying art. It was a charged time in Paris following the failed revolution and war with Germany of 1870-1871. For an architect in particular it was a time both of great change and creation. The Paris Opera and the Bibliothèque Nationale were both completed in 1875. Haussmann's plan was under construction and largely finished by 1876 providing the framework on which Paris developed as the most emulated city in the world over the next several decades. After Paris, Pissis traveled to Rome and "throughout the leading cities of the Continent." (Davis 1911)

By February of 1878, Pissis had returned to the longtime family home at 825 Mission Street in San Francisco where, according to the 1880 census when he was twenty-eight years old, he lived with his parents and all his siblings.

He worked again for William Mooser in 1879-1880 at 302 Montgomery Street. Then in 1881, he opened his own office at 217 Sansome Street; there he may have first met Jacob B. Reinstein, a Jewish attorney of about the same age, who also had an office in the building and who would later play an important role in Pissis' career. In his dissertation on Pissis, Christopher Nelson characterized Pissis' first clients as primarily either French or Jewish, which lead to much additional work in both communities for the duration of his career. For example, in 1882 he worked on "alterations to the French Bank at 534 California Street" and for other French clients. In addition, he designed a house for JKK Nuttall, a partner in the brokerage business of Nuttall & Hellman, at 1602 Taylor Street: "Nuttall was . . . a prominent member of San Francisco's Jewish community. One of the sons married a daughter of Samuel Rosenstock, whose wife belonged to the Leventritt family. Pissis later designed buildings for all of three of these families, suggesting an early and important connection with the city's Jewish community." (Nelson 1986: 72)

In these early years of his practice, Pissis followed his father's example and went into various kinds of businesses in addition to practicing his profession. In 1884, he became a director of the French Mutual Provident Savings & Loan Society, a position that built upon his existing ties to the French community and that initiated an important relationship with the city's banking industry.

In 1884-1885, Pissis invested in, designed, and managed after its opening, The Panorama Building at the southwest corner of Eddy and Mason streets. A type of building that was popular in France and elsewhere in Europe when Pissis was there, a panorama was an attraction that mixed art and entertainment, and in this case was also highly profitable for its investors. The Panorama Building was a large structure that filled a fifty-vara lot. With an iron frame enclosed in fifty-foot high brick walls, and a skylit dome, the building provided a raised central platform for viewing an immense circular painting of the Battle of Waterloo by two French artists. (California Panorama Company 1885)

Also in these early years, Pissis laid the foundation for extensive professional activities that would be a vehicle for his influence on California architecture throughout his career. These activities would also contribute to his growing reputation among potential clients. In 1882, Pissis was among the earliest members of the newly formed San Francisco chapter of the American Institute of Architects (A.I.A.). In 1883, Pissis presented a paper on architectural education at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and taught a class on "practical architecture" at the A.I.A., both early instances of a life-long interest in architectural education. In 1884, he served as vice-president of the A.I.A. (Nelson 1986: 68-71)

From 1885 to 1898, Pissis practiced in partnership with William P. Moore in the firm of Pissis & Moore. William Payne Moore (1847-1902) came to San Francisco from Liverpool in 1869 when he was twenty-two. He worked for Kenitzer & Raun and on his own before joining Pissis. The partnership was dissolved in December 1898 when Moore retired because of poor health. (Robins 1964) The firm continued at 217 Sansome Street until 1889 when they moved to 307 Sansome Street.

Pissis & Moore continued working for the French and Jewish communities designing houses and commercial buildings. For Jewish clients for example, they designed a house at Clay and Franklin streets for Philip N. Lillenthal, an influential Jewish banker. In 1897, they designed the American Exchange for Jacob Stern at 325 Sansome Street, and bronze work for the Rothschild bank on California near Leidsdorff. (Nelson 1986: 80, 121-123)

Pissis' working relationship with the French community continued in large and small ways. For example, in the 1890s, Pissis was the consulting architect to the building committee for a new building of the French Hospital. In 1886, he designed an addition to Notre Dame des Victoires on Bush Street, the church of the French Catholic community. This also appears to have been Pissis' first ecclesiastical commission. (Nelson 1986: 128)

Interestingly, there appears to have been substantial intermingling between members of Pissis' two core client groups, French and Jews. In 1890, for example, Pissis and five other Frenchmen were pall bearers for the Jewish insurance man, Leon Weill, at Temple Emanu-El. In the same year, the executive committee for the annual ball of the Cercle Francais included Albert Pissis and three with Jewish names. (*San Francisco Call* 30 November 1890) In 1891, an event of the San Francisco Art Association was attended by Albert Pissis and many others with French and Jewish names. (*San Francisco Call* 8 May 1891) Similarly, subscribers to an 1895 exhibition at the Mark Hopkins Institute included the Pissis brothers and many others with French and Jewish names. (*San Francisco Call* 29 May 1895)

In this period, Pissis & Moore also designed houses for a third special group — wealthy Latin Americans. In 1896, they designed a stone mansion at 1825 Sacramento Street near Van Ness for J. Zenon Posadas. Posadas, who minted his own coins (geocities.com), was "owner of a large coffee plantation in Guatemala," and was "supposed to keep an eye on the machinations of the revolutionists who find it safer to plot in San Francisco than in Guatemala." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 21 September 1899) In 1898, they designed a house at 1297 Taylor Street near Washington Street for Wenceslao Loaiza, the Argentine Consul. Albert Pissis' brother Eugene was president of W. Loaiza & Co. Merchants. The company "controlled at one time practically all the importing [of coffee] from Mexican and South American ports." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 21 October 1940) The Loaiza's traveled to Guaymas, Mexico both for business and pleasure, raising the possibility that they had known the Pissis family there.

However, after Moore joined the partnership the firm's universe of clients and the scale and prominence of its work increased considerably. Most notably, Pissis & Moore designed the Hibernia Bank in 1888 at Jones and McAllister streets, and the Parrott Building in 1896, better known as The Emporium, on Market Street. Another example of the new social stature of their clients was a commission for the Bohemian Club, of which Pissis was a member, at the northwest corner of Grant and Post streets in 1893.

The Hibernia Bank, owned by the socially prominent Tobin family, was a pivotal work not only for Pissis & Moore, but in the long career of Albert Pissis. Before that he was well regarded but none of his buildings were well-known by the public (like the Panorama Building) and also critically acclaimed. Willis Polk was the first influential architect to praise the Hibernia Bank highly, calling it "the most artistic building in San Francisco." (Nelson 1986: 97-98) After the Hibernia Bank, Pissis was always considered one of the leading architects of San Francisco.

Two of the notable features of the Hibernia Bank were its prominent dome (at the entrance corner) and its stained glass, features also present in different ways in the Emporium. Built for a pioneer San Francisco family that was already long associated with notable architecture in San Francisco — since Parrotts Granite Block of 1852 — it included a large central skylit domed interior space on an iron frame. Both buildings were also in the image of monumental classicism popularly associated with the teachings of the Ecoles des Beaux-Art and with the famous Chicago World's Fair of 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition, which followed the design of the Hibernia Bank by several years.

Pissis & Moore also designed more ordinary buildings for clients of all types. Among these were two houses of 1885 in the same block where Temple Sherith Israel would later be built. At 2002 California Street they designed a house for Dr. R.I. Bowie (which has been somewhat altered). At 2226 California Street they designed a house for William Vale, now City Landmark No. 168.

In this period, Pissis continued his professional activities. In 1886, he joined the national organization of the A.I.A. and became a fellow (F.A.I.A.). In 1887, he served as president and trustee of the San Francisco A.I.A. (In the same period, William Moore served as vice-president of the local A.I.A. in 1887-1889 and 1895-1896.) In 1889, Pissis taught classes at the Architectural League.

Several of Pissis' most successful professional associations were in collaboration with his former office neighbor and Regent of the University of California, Jacob G. Reinstein. In 1896, Pissis was appointed to a three-person committee to judge plans presented to the Regents of the University of California for "the Affiliated Colleges," whose most active members on this issue were Reinstein and California Governor James H. Budd. About 1895, Pissis participated in the early stages of the development of what would become known as the Phoebe Hearst plan for the University of California with his current and former office neighbors, Bernard Maybeck and Jacob Reinstein. The idea for the plan began with Maybeck; Reinstein was the leading force for the plan among the Regents; and Phoebe Hearst funded the plan. Pissis directed Maybeck toward his former teacher, Julien Guadet, in Paris, to write the program for the competition. (*San Francisco Call* 9 February 1896; *San Francisco Call* 20 February 1896; Nelson 1986: 29)

In an action that combined his professional and investment interests, in 1889 Pissis became a director of the California Architectural Publishing Company which then bought the leading regional architectural publication, the *California Architect and Building News*. (Nelson 1986: 71) Other investments included a factory and warehouse on Main near Mission Street designed by Pissis for his mother's estate in 1893; and a rental property for his brother Emile at Taylor and Pleasant streets in 1895. (Snyder 1975)

In 1889, Pissis & Moore moved from Pissis' long-time office at 217 Sansome to 307 Sansome Street, perhaps to larger quarters at a time when his office was busy with construction that was beginning on the Hibernia Bank and with many other projects. Little else is known about the size or organization of the office at that time except that Loring P. Rixford worked there from 1894-1896 and Louis Stone was there in the 1890s. Stone later had a successful practice in the firm of Stone & Smith, known especially for their hillside apartment buildings. Rixford was a member of a prominent family of artists, like Pissis; he graduated from the University of California in 1894, worked for Pissis while he studied architecture under Maybeck at the Mark Hopkins Institute, studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts under Victor Laloux from 1899-1901 (overlapping with Arthur Brown, Jr.), and opened his own practice in San Francisco in 1902.

In this period, Pissis continued to live with his family at 825 Mission Street. His father died sometime between 1880 and 1889, and in 1889, he moved with his mother and brother Eugene, an officer in a printing company, to 1709 California Street. In 1891, Pissis traveled to Europe, the first time he is known to have gone since returning from his studies in the 1870s.

After Moore retired, Pissis practiced without a partner until his death in 1914. However, he depended on capable young architects, some of whom he helped train, to whom he appears to have given substantial responsibility. Chief among these was Morris M. Bruce (1868-1942) who took over the practice when Pissis died.

In 1895-1896, Bruce had worked for A.C. Schweinfurth in San Francisco on two projects for William Randolph Hearst — the Hacienda del Pozo de Verona near Sunol, Alameda County and on the Examiner Building on Market Street in San Francisco. Then, he worked for Ernest Flagg in New York when Flagg was designing the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. He also worked briefly for Tharp & Holmes — Tharp was later a highly regarded City Architect of San Francisco, and Holmes was a prominent engineer best known for his design of the foundation of A. Page Brown's Ferry Building — in San Francisco before joining Pissis in 1899. During his years with Pissis, Bruce worked on the Mechanics' Institute, the Flood Building, the Mercantile Trust, the reconstruction of the Hibernia Bank, and the Stanford Medical Library. (Withey 1970: 84) It is not known if he was involved with Temple Sherith Israel.

Also in this period, Clarkson M. Swain worked in the office for thirteen years and Loring P. Rixford returned from his studies in Paris to work in the office again in 1901 and 1902. In 1907, Rixford was elected to the Board of Supervisors on



the reform slate after the beginning of the graft prosecution and in 1909, he worked as City Architect, a period when his city positions may have been helpful to Pissis.

Pissis kept his office at 307 Sansome Street until it was destroyed in 1906. Among other architects with offices in the same building were French natives Jules Godart and Auguste Francis Xavier Lourdou, and former student at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Bernard Maybeck.

In this period, Pissis was involved in the early planning for what became known as the Burnham Plan for San Francisco. In 1899, the San Francisco Art Association asked the mayor to appoint "a committee to draft a comprehensive plan for the adornment of San Francisco"; the committee would include Pissis, Reinstein, and seven others. (*San Francisco Call* 4 January 1899)

Also in 1899, Pissis joined the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects in New York (Levy 1905: 495) an organization involved with the education of architects in the Beaux-Arts system. In 1900, he was appointed to a three-person jury for the Oakland Library Competition. (*San Francisco Chronicle* 11 March 1900)

In his personal life, Pissis had lived with his parents and helped care for them in the family homes at 825 Mission Street and 1709 California Street. His father died in the 1880s and his mother died about 1892-1893. Albert and Emile continued to live at 1709 California Street after their mother's death.

In 1905, a few months after completion of Temple Sherith Israel, Pissis married for the first time, at the age of 53. Pissis' wife was Georgia Parquer Stein (1875-1930), recently divorced from Max Stein, a Jewish sign painter active in the Turn Verein. The Stein's daughter, Ethel (born 1893), was adopted by Pissis and was his only child. After a lengthy "bridal tour," Albert, Georgia, and Ethel moved into the Palace Hotel in September 1905. At the time of the earthquake, they were listed as residents of the family home at 1709 California Street.

After William P. Moore retired, Pissis' practice continued to prosper as it had during the partnership. From 1899 to 1906, Pissis continued to work for French and Jewish clients as well as for the new downtown business interests and others that came into the practice during the partnership. Indeed, in these years the distinction between projects for French and Jewish clients and those for downtown business interests was increasingly blurred.

In 1899, he began work on St. Matthew's Church in San Mateo for the Roman Catholic Archbishop; this had a large, highly decorated interior with stained glass windows. In 1900, he designed a large office building, the Callaghan Building on Market Street, near City Hall. In 1901, he began work on St. Rose Academy at Pine and Pierce, on the immense Flood Building at Powell and Market streets and on the President's House on the campus of the University of California in Berkeley. In 1902, he began work on St. Anne's Home, a home for the aged on Lake Street for the Little Sisters of the Poor, a French Catholic order, including a chapel.

Among his projects for Jewish clients in this period were the Vulcan Iron Works for Louis Sloss, Jr. in 1900; a building for Marion Leventritt on Geary west of Grant in 1902; the Sloss and Rosenstock mausoleums; the Jacob Stern Building on Battery Street; and Temple Sherith Israel begun in 1903.

The period when Temple Sherith Israel was being design and built, from September 1902 to October 1905, provides a resume of Pissis' career. The clients for his three major projects of the time were French (Little Sisters of the Poor), downtown business elite (Flood Building), and Jewish (Congregation Sherith Israel). They represented a spectrum of building types — a home for the aged, an office building, and a synagogue. They represented a diversity of styles — Georgian Revival, Neo-Classical, and Byzantine-Romanesque. As different as they were, however, they also represented a consistency of approach based on Beaux-Arts teaching. The plan and appearance of each building was designed for its purpose and its context; the style of each was chosen for its appropriateness to a particular place and situation. In each case, the materials were chosen for their architectural qualities rather than their cost — they were all expensive. And in each case, their realization called for the contributions of skilled artists and crafts persons. While Pissis is best know for



his monumental Neo-classical buildings — the Hibernia Bank, the Emporium, and the Flood Building — his accomplishments as an architect can only be represented by a diversity of his buildings.

The devastating earthquake of 18 April 1906 and the fire that followed destroyed Pissis' home, his office, and his business records, and many buildings he had designed in the fire zone, including the Callaghan Building, the Wenban Building (formerly the Bohemian Club), the Mercantile Trust Company, the Alliance Building, Marchand's Restaurant, Delmonicos, the Wilcox Building, the Savoy Hotel, the Howland Apartments, the Jacob Stern Building, the Levi Strauss Building, the Miller Sloss and Scott Building, and the Hotel Terminus, most of which were illustrated in a long review of Pissis' work in the *American Builders Review* three months before the earthquake. (Cahill 1906: 1-37) As disastrous as this was, however, three of Pissis' most conspicuous buildings although gutted by fire, at least partly survived — the Hibernia Bank, the Flood Building, and the Emporium. The Flood Building, the largest building in San Francisco, together with the monumental surviving front facade of the Emporium standing across the street, were a particularly powerful image of good construction surrounded by almost total devastation.

Pissis' well-documented design of the Flood Building with its "very heavy and strong" steel frame suggests that he approached his responsibilities for the structure of his buildings conservatively, even though the design "lacks earthquake-resistant features." (Tobriner 2006: 94) No doubt this was because, like most architects of his era, he didn't understand that they were needed. His overbuilding, rather than his structural sophistication, appears to have saved the Flood Building.

The best testament to Pissis' solid conservative construction, was Temple Sherith Israel which survived the earthquake with very little damage. Located outside of the fire zone, it was said to have the largest interior in the city to survive. Also surviving outside the fire zone were his massive brick Cotton Mill of 1879, St. Rose Academy, and St. Anne's Home of the Little Sisters of the Poor in San Francisco. Many of his houses, cemetery works, St. Matthew's Church in San Mateo, and the President's House at the University of California in Berkeley also survived.

The few years after the earthquake were a frenzied period of design and construction for San Francisco architects in general including Pissis. Another long review of his work, this one in *The Architect and Engineer* in January 1909, almost three years after the earthquake, illustrated his major works during this period. The Flood Building (he moved his office to the top floor by 1907), the Emporium, the Hibernia Bank were, to varying degrees, rebuilt. In addition, the California Casket Company Building on Mission Street and the Levi Strauss Co. factory on Valencia Street which were under construction at the time were repaired and completed.

New downtown buildings for Jewish clients in this period designed by Pissis included the Rosenstock Building, the Roos Brothers Building, the Sutro Building, the Heyman-Weil Building, the Haas Brothers Building, the Liebes Building, the Marion Building, the Simon Building, and the Nuttall Building.

New downtown buildings for French clients were the Roullier Building, the Antoine Borel Bank, and the Rochat-Cordes Building. And, new downtown buildings for French Jews were the Roos Brothers Department Store, the White House Department Store, and the London-Paris National Bank.

In addition, Pissis designed the Mercantile Trust Building, the W.P. Fuller Building, the Misses Butler Building, and the Mechanic's Institute.

After the crisis period of reconstruction, Pissis' career appears to have slowed considerably. In 1910, he designed a "Great Hippodrome" for Market and Twelfth streets, a huge Romanesque Style structure that would function as a convention center, theater, and exposition building with 18,000 seats. It was never built. As part of the effort, "An expert in construction" was planned "to be sent East to inspect and report on the latest buildings of the kind, with the purpose of embodying the most recent improvements in the Hippodrome scheme." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 3 April 1910) This is the only known evidence about Pissis' engineering designs, suggesting that he hired outside experts for his largest and most complicated buildings — including the Flood Building, the Emporium, and Temple Sherith Israel.

His most prominent building after 1909 was the Lane Medical Library of 1912 in the same block as Temple Israel at the southeast corner of Webster and California streets.

While most of his post-fire buildings were plain commercial buildings, the Mechanic's Institute and the Lane Medical Library were clad in sandstone and incorporated artwork; both had murals by Arthur F. Methews. Although stone had not performed well in the fire, Pissis — and few others — continued to use it. Even several of his commercial buildings were faced in stone.

Perhaps freed by his wealth, Pissis spent a great deal of time on professional activities after the earthquake and especially after about 1909. In a time of crisis, he served again as president of the San Francisco chapter of the A.I.A. from 1907 to 1909, as a trustee of the A.I.A., and on the Fine Arts and City Adornment Committee — in this role he was Chairman of a blue-ribbon group that also included John Galen Howard, William B. Faville, Willis Polk, and Charles Peter Weeks.

In June 1908, Pissis was appointed to a committee with James Reid and John Galen Howard to advise the City of San Francisco on one of its most difficult and most important decisions — what to do with the old City Hall which was severely damaged in the earthquake and burned in the fire. In March 1909, the committee recommended demolishing City Hall, making way for the new Civic Center Plan and new City Hall.

Pissis was among the first architects involved in the planning of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (P.P.I.E.). In February 1910 he lead a group from the A.I.A. in approaching the Exposition Company with ideas at a time before the site had been chosen. In August 1911, Pissis was appointed to the Advisory Architectural Board for the Exposition, also including Willis Polk, Clarence R. Ward, John Galen Howard, and William Curlett.

Pissis had long been ambivalent about architectural competitions, a locally contentious issue over many years. His teacher, Guadet, was an international authority on competitions. The key project of his early career came from a competition for the Hibernia Bank, won by Pissis & Moore. In the early 1890s, he helped prepare a program for a competition for the French Hospital in San Francisco (Nelson 1986: 128) Pissis was involved in the early stages of the competition for the Phoebe Hearst Plan for the University of California, for which he recommended the participation of Guadet. After wavering, he declined to enter the competition for Temple Sherith Israel — and subsequently was offered the job. In 1908, he won a competition for the Pacific Union Club, but was not offered the job. In 1912-1913, in a complicated controversy over the allocation of work and the structure of competitions in the Civic Center, Pissis served as vice-president of a new organization, the San Francisco Society of Architects, in opposition to the local chapter of the A.I.A. (Woodbridge 2002: 121-128) In part, Pissis' group sought to limit the use of competitions. In 1914, in the competition for the Public Library in the new Civic Center, Pissis was disqualified. (Nelson 1986: 170)

After the earthquake, Pissis and his family lived at 1834 Gough Street in 1907, a house on the edge of the devastation, overlooking the ruins and rebuilding from a high point. In November 1908, he paid \$140,000 for a house at 2800 Pacific Avenue designed by Ernest Coxhead —a newsworthy purchase described by the *San Francisco Call* as "one of the largest real estate deals in the way of private residences that has taken place in the city for a long time." (*San Francisco Call* 22 November 1908) However, Pissis lived the rest of his life at the Hotel St. Francis, and never lived in the house. After the earthquake, Pissis continued investing, purchasing forty acres near Redwood City in 1909 with one of his brothers. (Nelson 1986: 16)

Pissis died at the St. Francis Hotel on 5 July 1914 of pneumonia. His funeral at Notre Dames des Victoires was attended by "Many of the leading architects of San Francisco, together with business and social associates . . . The pallbearers were Clinton Day, John Reid, Arthur Brown, Jr., James Walsh, John T. Mahoney, Morris Bruce, Leon Boqueraz, and Louis Bourgeois. He was buried in Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma. He left his fortune to his wife who traveled often to Europe; she later left what she hadn't spent to her daughter.

Numerous obituaries praised Pissis and his work. The *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, a publication of the national organization, summed up Pissis contribution by quoting an earlier article by B.J. Cahill: "the work of Albert Pissis

seems to me to be pre-eminent in San Francisco. I can think of no one else whose work is so uniformly excellent, whose buildings are so nicely toned to their varying character, use, and magnitude, and where the tone once established is so uniformly preserved; where proportion in all its shades of meaning is so generally pervasive; and when the grammar of classic design is so generally faultless." (American Institute of Architects 1914: 524)

For the same reasons that Cahill admired Pissis, later generations of architectural critics and historians have paid less attention to him than to some of his contemporaries. Pissis was a classicist who adhered to principals he learned as a student throughout his career. Cahill called attention to what he considered virtues — to his "refinement of style" and to "the straightforward and sane use of the plain recognized motives of classic architecture without any deliberate attempt at originality." (American Institute of Architects 1914: 522-523) Maybeck, Coxhead, and Polk on the other hand, have been praised for the opposite approach — for their originality. (Longstreth 1982)

### **Emile Pissis, Artist**

Emile M. Pissis (1854-1934), was a Paris-trained artist who participated in art events and organizations, and whose work was well-regarded but little seen. He made little attempt to show or sell his work and most of it was lost in 1906 and after his death. Nevertheless, on the basis of a prize-winning painting of 1897 and two surviving groups of work — nine watercolors of San Francisco in ruins after the earthquake and fire of 1906, now in the collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and eleven or more art glass windows of 1905 in Temple Sherith Israel, Pissis is remembered as a distinguished San Francisco artist of his time. (Hughes 2008)

Emile Pissis was born in Mexico, the younger brother of Albert Pissis, and moved to San Francisco with his family when he was four. He attended a French language elementary school in San Francisco. (Raquin 2005: 3) In 1871, at the age of 17, he was a co-founder of the San Francisco Art Association. (Hughes 2008; *San Francisco Chronicle* 11 June 1934) Later that year he went to Paris where he studied art "in public evening classes, in which he won a medal," and at the Academie Julian, at that time a liberal, private-school alternative to the Ecole des Beaux Arts where men and women were both admitted to a program built around life drawing classes. Pissis studied at the Academie Julian for four years and returned to San Francisco in 1876. (Nelson 1986: 106-107)

Apart from infrequent references in the newspapers, little is known about Pissis' career. Back in San Francisco, he worked as a clerk in firms importing wine and luxury goods from France. In 1879 he was "a teacher on the School Committee" of the San Francisco Art Association. Despite this activity, for many years, he considered his art a sideline, later stating: "[I] was in business for seventeen years and my artistic calling dates from 1889." (Nelson 1986: 106-107)

In 1889, he "was financially able to pursue exclusively his artistic interests. He immediately returned to Paris for three more years of study under Paul-Louis Delance (1848-1924), a student of Jean-Leon Gerome and winner of a bronze medal at the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition." (Nelson 1986: 107-108)

Like his brother, Albert, Emile lived much of his adult life in the family home with his parents and siblings. When he returned from his second period of art studies, he was accompanied by his mother and his sister, Marie, who evidently spent part of that time in Paris with him. (*New York Times* 19 September 1892) Then in 1895, Emile's brother Albert designed an expensive new residence for him at the corner of Taylor and Pleasant streets, just below the top of Nob Hill, where he would live by himself. (Snyder 1975: 400)

In April 1895, Emile Pissis represented the new School of Design at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art in negotiations with a committee of architects — Bernard Maybeck, Willis Polk, and George H. Sanders — to begin teaching architecture. (*San Francisco Call* 10 April 1895) In May 1895, Emile and Albert Pissis were both listed as subscribers to the annual exhibition at the Art Institute. (*San Francisco Call* 29 May 1895) In December, Emile was among eighteen artists who contributed sketches to a Christmas gift for Edward F. Searles, "in recognition of Mr. Searles work for the Art Institute." (*New York Times* 11 December 1895) Searles wife, 22 years his senior, was Mary Frances Sherwood who had inherited a fortune from her first husband, Mark Hopkins. Some of this money was redirected by Searles to the Art Institute.



In 1897, Emile placed third in the annual competition of the Mark Hopkins Institute behind Arthur F. Mathews and William Keith, for his oil painting of the Discovery of San Francisco Bay by Don Gaspar de Portola. (*San Francisco Call* 22 October 1909) Also in 1897, Emile designed "decorative panels" for the residence of Dr. A. Barkan on Laguna Street, designed by his brother Albert. (Nelson 1986: 108; Snyder 1975: 402)

In 1905, Emile designed most of the windows executed in art glass for Temple Sherith Israel, designed by his brother Albert. It is not known how many windows he designed or which ones, although he was paid \$1,500 for his work in 1906 and 1907. (*Minutes* 1907: 84, 100) He is credited with the design of the best known window, depicting Moses at Yosemite. (Raquin 2005: 2)

The earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed Emile Pissis' home on Nob Hill and almost all of his artwork, including the decorative panels in the Barkan residence. It also proved the inspiration for his new work — represented by nine watercolors of the ruins of San Francisco in 1906 now in the collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

In October 1909, his 1897 painting of Portola's Discovery of San Francisco Bay, which had survived the earthquake and fire of 1906, was displayed in the window of the *San Francisco Call* during the Portola Festival, a large civic celebration. (*San Francisco Call* 22 October 1909) It is now at the California Historical Society along with another large painting, "Ortega Cut Off from Point Reyes by Golden Gate."

In the 1920s, Emile wrote about himself and his career: "I do not seek fame, notoriety, nor pecuniary remuneration, feeling that I have done a little good in the development of art in California. Was a friend of Mezzarra, Narjot, Hill, Julian Rix, Clausserek, Bourg, and other old timers." (Nelson 1986: 108)

After his death, Eugene Gallois, Emile's brother-in-law recalled: "He was a bachelor, and liked to roam the Marin County Hills, fishing and hunting; and when he came across a beautiful scene, he painted it." He lived a comfortable life "in the luxurious studio on Nob Hill," (*San Francisco Chronicle* 11 June 1934) — rebuilt after 1906 — with the assistance of two French servants in 1910 and one African American servant in 1930. (U.S. Bureau of the Census)

His art work survived a fire in November 1933 in a building he owned next door at 1133-1141 Taylor Street: Emile "was forced to flee from his home on Pleasant Street adjoining the structure. He carried his valuable paintings from the house." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 11 November 1933)

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "He never sold a picture! He never tried to sell one. In fact, he expressly forbade selling them in verbal instructions to his brother-in-law . . ." In the living room of the apartment at 18 Pleasant Street . . . were piled and strewn haphazardly hundreds of the old painter's works. A few etchings, dozens and dozens of murals, mostly of Marin County scenes, a scattering of portraits, many of them dust-covered and old." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 11 June 1934)

### **Attilio Moretti, Artist**

Attilio Moretti (1852-1915) was an Italian-born artist who came to San Francisco as a young man and had a long career decorating interiors of churches, restaurants, homes, and other buildings — the full extent of his work is not known. His principal work was painting frescoes, but he made other types of paintings, sculptures, and furnishings as well; his obituaries referred to "altars and artistic memorials" (*San Francisco Examiner* 30 March 1915) and "monuments of more than local note." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 31 March 1915) While most of his work was in San Francisco, according to Emile Pissis, "Moretti was busy painting saints and angels in the Catholic churches throughout the state." (Pissis, Emile 1920) At his death he was called "one of the best-known men in his line in California." (*San Francisco Examiner* 30 March 1915)

Moretti was born in April 1852 in Milan. According to various sources, he came to the United States in 1865, 1873, or 1877. Nothing is known about his family, education, or training as an artist, although he exhibited his work at the Mechanic's Institute in San Francisco in 1878 and at the San Francisco Art Association in 1879 and 1902. In 1880, he



lived in a lodging house at 920 Market Street in San Francisco with Bernardo Trezzini, from Switzerland; both were identified in the census as fresco artists. The two established a firm, Moretti & Trezzini which lasted until 1898 or later. About 1900, Moretti formed a new and probably short-lived partnership with Detlef Sammann. Sammann was a German-born artist who had previously worked as a decorator and muralist in New York, and later became well-known as a painter in the style of the California Impressionists. At the time Moretti worked on Temple Sherith Israel, he appears not to have had a partner.

Moretti was married to a California-born woman seventeen years his junior in 1891; they had one son, Louis, and lived in a house they owned on Hermann Street between Buchanan and Webster. In 1911, they were divorced.

From his early years in San Francisco, Moretti was part of the city's Italian social elite. Between 1881 and 1908, there are numerous accounts in the newspapers of Moretti's presence at exclusive dinners and celebrations, often because of distinguished Italian visitors. In addition, he attended other prominent social events that were not exclusively Italian. In one of these, he was part of a small group on a special train to the 1893 Midwinter Fair in Golden Gate Park. In another he attended a banquet honoring Phoebe Hearst as the first woman Regent of the University of California.

Moretti's work for the Catholic Church was partly due to his association with Archbishop Patrick Riordan, "a close friend and an admirer" (*San Francisco Examiner* 30 March 1915) whose long tenure from 1884 to 1914, was marked by a major building program by the archdiocese. For the Catholic Church Moretti & Trezzini decorated Notre Dame des Victoires in San Francisco in 1889 (*Monitor* 1889), after the completion of an addition to that church designed by Albert Pissis. This is the first known collaboration between the two. As a member of the parish, Pissis would also have seen Moretti's work any time he attended church during the seventeen years between its completion and its destruction in 1906.

Before 1898, Moretti & Trezzini decorated Catholic Church interiors at St. Ignatius, St. Mary's, and St. Peter's in San Francisco (*San Francisco Call* 18 December 1898). In 1893 they designed a shrine at St. Joseph's in San Jose (*Monitor* 1893). Before 1906, Moretti designed a chapel at the Convent of the Holy Family. (saveoursacredheart.org 2009)

While the full extent of Moretti's work for the Catholic Church is not known, much of it, especially in San Francisco, was destroyed in 1906. Only two of his church works after 1906 are known, both of them major works. In 1910, he designed and supervised the construction of three Carrera marble altars for Sacred Heart in San Francisco; the main altar was carved in Italy and weighted 95 tons. (Willard and Wilson 1985: 54-55) Moretti's other major Catholic Church work after 1906 "was the beautiful chapel in Holy Cross cemetery, decorated in Romanesque style." (*San Francisco Examiner* 30 March 1915)

Apart from Catholic churches, Moretti did other ecclesiastical work. His family believed that he contributed to the first chapel at Stanford (*Oakland Tribune* 5 December 1958) and he also designed the interiors of Temple Sherith Israel, both projects that were among the largest and most important of his career.

Perhaps the least-known aspect of his career is the work he did for commercial and residential clients. In 1892, Moretti & Trezzini decorated the McDonough Theater in Oakland in the Rococo Style with figures of comedy, tragedy, and cupids over the proscenium. (*San Francisco Chronicle* 28 September 1892) In 1898 he did the interior of a new building for the well-known Poodle Dog Restaurant. (*San Francisco Call* 18 December 1898) After the earthquake, Moretti decorated the interior of Blanco's Restaurant — "the most magnificent of its kind in the country." (*San Francisco Call* 8 November 1907)

Among his residential commissions, only a few are known. In 1888, Moretti & Trezzini designed ceiling frescoes for the mansion of Leonard John Rose in the Bunker Hill neighborhood of Los Angeles. (onbunkerhill.org) Before 1898, the firm decorated the interiors of the Hobart and Hopkins residences in San Francisco. (*San Francisco Call* 1898)

Moretti died in 1915 and was buried at Holy Cross Cemetery.

### Willemina Ogterop, Artist

Willemina Ogterop was a stained glass artist associated with the Cumings Studio in San Francisco beginning in 1928. A profile in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1948 described her background:

Born in Maastricht, the Netherlands, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam before going to South Africa at the age of 21. In Africa she met her future husband. They were married in Java and lived in India and Ceylon before returning to Holland where their children were born.

The family came to California just before the end of World War I and lived for ten years on a ranch near Santa Cruz. But when her husband became bed ridden from the after-effects of an illness contracted in South Africa, Mrs. Ogterop went to work for the Cumings Studio.

In her classes in Amsterdam, she had studied the art of window-making in a general course. And her European background gave her first-hand knowledge of some of the finest examples of the art.

But she was hardly prepared for the difficulties and intricacies of handling stained glass as an artistic material . . .

In her early days at the Cumings Studio, Mrs. Ogterop followed further than she does now the process of making the windows she designed, since the staff was small and each artist carried out more of the details of his or her own work than is usual. But it was thus that she acquired full knowledge of each step involved in the process . . .

Nowadays Mrs. Ogterop's schedule is so heavy that, as is usual, various craftsmen in the studio take care of many of the details of window-making while she devotes her time mainly to the making of designs. (Stull 1948)

Ogterop designed windows "for churches and synagogues in Sacramento, Oakland, Vallejo, San Rafael, Stockton, Oroville, Gridley, Santa Rosa, Los Angeles, Napa, Modesto, San Diego, Red Bluff, and New Orleans." She designed a window using lines from a Hindu poet, Rabindranath Tagore, and donated it in his honor to a university in Calcutta. (Stull 1948)

In the San Francisco area, she designed windows for St. Albert's Chapel at the Dominican College in Oakland, at the Chapel of the Presidio of San Francisco, at St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco (Stull 1948), and at Temple Sherith Israel.

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**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

**DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY**

**CONGREGATION SHERITH ISRAEL**

It is not known when the first Jews came to California, but in the first year of the Gold Rush, 1848-1849, unknown numbers of Jews came along with members of many other groups — Anglo-Americans from many states, Europeans from many countries, Chinese, Canadians, Australians, Latin Americans, North Africans, and others. Jews "numbered in the thousands on ships' passenger lists" and constituted a much higher proportion of the Gold Rush population than of the population of the eastern states. (Rosenbaum 2000: 1-2)

The diversity of the Jewish population was comparable to that of the population at large. It included "a significant few" Sephardic Jews — descendants of those who lived in Spain before 1492 — some of whom were the first Jews in North America and were long-established in the United States. A few came from England, France and elsewhere. The largest number in Gold Rush California, however, were from "German-speaking lands" — mostly from Bavaria and Posen, a district of Prussia that had been part of Poland. Bavarians and Poseners both spoke German and Yiddish, both "came from deeply religious rural villages," but otherwise they had many cultural differences. (Rosenbaum 2000: 3) With the Poseners were numerous others from "Russian-occupied Poland." (Zerin 2006: 22)

The first Jewish services in California were held in the fall of 1849 in a tent on Jackson near Kearny Street in San Francisco. These services were followed within the year by the establishment of the First Hebrew Benevolent Society by Poseners and eastern Europeans, the purchase of land near Vallejo and Gough streets for a Jewish cemetery, and the establishment of the Eureka Benevolent Society by Bavarians. (Rosenbaum 2000: 6)

In April 1851, an effort to form a Jewish congregation dissolved over the differences between the groups, leading to the establishment of two separate congregations — Congregation Sherith Israel, consisting largely of Poseners, Poles, and English (Badt 1904), and Congregation Emanu-El, dominated by Bavarians. A fundamental issue was the preference for the Polish rite by Sherith Israel and for the German rite by Emanu-El. According to Fred Rosenbaum, a historian of Congregation Emanu-El and San Francisco's Jews, "Such disagreements between the Bavarians and Poseners were common across America, and split many of the dozens of new synagogues formed by German-Jewish immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s." (Rosenbaum 2000: 8)

The names chosen by each were the same as those of the two leading congregations in New York — New York's Emanu-El was also dominated by Bavarians, and Sherith Israel, meaning "Remnant of Israel," was the oldest congregation in the United States. (Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island is the oldest surviving synagogue in the United States.)

In addition to differences over rites and prayer books, over who would be hired as the ritual slaughterer, and who had the authority to make decisions, there were less tangible differences as well. Members of Congregation Emanu-El, many of whom had been in the United States longer, were more acculturated to this country, achieved success in business more quickly, and saw themselves as socially superior. The rivalry that was evident at the beginning has persisted to the present.

If the members of Congregation Sherith Israel were, on average, less prosperous than those at Emanu-El, they were also successful in business. In *920 O'Farrell Street*, the author, Harriet Lane Levy, whose family attended Sherith Israel, portrayed the Jewish society she knew as socially ambitious and well-to-do. She and many others also wrote about the special place of Jews in San Francisco. Recently, Marc Dollinger, a scholar of Jewish studies, wrote that conditions in the Gold Rush and afterward "combined to create unprecedented Jewish social mobility"; "Jewish residents tended to resist the temptation to live in cloistered Jewish enclaves, enjoying instead the opportunity to live and socialize among the larger

non-Jewish community. They built grand synagogues that testified to both their material success and to the centrality of Judaism . . . in their San Francisco lives . . . For San Francisco Jews, California emerged as the New Zion and San Francisco as the New Jerusalem . . ." (Zerin 2006, 7)

In July 1854, each congregation, after occupying various rented quarters, began building a synagogue. Because most Jews lived nearby, both of these first synagogues were built in what would later be called North Beach — Sherith Israel built its first synagogue on the east side of Stockton Street between Broadway and Vallejo streets, and Emanu-El built its first synagogue nearby on Broadway.

Once established, despite parallels in their development, the two congregations had their own identities and developed independently. Both were Orthodox at first. Both adopted Reform Judaism, although at different times. Both moved westward with their members, first to the area west of Union Square, and later still further west to the prestigious Pacific and Presidio Heights neighborhoods.

When the Stockton Street synagogue was completed, Congregation Sherith Israel had 110 members. From the beginning they operated a religious school, but they did not hire their first regular rabbi until 1857. In 1860, they bought land for a new cemetery, called Hills of Eternity, on a portion of what later became Dolores Park; this was adjacent to a new cemetery for Emanu-El, with whom they had shared the original cemetery. In 1868, the congregation bought a site for a new synagogue at Post and Taylor streets, which opened in 1870.

The congregation flourished at Post and Taylor streets. Henry A. Vidaver was a popular and respected rabbi from 1874 to his death in 1882. He was an author and his portrait appeared on a page devoted to "Eminent American Clergymen" in the *American Phrenological Journal*. In 1904, a history of Congregation Sherith Israel called him "The most prominent and erudite Rabbi of the United States, in his time." (Badt 1904)

Henry Vidaver was followed as Rabbi by his brother, Falk Vidaver. A notable event of his tenure was moving the congregation's cemetery from San Francisco's Mission District to Colma in San Mateo County. Because of a state law prohibiting burials in San Francisco after 1888, the old site was closed and a new "Hills of Eternity" purchased outside the city limits. Once again, congregations Sherith Israel and Emanu-El acted together and moved side-by-side to the new location.

Major changes came to Congregation Sherith Israel with the hiring of Jacob Nieto (1863-1930) as Rabbi in 1893. At that time, the congregation was no longer strictly orthodox, but its commitment to liberalization was incomplete. Seating was in "family pews" that included women, there was an organ in the synagogue, music was sung by a mixed choir of men and women, and some prayers were in English, among other changes. (Zwerin 1996: 205) Under Nieto, the congregation moved more toward Reform Judaism, adopting a modern prayer book that incorporated English, simplifying the annual program of services, bringing women into a more integrated and active role, and actively engaging in social issues outside the congregation.

To a congregation whose roots were largely in Posen and England, Nieto brought some of an outsiders background. He was born in London to a Sephardic family, and grew up in Kingston, Jamaica where his father was a hazan (cantor) in a Sephardic synagogue. He taught and had brief and incomplete training as a rabbi in England and served three years as a "minister" to a congregation in Sheffield — apparently an assistant to a rabbi. Then, he returned to New York where his father was hazan at Congregation Sherith Israel. From there, although lacking credentials and much experience, he was hired to come to San Francisco. (Zwerin 1996: 201-205)

In addition to his duties as a rabbi, from the beginning, Nieto was involved in community work, for example in efforts to revive the YMHA (Young Men's Hebrew Association) and in contributing to a memorial to Susan B. Anthony. (Zwerin 1996: 212)



"The popularity of [Nieto's] pulpit oratory" (Badt 1904) filled the synagogue and contributed to the proposal in 1895 that a new, larger building be built. The existing synagogue needed costly repairs -- it was drafty and leaked when it rained. Perhaps most of all, there were financial reasons. Income from the cemetery which had "always been the main source of sustenance of the Congregation" was supporting the operation of the synagogue but was needed for the cemetery itself. Thus, on 13 October 1895, the Board of Officers recommended to the congregation "That the incoming Board of Officers be empowered to appoint a Committee to purchase a proper building lot upon which to build a Synagogue, Lyceum and Gymnasium, and to place the Real Estate belonging to the Congregation upon the market for sale, and upon selling said property to proceed to build such buildings as will carry out this plan." (Congregation Sherith Israel. *Minutes* 13 October 1895)

Despite the readiness to build and the offer of sites — the favored location at first was the southwest corner of O'Farrell and Gough Streets (*San Francisco Chronicle* 10 March 1896) — the project did not move forward for several years.

While the proposal languished, Nieto pushed forward with other kinds of changes, particularly regarding the role of women, and the building continued to deteriorate. In 1899, with Nieto's support, nine women wrote a letter to the officers of the congregation requesting the full rights of membership. (Congregation Sherith Israel. *Correspondence* 1899) When there was no action on this request, "Through Rabbi Nieto's suggestion a ladies auxiliary was formed by the congregation and its friends, with a view to their taking an active interest in the development of the social and religious activities of the congregation, in encouraging the Sabbath rule, and in developing an ability on the part of the women to become social workers in the community at large." (Meyer 1916: 49)

Then in 1901, the proposal for a new synagogue was revived. As reported in the *Minutes of the Board of Officers*, presumably following a solicitation from agents of the congregation, an offer to buy the synagogue property was received in June. At the annual meeting in October, the congregation resolved to sell the property, buy a new site in the Western Addition, and build "a proper House of Worship and also a Lyceum and Gymnasium." The reason for doing this was "to progress and advance the cause of Judaism in this community. . . [and] the way to advance is to make the Jewish life socially and religiously attractive to the younger generation — and still hold in reverence the true doctrine of our forefathers." (*Minutes* 13 October 1901)

In April 1902, after rejecting lower offers, negotiations were underway to sell the property to Marion Leventritt for \$105,000, reserving the right to stay until the new synagogue was ready. As elsewhere, the principal source of information about the history of the congregation — the *Minutes of the Board of Officers and Trustees* — tells only part of the story. Left unexplained were Leventritt's motives and the relationship of the subsequent development of the site and the new synagogue to this transaction. Was Leventritt simply acting as a real estate investor, which was his business, or was he trying to help a congregation of fellow Jews? Leventritt was financially in a position to help others. He first made money as owner of Rosenstock & Co., a shoemaker before going into real estate. In 1890, he was a member of the San Francisco Board of Trade. At the time Temple Sherith Israel was built in 1905, he was president of the Building and Loan Associations of the State of California. Altogether he would build three substantial buildings on Geary Street downtown, all of them designed by Albert Pissis.

Leventritt was born in South Carolina in 1848, suggesting he was Sephardic, a background consistent with his brother's serving on the Supreme Court of the State of New York. His congregational affiliation in San Francisco is unknown. In 1900, he was a trustee of the Jewish Alliance of California, a group that aided Russian refugees. In this effort, Leventritt would have shared interests with Rabbi Nieto.

When the site of the old synagogue was sold to Leventritt, he sold it to the Bohemian Club and they built a new club for themselves designed by Albert Pissis, who was Leventritt's architect and would be the architect of the new synagogue as well

During the period of construction of the new synagogue, leaders of the congregation used traditional construction milestones to express their relationship to the larger community. The laying of the cornerstone took place on 22 February

1904, Washington's Birthday, emphasizing the allegiance and gratitude of the congregation to the United States. (*San Francisco Chronicle* 23 February 1904) At the dedication of the building when it was completed, Rabbi Nieto admired the building: "It is a magnificent occasion for us that we can meet in a place that we can call beautiful." But he warned that this beauty should not be a distraction from more important things, like prayer and like "the spectacles of that poverty which exists in our midst." (Nieto 1905: 1-3)

Nieto's reference to poverty was a reminder of the flood of eastern European Jews who had very recently moved to San Francisco, resulting during the course of construction of Temple Sherith Israel, in the establishment of two new congregations in the city — Keneseth Israel in 1903 and Beth Shalom in 1904.

Also during the period of construction, the issue of women came up again. On 18 October 1903, the Secretary of the congregation, Alexander L. Badt, reported that there were at that time 129 members, including 23 widows and five estates — 22% are practically disenfranchised." Badt argued that women should be given equal rights: "All are the most devoted to our cause and the most prompt in its support, yet none have the right to participate in your meetings or have a voice in your proceedings." (*Minutes* 1903: 255-256) There was no follow-up to this proposal until a year later on 16 October 1904 when the president put it to the rest by saying that the women themselves didn't sign or support it. (*Minutes* 1904: 324)

In April 1903, Congregation Sherith Israel joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations which was associated with the Reform movement. Joining at this time reflected the changes in the congregation.

In January 1905, about the time the new synagogue was finished, the congregation sold its long-vacant cemetery in the Mission district — the proceeds were necessary to pay for the new building.

The time of the completion of the synagogue — always referred to as Temple Israel until at least the 1920s — was also a period of renewed self-definition of the congregation. In an interview in 1907, Rabbi Nieto called attention to practices that might have seemed contradictory: "men and women sit together"; at the same time, "the clergy wear the Tallith, but very few of the laity do so." When asked if "Yours is a Reform congregation?" He answered, "We call ourselves a Conservative congregation, because we keep our hats on during service." (Nieto 1907: 233)

While Temple Sherith Israel was spared in the earthquake — a vindication of the time and money spent to do everything as well as it could be done — most other synagogues in San Francisco were gutted by fire or completely destroyed (*San Francisco Chronicle* 21 May 1906); Ohabai Shalome, in a wood building not far away on Bush Street, survived but its relatively poor membership was devastated and needed outside assistance. The Keneseth Israel synagogue on Russ Street was destroyed and its membership of recent immigrants suffered. Other small congregations in rented spaces were also left without places to meet. In contrast, the members of congregations Sherith Israel and Emanu-El were relatively well off and took care of themselves. The most dramatic and unavoidable comparison was with the new synagogue of Congregation Beth Israel on Geary near Fillmore; under construction and almost completed, it was severely damaged. However, their old synagogue which they still occupied survived. With what many said was the largest building left standing in San Francisco after the disaster, Congregation Sherith Israel offered its facilities to others.

The principal user of the building after the earthquake, however, was completely unexpected. On 23 April 1906, only two days after the fire went out, various city departments moved into Temple Sherith Israel. Some would move out shortly, but on 24 April 1906, agreement was initiated between the congregation and the Superior Courts of the City and County of San Francisco for a monthly rental of the building except during religious services and holidays that brought in \$1000.00 per month through February 1908. The rent paid for use of the building for courtrooms and judges chambers. The city's Law Library was also there, in the gallery of the main sanctuary, until November 1907. The city paid an additional \$250.00 per month for janitorial service and a building manager — a task performed by the Secretary of the Congregation, Alexander L. Badt.

The presence of the courts was disruptive, but the money received for the rent was helpful during a difficult time. Although the building was little damaged and the membership was relatively well off, the congregational income was down at a time

when relief efforts placed new demands on the congregation and its members. The two principal sources of income for salaries and running the synagogue were ordinarily from seat rentals and the cemetery. Many seat renters were refugees temporarily living outside of San Francisco; it may be that some were not able to pay the seat rentals and the widespread hardship meant that the congregation wasn't growing as expected. The bigger problem was the destruction by the earthquake of the gateway and mortuary chapel in Colma shared with Congregation Emanu-El which incurred large unexpected costs.

On 13 October 1907, the president reported that "the rent we received during the past year for use of our Temple by the Superior Court has materially assisted us for the time being, and enables us to present a balance sheet without one dollar of floating indebtedness and some balance on hand." However, "considerable repairs will be necessary, by reason of the occupancy of the Temple by the Courts." In addition, "The sale of seats . . . still falls far short of its possibilities, and we must make renewed efforts to interest our co-religionists in our beautiful Temple . . ." (*Minutes* 1907: 134) This final point calls attention to one of the original reasons for spending the money to build a beautiful synagogue — to attract members, especially young ones.

During the period when the courts were in residence, religious services were held as usual with the possible exception of 22 April 1906, the day after the fire went out.

After the courts left, the congregation turned its attention back to more ordinary concerns of religious practice and social involvement. Jacob Nieto continued as Rabbi until his retirement in 1929 (*San Francisco Call* 26 November 1929); he died in 1930. Nieto's tenure contributed substantially to the reputation of Congregation Sherith Israel as socially active. Among his interests during his 37-year tenure were women's rights, capital punishment, a third party alternative in 1920 (Borsuk 1974), Russian refugees, public schools, and the public health emergency after the earthquake.

The congregation struggled in the 1930s, but was revived under Rabbi Morris Goldstein from 1932 to 1971. During his tenure, Temple House was built next door and completed in 1949. Temple House provided ample facilities for a religious school for the first time.

## TEMPLE SHERITH ISRAEL

### Building

Temple Sherith Israel was designed and built between April 1902 and September 1905, with final details completed within a few months. The process of design and construction was carried out by the Building Committee of the congregation, the subcommittee on Architecture, the architect, and numerous contractors. The Board of Officers and Trustees approved many decisions and the congregation as a whole approved the biggest decisions, like selection of the site and approval of the plans. The Building Committee met once a week during the long planning phase. During construction, there was so much to do that the Architecture sub-committee was available every day, its members alternating days.

Because the available evidence records the roles of the various committees and the Board of Officers — references to Rabbi Nieto in the *Minutes* are scant — it would appear that the Rabbi was not involved in the process. However, the final results and some observations by contemporaries indicate that he had an important influence on the building.

On 20 April 1902, a committee of five was appointed to select a site for the new synagogue and on 24 April 1902, resolved "to acquire ample accommodations for all its purposes in a more westerly location of the City than the present Synagogue." After reviewing "offers from various real estate agents of 30 different parcels of land," the committee focused on the northeast corner of California and Webster streets. (*Minutes* 129, 134, 140)

On 30 July 1902, seeking "to select a site which would offer the greatest convenience to the membership, together with pleasant situation and prospect of future advancement in value," the committee recommended purchasing three lots at California and Webster measuring 132½ feet on California Street and 164 feet on Webster Street. (*Minutes* 150-152)



On 4 August 1902, the Building Committee met for the first time to designate three subcommittees of three members each. The Committee on Architecture consisted of Philip N. Aronson, an English born stove manufacturer, Nathan Schlesinger, a German-born real estate agent, and Bahr Scheideman, a Polish-born clothing merchant. The role of the Committee on Architecture, which had the primary responsibility, was to hire the architect, guide the architect in the development of plans for the building, participate in the hiring of contractors, work with the architect in supervising construction, and generally serve as the vehicle of communication between the Congregation and its Officers on the one hand, and the architect and contractors on the other. Judging from their occupations, they were novices in this role.

On 18 August 1902, the Committee on Architecture first addressed the hiring of an architect: "We recommend the advertising of competitive plans and specifications and to award prizes for the three best designs. On 15 September after meeting with "some of the foremost architects of this city" the committee revised its proposal. An open competition, it seemed would be impractical and lead to many complications: "the best class of our architects would not participate." Instead of an open competition, they would hold "a very limited competition." Clinton Day, the Reid Brothers, Bliss & Faville, Julius E. Kraft and George A. Wright — all prominent architects — would compete; "Architect Albert Pissis whom we have also consulted . . . has finally declined to enter the competition." In fact, all of the architects advised simply choosing one and foregoing the competition. The architect who was chosen "could thus meet the committee as often as possible, consult [with] them as to each individual [part] of the building, prepare if necessary several sketches and plans that could be changed, until a most satisfactory result could be reached." Taking all of this into consideration, Building Committee members Baruth Mish, a tailor born in Missouri of English and Prussian ancestry, and Meyer Davidson, a dry goods merchant born in Prussia, recommended hiring Albert Pissis who was then unanimously approved. At a meeting two weeks later, the committee described Pissis as an architect "who stands second to none." (*Minutes* 160, 168-169, 174)

Once the architect was chosen, the committee's discussions turned to the building program, a matter that was related to the money available. Among the principal issues were the size of the sanctuary and the provision of space in an annex for a lyceum and gymnasium, as proposed in 1895 and 1901. At an important meeting on 10 October 1902, the president of the congregation, Charles Harris, stated: "It is the aim and every member's desire that Sherith Israel should unfurl its flag over an edifice that would be second to none, one befitting the foremost Congregation in the United States." But, he argued, that could not include construction of the lyceum and gymnasium which were too expensive and had to be deferred. (*Minutes* 172-174)

The president also recommended a seating capacity of 2,000 but 1,200 to 1,500 was adopted. Over the next several weeks, the relationship of the number of seats to the design of the building and the size of the lot was debated.

The architect presented a preliminary design for the building on 10 November 1902 and more developed plans on 1 December 1902. Over the next four months, Pissis presented a series of revised plans in response to comments from the committee and the congregation. While details of the issues of concern are not well known, the revisions had to do generally with the size and configuration of seating, the design of the gallery, and the size of the vestibule. Among the last issues considered was the design of the elevations. In these discussions, Moses Samuel of the Building Committee took the lead. Plans were completed and approved on 2 March 1903. (*Minutes* 196-215)

On 16 March 1903, "It was decided that all extra windows in the rear wall be dispensed with and that wall will be finished in plain brick without ornamentation. Also that battlements in front of the windows in front and sides be omitted." (*Minutes* 1903: 216)

Also on 2 March 1903, the Building Committee asked Pissis "to produce a plaster of Paris model of the plans for the New Synagogue." This was ready the following week and put on display for the congregation. (*Minutes* 215, 223) A photograph of the model appeared in the program for the cornerstone ceremony on 22 February 1904; this is the last known reference to the model.



On 20 July 1903, the final plans and specifications were ready to take bids. When the bids came in, the total cost was lower than expected. Among at least twenty contracts, the four largest were awarded on 31 August 1903 to J.J. O'Connor for brickwork, to the McGilvray Stone Co. for sandstone, to P. Noble for steelwork, and to C. Chisholm & Son for carpenter work. (*Minutes* 235, 241)

Although the bids were low, the reality of the total commitment appears to have provoked anxiety and further discussion, resulting in a reiterated commitment to go ahead: "It was further conclusively demonstrated that a building of inferior artistic merit will not reduce the cost of building to such a degree as to be seriously considered." (*Minutes* 235)

Ground was broken 8 October 1903, later than had been expected largely due to the time it took to arrive at an acceptable design. "The expectancy of a New Synagogue and the unavoidable delay in commencing building operations had a kind of lethargic effect on matters synagogical." However, as construction began, there was renewed recognition of the meaning of the undertaking: the president reported that the Building Committee would "be able to turn over to you a structure that not only you but your descendents as well will be proud of." (*Minutes* 251, 254) To handle the additional workload during construction, two members were added to the Committee on Architecture, Miles Samuel, a jeweler, and Mark Green, a consignment merchant born in Germany. In April 1904, two committee members were assigned to be available on each day of the week. (*Minutes* 235, 294)

The cornerstone was laid in the rain on 22 February 1904. Once construction began on the building, attention turned toward finishes and furnishings, including memorial windows, the perpetual light, the organ, and furniture. As the building neared completion, on 16 October 1904 the president called it "an edifice second to none in the United States . . . a masterpiece of architecture." (*Minutes* 1904: 320) The interior design by Attilio Moretti based on a sketch presented by him on 17 April 1905 was executed beginning 1 May 1905. (*Minutes* 363, 366) Two years later, Rabbi Nieto described Moretti's work: "The interior is Byzantine, and the decorations are in keeping with that style of architecture." (Nieto 1907: 233)

On 24 September 1905, the building was dedicated and the congregation moved into the synagogue. The total cost of the building at that point was \$240,243.98 (*Minutes II*, 5) and ultimately was closer to \$250,000.00. (*Minutes II*, 6) At its opening, the *Chronicle* called it "One of the finest temples in America." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 25 September 1905) Two years later a Seattle newspaper called it "the largest and costliest synagogue west of Chicago." (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* 21 July 1907)

In addition, according to a newspaper account of the consecration of the building, "Dr. Nieto designed the emblems, which are strikingly beautiful and in strict harmony with the Oriental scheme." (*San Francisco Call* 25 September 1905)

## Windows

Leaded and stained glass windows for Temple Sherith Israel were envisioned for three purposes — religious, artistic, and as memorials. The windows were mostly outside the budget of the building, so it was only as memorials that they could be realized.

Early in the process, on 7 December 1902, the Building Committee assumed the responsibility for approving memorials. In August 1903, offers of memorial windows began trickling in. A memorial window committee was established 4 October 1903, consisting of Rabbi Nieto, vice-president Henry Roman and two members of the Architecture committee — Schlesinger and Sheideman. Philip Aronson was later added to the committee. Another committee was formed shortly after this for Art Glass consisting of Schlesinger, Spiro, Green, Brown, and Aronson. It appears that little was done about the windows until 10 July 1904 when the Building Committee began to develop a program, deciding that "the Memorial Windows in the New Temple be made a representation of biblical subjects" and that the rabbi should be asked for suggestions. (*Minutes* 1904: 308)

To inspire donations of windows, on 5 September 1904 officers of the congregation were asked to subscribe. On 16 October 1904, the president told the congregation: "The Committee on Art Glass reports that they have had home talent

draw designs for the various windows." On 27 February 1905, some decisions were made about minor windows, ground floor windows on California and Webster streets would have leaded colored glass, and windows on the east side would be in chipped glass. On 6 March 1905, it was decided that memorial windows would cost \$300 each. (*Minutes 1904-1905*: 314, 353, 357)

Finally, in May 1905 work began on the windows. A contract for the rose window (apparently not a memorial) was signed 1 May 1905. On 16 May 1905, eleven windows were reported to have been subscribed: the large west window, the large east window, five windows on the east side and four windows on the west side. On 9 July 1905, it was decided that three chapel windows and three windows over the front entrances would have colored glass. (*Minutes 1905*: 366, 369, 379)

On 29 October 1905, the large arched east and west windows, seven memorial windows on each side, and two vestibule windows were all under construction: "All these windows have been obtained through the efficient work and influence of our Rabbi solely and he is also practically the designer of them. The windows will probably all be placed in position within ninety days from now." (*Minutes II 1905*: 6) This statement is confusing in two ways. First, the large window now on the east side appears to be from the 1920s. Second, the reference to the rabbi's role raises questions that can't be answered.

An unknown number of windows that were subscribed for and "were near completion" at the manufacturer's place of business were "destroyed in the great conflagration, but are now again in the hands of the artist." At the time of this report, on 21 October 1906, Emile Pissis was paid \$500.00. A couple of months later, on 3 January 1907, the following was recorded in the *Minutes*: "A bill of E. Pissis for \$1,000 for drawings of memorial windows now in process of manufacture." (*Minutes II 1906-1907*: 84, 100)

### Organ

On 1 November 1903, an Organ subcommittee was formed consisting of Davidson, Mish, Sheideman, Brown, and Bare. On 5 November 1903, the subcommittee reported that they had asked Cantor Davis "to make himself conversant with facts to determine the most prominent Organ Builders in the United States and to recommend a firm." Davis visited Temple Emanu-El and a number of churches. He "submitted specifications for an organ of the capacity that would be required" to five companies around the country for bids. On 20 December 1903, the committee planned to visit Stanford Memorial Chapel and reported receiving bids. On 4 January 1904, Mr. Howe of the Murray M. Harris Organ Company in Los Angeles made a presentation to the committee. (About this time, the company changed its name to Los Angeles Art Organ Company.) (*Minutes 1903-1904*: 270, 271, 275, 279)

On 1 February 1904, the committee accepted the bid from Los Angeles Art Organ, a total of \$11,500 after a "rebate donation of \$1,600. The main organ would have 46 stops and an echo organ would have three stops in the dome. On 18 April 1904, revisions were made to the organ specifications after a review by San Francisco organ experts from Schoenstein & Co. On 13 February 1905, the Los Angeles Art Organ Company won an additional bid to provide the organ casing for the display pipes. On 4 September 1905, three weeks before the dedication, the organ was ready to be delivered. (*Minutes 1904-1905*: 281, 295, 353, 390)

Sherith Israel's organ is the subject of a chapter of a book on organ building in Los Angeles (Smith 2005: 121-145) and a profile in an article on American synagogue organs in *Journal of the Organ Historical Society*. Among American synagogue organs, "The San Francisco instrument is a standout, it is at once conservative and progressive, the product of educated and thoughtful design. . . . [It] benefitted from the voicing skills of the renowned English voicer John W. Whitely," which gave it an "'English Cathedral' sensibility." In addition, it was an innovative instrument: "The three-rank Echo section, high in the dome, was the first in a San Francisco house of worship, and foreshadows the many echo divisions found in synagogue organs in the two decades that followed." (Gluck 2006: 109-110)

### Furnishings and Fixtures

Before much planning had been done on furnishings for the synagogue, on 4 October 1903, offers were made to donate money for the Perpetual Light and for Memorial Tablets with the Ten Commandments. Then, on 1 November 1903, a

Furniture subcommittee was formed, consisting of officers Bare, Spiro, Mish, Roman, and Boas, but little was done for a year. (*Minutes* 1903: 249, 268)

On 28 November 1904, bids were received on furniture. On 13 February 1905, the bids of California Woodworking Company for pews (also worked on the Emporium); the bid of Forbes & Sons for Ark decoration, the lectern, and the pulpit (also made bank furniture); and the bid of Vermont Marble Company for marble stairs, flooring, and wainscoting were all accepted. On 27 February 1905, bids were received for carpets and from C. Chisholm & Co. to change the finish on the Ark from oak to mahogany. (*Minutes* 1904-1905: 337, 353)

On 5 July 1905, the bid of Thomas Day Co. for gas and electric light fixtures was accepted; Thomas Day Company, established in San Francisco in 1850, made light fixtures for many important buildings including the Palace Hotel, and the Opera House in San Francisco, Ahwahnee Lodge in Yosemite, Pasadena City Hall, Los Angeles Public Library, and at Stanford. (*Minutes* 1905: 378)

### Alterations and Additions

When Temple Sherith Israel had only been in use for a little over six months, it was subjected to a supreme test — the great earthquake of 18 April 1906. The earthquake did relatively little damage. According to the president's report of 21 October 1906, "Our temple proved a splendidly constructed building and came out of the disaster scarcely touched, and showing no structural defects. The total cost of necessary repairs will be only about \$2500." (*Minutes II* 1906: 77) According to later reports, the cost of repairs was only about \$1,000. Most of the repairs were at the south gable; according to a witness, the building "had lost a lot of huge grey stones from the gables, and the south gable stood about 1 foot away from the roof girders, so that you could look between wall and rest of building." (cited in Paret 2007: 2116) A photograph shows the repair work being done with the help of a tall crane. (Bancroft Library)

The Webster Street entrance was relocated by the 1920s. Except for a new memorial window in 1925, no other work is known to have been done on the building until 1935. In March 1935, drawings were prepared by Samuel Lightner Hyman and Abraham Appleton, Architects, for an addition housing an elevator on the east side of the building.

In 1947, the lot next door on California Street was purchased and the architect Bernard G. Nobler was hired to design an annex with classrooms, a theater, an auditorium and a kitchen. While this annex, called Temple House, lacked a gymnasium, it generally fulfilled the goals first enunciated for the congregation in 1895. Temple House opened in April 1949 at a cost of \$250,000 — the same as the original cost of the synagogue itself.

The architect for Temple House was Bernard G. Nobler (1916-2003). Nobler was born in Chicago and practiced in California and Hawaii. Later he was partners with Clement Chen in the firm of Chen & Nobler, specialists in hotel design.

The chapel on the ground floor of the synagogue was also remodeled in 1949.

### United Nations

Toward the end of World War II, international efforts were begun to establish an organization of countries to maintain world peace. To this end a meeting was held in San Francisco beginning 25 April 1945 — the United Nations Conference on International Organization. For the duration of the meeting, San Francisco was "the temporary capital of the world." (McGloin 1978: 347) The meeting was attended by representatives from forty-six countries and numerous international organizations.

After the initial meeting at the San Francisco Opera House, meetings were held in various places around San Francisco. Some places had an official connection to the conference; for example, the Woman's Athletic Club was asked by the organizers to provide support for distinguished women attending the conference, and the Alcazar Theater presented "film programs for all persons holding conference credentials" (*San Francisco Chronicle* 22 April 1945). Other places played an incidental role, such as hotels and restaurants. And other places were involved from the outside: a newspaper article was headlined "Protestant Churches to Pray for Meeting." (*San Francisco Chronicle* 19 April 1945)



In this context, Temple Sherith Israel participated unofficially, but in a substantive way. The meeting at Temple Sherith Israel was sponsored by the Synagogue Council of America "for and by the local Jewish community . . . for the purpose of bringing together all elements of the local Jewish community to present, from a Jewish viewpoint, the spiritual values of the . . . United Nations." (*Emanu-El* 20 April 1945) Two thousand people attended the meeting — far more than the seating capacity; "Seven rabbis, three cantors, their congregations and choirs participated in the program." The principal speaker was Rabbi Elliot M. Burstein of Congregation Beth Israel who spoke about the need for international law. (*Emanu-El* 1945: 3)

The political message, if any, that came out of the meeting is unknown. The most important Jewish issues of the time were the particular suffering of the Jews in Europe during the war and the "establishment of Palestine as the Jewish National Home." The official voice of American Jews at the conference was provided by representatives from the American Jewish Conference and the American Jewish Committee. On the issue of Palestine, these groups cancelled each other out: the American Jewish Conference supported the creation of a Jewish state and the American Jewish Committee did not. (*Emanu-El* 1945)

In the two weeks after the big meeting, Dr. Israel Goldstein, brother of Congregation Sherith Israel Rabbi Morris Goldstein, spoke at Sherith Israel. Dr. Goldstein was a representative of the American Jewish Conference and president of the Zionist Organization of America. Later, Dr. Maurice Persweig of the World Jewish Congress and a colleague of Dr. Goldstein spoke at Temple Sherith Israel.

## EVALUATION

### CRITERION A: LAW

Temple Sherith Israel is significant under Criterion A in the area of Law as the primary site of the San Francisco Graft Prosecution of 1906-1908. It is significant at the local level for the period 1906-1908. Because Temple Sherith Israel was the largest building left standing in San Francisco after the devastating earthquake and fire of 18-21 April 1906, it was quickly occupied by most of the Superior Courts of the City and County of San Francisco. From October 1906 to February 1908, it was the primary site of the Graft Prosecution. Graft-related proceedings held in the synagogue including Grand Jury indictments of Eugene Schmitz, the mayor, Abraham Ruef, a powerful attorney and corrupt political operator, and many other public officials accused of receiving bribes as well as corporate officials accused of paying bribes; the confession of Ruef for bribery schemes involving French restaurants; and the trial and conviction of Louis Glass of the Pacific States Telephone Company for bribery. This was a major turning point in San Francisco's political history and influenced other California cities to undertake similar prosecutions.

### CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURE

Temple Sherith Israel is significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as the work of a master, architect Albert Pissis. Pissis was educated at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and was among the leading architects in San Francisco from the 1880s to his death in 1914. He designed many of the most prominent buildings in the city during that time, including the Panorama Building, the Hibernia Bank, the Emporium, the Flood Building, and Temple Sherith Israel. From the beginning of his career, his two principle client groups were French and Jewish. Temple Sherith Israel is the culmination of his work for Jewish clients and the only one to express that relationship in architecture. In the context of his work at large, dominated by buildings with classical imagery from antiquity, the Renaissance, and Baroque periods, Temple Sherith Israel stands out for its distinctive style, primarily based on Byzantine and Romanesque sources. At the same time it is an exemplary representative of Pissis' work as a whole in that it provides a clear expression of the application of Beaux-Arts principles of design.

## PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

The period of significance under Criterion A is 1906-1908, the years when the San Francisco Graft Prosecution was held in Temple Sherith Israel. Under Criterion C, the period of significance is 1905, the year the building was completed. Altogether the period of significance is 1905 to 1908.

## INTEGRITY

Temple Sherith Israel retains integrity for its period of significance — 1905 to 1908 — as follows:

**Location:** The building retains integrity of location. It occupies the site on which it was built in 1905 and where the graft trials were held from 1906 to 1908. It has not been moved.

**Design:** Temple Sherith Israel retains integrity of design. Its massing, composition, and details retain their original associations with the Byzantine and Romanesque styles and with the influence of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. The dome, the round-arched pavilions in each facade, the texture of details within these arches and the stained glass are all intact. All of the original ceremonial spaces and circulation are intact.

At the same time, some details have been altered. The Webster Street entrance was moved before the 1920s. The elevator was added in 1935 and a corridor connecting it to the Temple House annex was built after 1949.

Many of the secondary ground floor interior spaces have been altered in size, finishes, and character.

The most important changes are the painting of the stone facade and the removal of the decorative iron gates from the three arches of the California Street entrance and the replacement of three wood doors to the vestibule.

These changes to the design of the building are relatively minor in the context of the whole.

**Setting:** The setting of Temple Sherith Israel is consistent with its character during the period of significance, although many of its details have changed. Next door on California Street, two two-story wood houses from the 1880s were replaced by Temple House in 1949, but adjacent to the property of the congregation on both streets there are still houses from the 1880s, as there are on the surrounding blocks. In addition there are apartment houses from the 1910s-1920s, the 1912 Lane Medical Library (designed by Albert Pissis) down the block on Webster Street, and a modern medical building across Webster street from the 1960s. Only the modern medical building is inconsistent with the original character of the setting.

**Materials:** Temple Sherith Israel retains integrity of materials in that few materials have been removed. The most important removals are the iron gates on California Street and the wood doors behind them. Most other removals are of relatively minor interior finishes.

One of the most significant materials of the building is the sandstone exterior. While all of this is intact, it has been painted over.

The rich marbles and painted surfaces of the vestibule and the foyer, the many colored glass windows in the sequence of ceremonial spaces — vestibule, main stairs, foyer, sanctuary — and leaded glass windows in secondary spaces are all intact.

**Workmanship:** Temple Sherith Israel retains integrity of workmanship. There is an unusually high degree of hand craftsmanship in this building including quarried stone and carved stone details, colored glass windows, plaster surfaces that are painted, stenciled, and frescoed, copper and bronze light fixtures, the perpetual lamp, and carved wood, especially in the Ark wall. All of these things are intact. Only the workmanship of the sandstone exterior is compromised with its coating of paint.

**Feeling:** Temple Sherith Israel possess a particularly high integrity of feeling because of the unusual and extensive craftsmanship employed in its execution, and because of the integrity in all areas of its ceremonial interior spaces. The interior especially comprises an extraordinary space that appeals to all the senses.

**Association:** Temple Sherith Israel possesses integrity of association in relation to the San Francisco Graft Prosecution. Although some of the legal proceedings of that event took place in secondary spaces on the ground floor that have been altered, many major events were held in the main sanctuary which remains intact.



Temple Sherith Israel  
Name of Property

San Francisco, CA  
County and State

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

See Continuation Sheet

**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  
Name of repository: **Magnes Museum, Berkeley**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre \_\_\_\_\_  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 10 550120 4182400  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

The west 105 feet of assessor's parcel number 0637-011.

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The property boundaries include only the west portion of assessor's parcel number 0637-011, encompassing the site on which the synagogue was built in 1905, but excluding an annex built in 1949.

Temple Sherith Israel  
Name of Property

San Francisco, CA  
County and State

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### 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Michael R. Corbett, architectural historian  
organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 31 October 2009  
street & number 2161 Shattuck Avenue #203 telephone 510-548-4123  
city or town Berkeley state CA zip code 94704  
e-mail mcorbett@lmi.net

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### Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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### Photographs:

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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: **Temple Sherith Israel**  
City or Vicinity: **San Francisco**  
County: **San Francisco** State: **CA**  
Photographer: **Michael R. Corbett**  
Date Photographed: **15 June 2009**  
Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of \_\_\_\_.

Temple Sherith Israel  
Name of Property

San Francisco, CA  
County and State

**Property Owner:**

name Congregation Sherith Israel  
street & number 2266 California Street telephone 415-346-1720  
city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94115

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



Continuation Sheet

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Temple Sherith Israel  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: CALIFORNIA, San Francisco

DATE RECEIVED: 2/19/10 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 3/04/10  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 3/19/10 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 4/05/10  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000114

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 3-31-10 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places**

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

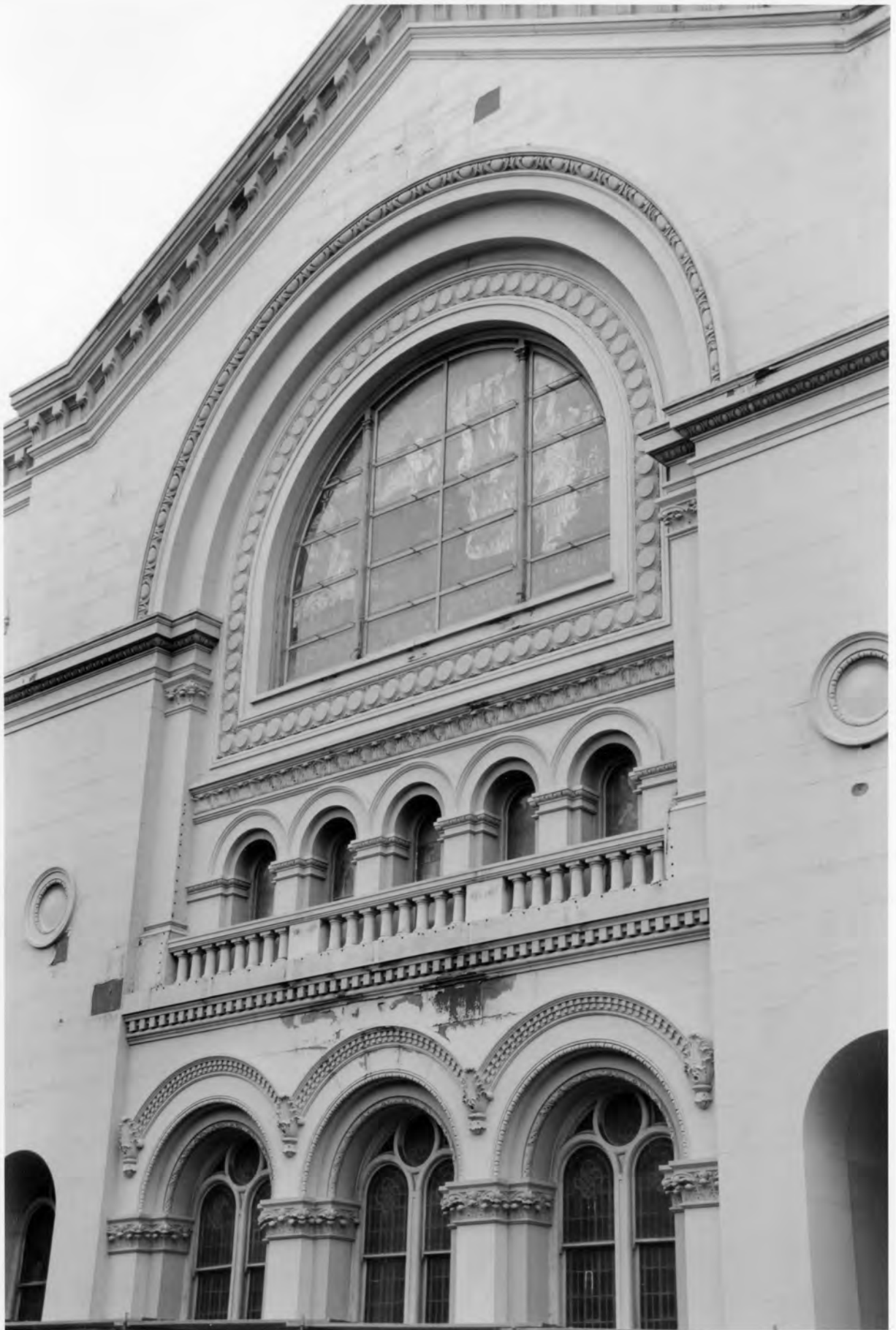
REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



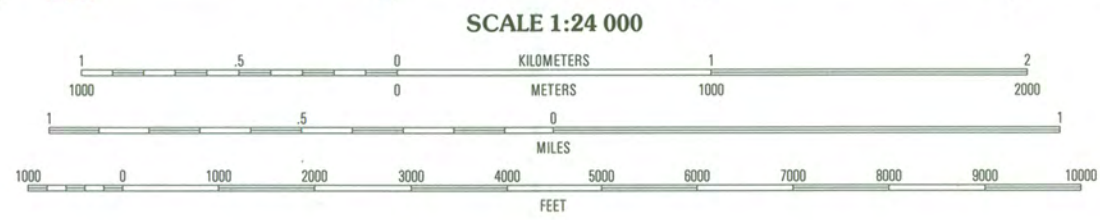
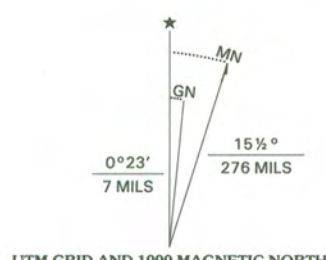




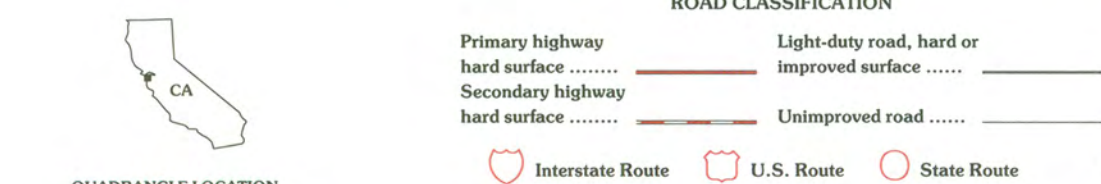


TEMPLE SHERITH ISRAEL  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA  
CALIFORNIA  
ZONE 10  
EASTING 550120  
NORTHING 4182400

Produced by the United States Geological Survey  
Topography compiled 1956. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1993 and other sources. Photoinspected using imagery taken 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. PLSS and survey control current as of 1956. Boundaries, other than corporate, revised 1999.  
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 10 10 000-foot ticks: California Coordinate System of 1927 (zone 3)  
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geographic Survey NADCON software  
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map



SCALE 1:24 000  
CONTOUR INTERVAL 25 FEET  
SUPPLEMENTARY CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929  
TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	

1 San Rafael  
2 San Quentin  
3 Richmond  
4 Point Bonita  
5 Oakland West  
6  
7 San Francisco South  
8 Hunters Point

SAN FRANCISCO NORTH, CA  
1995

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

NIMA 1559 IV SW-SERIES V895





**Temple Sherith Israel  
San Francisco  
County of San Francisco  
Staff Report**

Temple Sherith Israel is a large domed synagogue located in the Pacific Heights neighborhood of San Francisco, built in a mixture of Byzantine and Romanesque styles, composed in a Beaux Arts manner and constructed in 1905. Its structure is in two parts, brick exterior walls clad in sandstone and an interior cage of steel that supports a prominent dome, the roof, and most loads. Large arched pavilions on each façade enclose a textured concentration of architectural ornamentation and colored glass.

The property is nominated under Criterion A for its role in the aftermath of San Francisco's 1906 earthquake, and Criterion C as the work of a master architect, Albert Pissis. After the San Francisco earthquake and fire, most of the city's civic buildings were destroyed. Many private buildings were temporarily adapted for civic functions, and the Temple Sherith Israel became the site of San Francisco's Superior Court and Law Library for over a year. During that period, the property became the site of San Francisco's graft trials, a series of court cases that removed San Francisco mayor Eugene Schmitz from office.

The property is nominated under Criterion C as the work of master architect Albert Pissis, one of San Francisco's leading architects from the 1880s until his death in 1914. He attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, graduating in 1875. His architectural firm, Pissis & Moore, quickly became one of the most prominent in the city. Temple Sherith Israel is an excellent example of Pissis' work, one that resisted the devastation of the 1906 earthquake due to his habit of over-engineering buildings rather than intentional earthquake-resistant designs. His brother Emile Pissis and artist Wilhelmina Oglethorp designed the art glass windows of the synagogue, and artist Attilio Moretti designed the interior and frescoes. Other than modifications to the building's entrances, the building retains a high degree of integrity.

The property is being nominated on behalf of the building owner, Congregation Sherith Israel. Staff supports the nomination as written.

Staff recommends the State Historical Resources Commission determine that the Temple Sherith Israel meets National Register Criteria A and C at the local level of significance, satisfying Criteria Consideration A, and recommends the State Historic Preservation officer approve the nomination for forwarding to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register

William Burg  
Historian I  
January 5, 2010



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

## Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. 0642

HEARING DATE: JANUARY 20, 2010

1650 Mission St.  
Suite 400  
San Francisco,  
CA 94103-2479

Reception:  
415.558.6378

Fax:  
415.558.6409

Planning  
Information:  
415.558.6377

*Date:* January 14, 2010  
*Case No.:* 2009.1138U  
*Property Address:* 2266 California Street  
*Block/Lot:* 0637/011  
*Requestor:* Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA  
 State Historic Preservation Officer  
 Office of Historic Preservation  
 PO Box 942896  
 Sacramento, CA. 94296-0001  
*Staff Contact:* Aaron D Starr - (415) 558-6362  
 aaron.starr@sfgov.org  
*Reviewed By:* Tina Tam - (415) 558-6325  
 tina.tam@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER THAT THE PROPERTY LOCATED AT 2266 CALIFORNIA STREET, ON LOT 011 IN ASSESSOR'S BLOCK 0637, BE NOMINATED TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES AND THAT THE OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROCESS THE NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION.

### PREAMBLE

WHEREAS, On November 25, 2009, Milford Wayne Donaldson, State Historic Preservation Officer forwarded a request to the San Francisco Planning Department (hereinafter "Department") for review and comment on the nomination of 2266 California Street, also known as the Temple Sherith Israel, on Lot 011 in Assessor's Block 0637, to the National Register of Historic Places (hereinafter "National Register").

Pursuant to the Certified Local Government Agreement between the Office of Historic Preservation (hereinafter "OHP") and the City and County of San Francisco, the Historic Preservation Commission (hereinafter "Commission") is provided with a sixty (60) day review and comment period to provide written comments to the OHP before the State Historical Resources Commission takes action on the above-stated National Register nomination.

The National Register is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. The National Register's criteria for evaluating the significance of properties were designed to recognize the accomplishments of all peoples who have made a contribution to the Nation's heritage in the areas of

**Resolution No. 0642**  
**Hearing Date: January 20, 2010**

**CASE NO. 2009.1141U**  
**2266 California Street**

Events, Persons, Design/Construction, and Information Potential. The four National Register criteria are designed to guide state and local governments, federal agencies and others in evaluating potential entries into the National Register.

At its hearing on January 20, 2010 the Commission, acting in its capacity as San Francisco's Certified Local Government Commission, reviewed the nomination of the Temple Sherith Israel located at 2266 California Street, to the National Register.

In reviewing the nomination, the Commission has had available for its review and consideration reports, photographs, and other materials pertaining to the nomination contained in the Department's case file, and has reviewed and heard testimony and received materials from interested parties during the public hearing on the Project.

The property was previously surveyed as part of the Junior Leagues 1969 Here Today Survey (page 36 of "Here Today"), it was also included in the City's 1976 Architectural Survey where it was given a rating of 4 on a scale of -2 to 5, and on the City's Unreinforced Masonry Building (UMB) Survey.

According to the nomination's summary, the Temple Sherith Israel, 2266 California Street, is eligible for the National Register under Criteria A (events) and C (design/construction). The subject building is significant under Criterion A in the area of law as the primary site of the San Francisco Graft Prosecutions of 1906-1908. Because the Temple was one of the only large buildings still standing after the 1906 earthquake and fire it was used by most of the Superior Courts of the City and County of San Francisco. From October 1906 to February 1908 it was the primary site of the Graft Prosecutions, which were a result of corruption in City government prior to the earthquake and fire. The subject building is considered significant under Criterion C in the area of Design/Construction as the work of a master architect, Albert Pissis.

Properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places are automatically included in the California Register of Historical Resources and afforded consideration in accordance with state and local environmental review procedures.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends that the property located at 2266 California Street, also known as the Temple Sherith Israel, on Lot 011 in Assessor's Block 0637, be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places and further recommends the State Historic Preservation Officer to process the National Register nomination.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Recording Secretary to transmit this Resolution, and other pertinent materials in the case file 2009.1141U to the State Historic Preservation Officer.



**Resolution No. 0642**  
**Hearing Date: January 20, 2010**

**CASE NO. 2009.1141U**  
**2266 California Street**

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was **Adopted** by the Historic Preservation Commission on January 20, 2010.

Linda Avery  
Recording Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Martinez, Wolfram, Chase, Buckley, Damkroger, Hasz and Matsuda  
NOES: none  
ABSENT: none  
ADOPTED: January 20, 2010

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**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

P.O. BOX 942896  
SACRAMENTO, CA 94296-0001  
(916) 653-6624 Fax: (916) 653-9824  
calshpo@ohp.parks.ca.gov



February 8, 2010



Ms. Carol Shull, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service 2280  
1201 I (Eye) Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005

Subject: **Temple Sherith Israel**  
**San Francisco, San Francisco County, California**  
**National Register of Historic Places**

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the **Temple Sherith Israel** nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. This property is located in San Francisco, San Francisco County, California. On January 29, 2010, the State Historical Resources Commission unanimously found the property eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C at the local level of significance.

The property is nominated on behalf of the property owner, Congregation Sherith Israel.

If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact William Burg of my staff at 916-653-8936.

Sincerely,

Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA  
State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures