

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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

1. Name

historic Congregation B'nai B'rith

and/or common Wilshire Boulevard Temple

2. Location

street & number 3663 Wilshire Boulevard not for publication

city, town Los Angeles vicinity of congressional district 24th

state California code 06 county Los Angeles code 037

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Wilshire Boulevard Temple

street & number 3663 Wilshire Boulevard

city, town Los Angeles vicinity of state California 90010

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Los Angeles County Courthouse

street & number 111 North Hill Street

city, town Los Angeles state California

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historical Cultural Monument #116 has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date March 21, 1973 federal state county local

depository for survey records Cultural Heritage Board of the Municipal Arts Department
City of Los Angeles

city, town Los Angeles state California

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed	(1963 additions)	

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Wilshire Boulevard Temple now exists in the same condition as built on its original site on the northeast corner of Wilshire and Hobart Boulevards in Los Angeles. In 1929, when the Temple was originally constructed, the site was far to the west of the central city in a residential area. Today, it is surrounded by high-rise, glass and steel structures. The Wilshire Boulevard Temple property holdings consist of the Temple Sanctuary, Vestibule, and Ambulatory (these portions considered to be of greatest significance to the nomination), adjoining offices and an Assembly Hall to the north of the Sanctuary, the adjoining Sigmund Hecht Library and Classroom Wing and 2 two-story classroom buildings.

The octagonal, steel-framed, concrete covered main building (Sanctuary, Vestibule, and Ambulatory) is crowned with a poured-in-place, reinforced, circular dome rising 130 feet above street level, which is covered with exterior copper panels. The exterior dome and walls are horizontally banded with inlaid marble panels and mosaic patterns, with the crest of the dome circled by concrete cornice design. The main facade of the Temple fronting Wilshire Boulevard is adorned with three arched entrances of carved marble and stone, opening into a spacious Vestibule. Entranceways are also located on the east and west sides. Broad stairways on either end of the Vestibule lead to the balcony, where a 20-foot rose stained glass window facing Wilshire Boulevard depicts the Torah Scroll and Star of David surrounded by symbols of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. At balcony level on the east and west walls a set of three 20-foot high stained glass windows rise above the Ambulatory circling the entire Sanctuary.

The main floor level of the auditorium has a sloping grade of 2% and seats approximately 1,300, while the balcony level seats approximately 400. The interior of the Sanctuary consists of highly articulated, carved oak wainscot panels beginning at floor level, above which the 7-foot high by 320-foot mural frieze circumscribing the interior depicts the history of the Jewish people from the time of Abraham to the discovery of America. The frieze begins at the altar and runs from east to west. A band of horizontal inlaid marble design above the murals distinguishes the first level from the balcony level. Dark marbled columns, topped with ornate gold leaf cornices on the east and west sides, support the eastern and western Lunettes; the 36 x 18-foot eastern painting represents the Prophets, Priests, and Rabbis of Old and the 36 x 18-foot western painting depicts the Reign of Peace and Good Will on Earth.

Continuing on the balcony level are side apses with three small arched stained glass windows. An ornate spring line of plaster moldings supports the coffered, plaster dome ceiling which rises 100 feet above floor level. Coffers of decreasing size lead to the compression ring at the top of the dome with the inscription of the Shema, the holiest Jewish prayer, centering around a final circular dome. Eight chandeliers designed after the ceremonial spice boxes are affixed to the dome ceiling and illuminate the Sanctuary and detailed artwork. The rear area of the balcony is lighted by a chandelier symbolically designed in the shape of the Star of David illuminating the circular rose window.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1928-1929 **Builder/Architect** Herbert M. Baruch Corporation/
A. M. Edelman and S. Tilden Norton

Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The Wilshire Boulevard Temple, built 1928-29, is a historically significant monument to the Jewish community of Los Angeles. Since the time of its dedication in June of 1929, the Temple has been the place of worship for the City's largest and oldest Jewish congregation - the Congregation B'nai B'rith - whose roots in Los Angeles trace back to the year 1851. Early members of the Congregation consisted primarily of immigrants from Germany and Poland, who came to America in search of religious freedom. The first organized gathering of Jewish settlers in the Los Angeles area took place in 1854 and the Congregation B'nai B'rith was formally incorporated in 1862. The Congregation built the Fort Street Synagogue in 1873 and in 1896 their second synagogue, of a Victorian Moorish style, was built at North and Hope Streets (neither of which is standing today). From a membership of approximately 60 in 1862, the roster rapidly expanded to warrant a third, larger place of worship; in 1921 the Congregation purchased the present site for the building of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple. The Congregation has since grown to a present-day membership of approximately 2,700 familial units.

The mid-1880s heralded the rise of Reform Judaism with the Congregation B'nai B'rith at the forefront of the movement on the West Coast. The Temple served as the center in Southern California for a departure from Orthodox Judaism, as was evidenced by the Congregation's community involvement in philanthropic activities. The Congregation has had a significant impact upon Southern California through commitment to social service and advocacy of humanitarian ideals. Members pioneered such major organizations in Southern California as the Kaspere Cohn Hospital (now Cedars-Sinai Medical Center), the Community Chest (now United Way), the Jewish Family Service (charitable efforts addressing the needs of the poor), the Masonic Order, the first Library Association, the Hollywood Bowl and, in 1873, founded the first Chamber of Commerce.

The Wilshire Boulevard Temple adopted the current Byzantine synagogue style of the day; it was modeled after accepted prototypes in the Eastern United States. The works of architects Henry Fernbach (Shaaray Tefila, New York, N.Y., 1869) and Arnold Brunner (Temple Beth El, New York, N.Y., 1891), who originated the concept of a dome in synagogue architecture to symbolize unity - the essence of Judaism, were likely influential in the design of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple. The Temple combines a predominant Byzantine style - central dome over base, use of mosaic incrustations and extensive use of marble - with the rounded archways and decorative stained glass artwork characteristic of the Romanesque style.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, D.D., L.H.D., S.T.D., LL.D.
 Rabbi Alfred Wolf, M.H.L., Ph.D., D.D.
 Wilshire Boulevard Temple

ADDRESS NOT VERIFIED

10. Geographical Data

ADDRESS NOT VERIFIED

Acreage of nominated property 1.487 acres
 Quadrangle name Hollywood, CA

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A	11	379750	3769650
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			
E			
G			

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
F			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification Beginning at a point on the northeast corner of Wilshire and Hobart Boulevards, the boundary proceeds north along Hobart for 330 feet, then east 125', then north 50', then east 146.89', then south 190', then west 146.59', then south 195', then west 125' to point of origin. Boundaries are drawn along lot lines

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries to encompass the original building and subsequent code additions.

state	N/A	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Donna Eby Buckwalter and Stephen B. Barasch
 organization Barasch Architects & Associates, Inc. date June 9, 1981
 street & number 25 North Mentor Street telephone (213) 449-7214 / 681-3306
 city or town Pasadena state California 91106

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

K. Wallon

title SHPD date 11-2-81

For HCRS use only

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

date 12/21/81

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Centered on the North wall of the Sanctuary, the Altar area rises 80 feet from the main platform. Ten foot high bronze Menorahs are situated at the stairs on either side of the Altar, with the wood carved podium centered on the platform. A second raised level contains the Holy Seats of carved wood which are recessed into the Altar. The third raised platform leads through the latticed bronze gateways to the Ark where the Torah Scrolls are housed. A detailed, marble inlay and carved wood arch is located around the gateways where the Eternal Light is affixed, above which the carved stone Holy Tablets are set into handsomely inlaid teakwood. The choir loft consists of arched, carved wood openings behind which screens can be adjusted to control the acoustics. Blending into the teakwood, gold leafed screens rise above the choir loft and conceal the organ pipes beyond. Atop the choir screen, the third lunette of the Sanctuary, a 34 x 17 foot painted mural, depicts the days of the Creation.

The overall physical layout and general dimensions of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple Complex are summarized as follows (see site plan for corresponding areas):

I. Main Building (1928-29)

This portion of the nominated property is considered to be of greatest significance to the historical registration and has thus been emphasized in the above portion of the physical description.

The first floor of the Main Building contains the main entrance vestibule, measuring approximately 20 feet wide by 52 feet in length, the Sanctuary which measure 100 feet wide by 100 feet in length (110 foot diagonal dimension), a board room, apartment and various other spaces. A perimeter corridor (ambulatory) exists within the main building on the first floor, as well as on the second floor which also contains the Sanctuary Balcony, the Rabbi's offices, several classrooms and choir and orchestra rooms.

II. Assembly Hall and Classroom Building (1928-29)

Continuing northerly from the Main Building, the Assembly Hall, measuring 50 feet wide by 80 feet in length, is separated from the Sanctuary by a 12 foot wide corridor extending the length of the Assembly Hall. The western portion of the corridor exits onto Hobart Boulevard. To the east of the corridor, behind the stage area, steps lead up to an enclosed, arcaded foyer and an enclosed courtyard beyond. The Classroom Building exists to the north of the court, while an entrance-way to the south of the courtyard adjoins the main parking area.

A foyer and entranceway in front of the Assembly Hall fronts along Hobart Boulevard. The second floor area surrounding the Assembly Hall consists of offices and a corridor which connects the second levels of both Classroom Buildings.

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Sections I and II, as noted above, are those portions of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple constructed in 1928-29. Several additions were constructed in 1963 and are structurally connected to those portions mentioned above. The additions are as follows:

III. Library and Classroom Wing:

This addition is located to the north of the Assembly Hall and is accessed via the corridor/foyer in front of the Assembly Hall. The Library and Classroom Wing contains a reception/information and switchboard area facing the main entrance fronting Hobart Boulevard. A double loaded corridor separates the Sigmund Hecht Library from offices and classrooms and leads to a second, north-facing courtyard. Stairs adjacent to the reception area allow access to the second floor foyer and offices beyond.

IV. Classroom Building:

To the east of the Library and Classroom Wing, through the second courtyard, a third courtyard runs through the center of this Classroom Building and the Classroom Building constructed in 1929. The courtyard runs the length of the buildings and continues easterly to a foyer and entranceway fronting Harvard Boulevard.

Each Classroom Building is serviced by a double loaded corridor running through its center. A corridor perpendicular to these corridors at the end of each Classroom Building joins the buildings and forms a circulation loop.

These later additions are included within the boundaries of the nomination but do not contribute historically or architecturally to the significance of the property.

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Of paramount artistic and cultural significance are the Temple's Warner Murals, donated by the Warner Brothers of the Warner Brothers Studio and painted by Hugo Ballin (born New York City, 1879-1956). The murals constitute the largest mural scheme undertaken at this time in any permanent religious building in Western United States. While Jewish religion has traditionally upheld an opposition to artistic portrayals of the human form in synagogue architecture in order to avoid reproduction of God in an anthropomorphic manner, the Congregation of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple is unique in its choice to artistically portray Jewish heritage and beliefs through mural paintings. Only one other Jewish congregation up to the time of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple construction has been known to employ paintings as a medium for education and religious enlightenment; in the year 245 a synagogue in Dura-Europos, an outpost of the Roman empire on the Euphrates River, covered the sanctuary walls with friezes on three levels. Archaeologists excavated the synagogue in 1932, three years after the dedication of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple.

Today, the Temple has become a symbol for the interdenominational movement in religion in Southern California and serves as a cultural center for several religious and non-sectarian functions. The Edgar F. Magnin Religious School provides religious education for the youth of the Congregation, with pre-school through twelfth grade classes scheduled year round. The Temple is currently planning several Cultural Exhibit Centers to provide resources for the study of Jewish religion, culture and history in Southern California, which is in keeping with the Congregation's philosophy of educating its members and the general public.

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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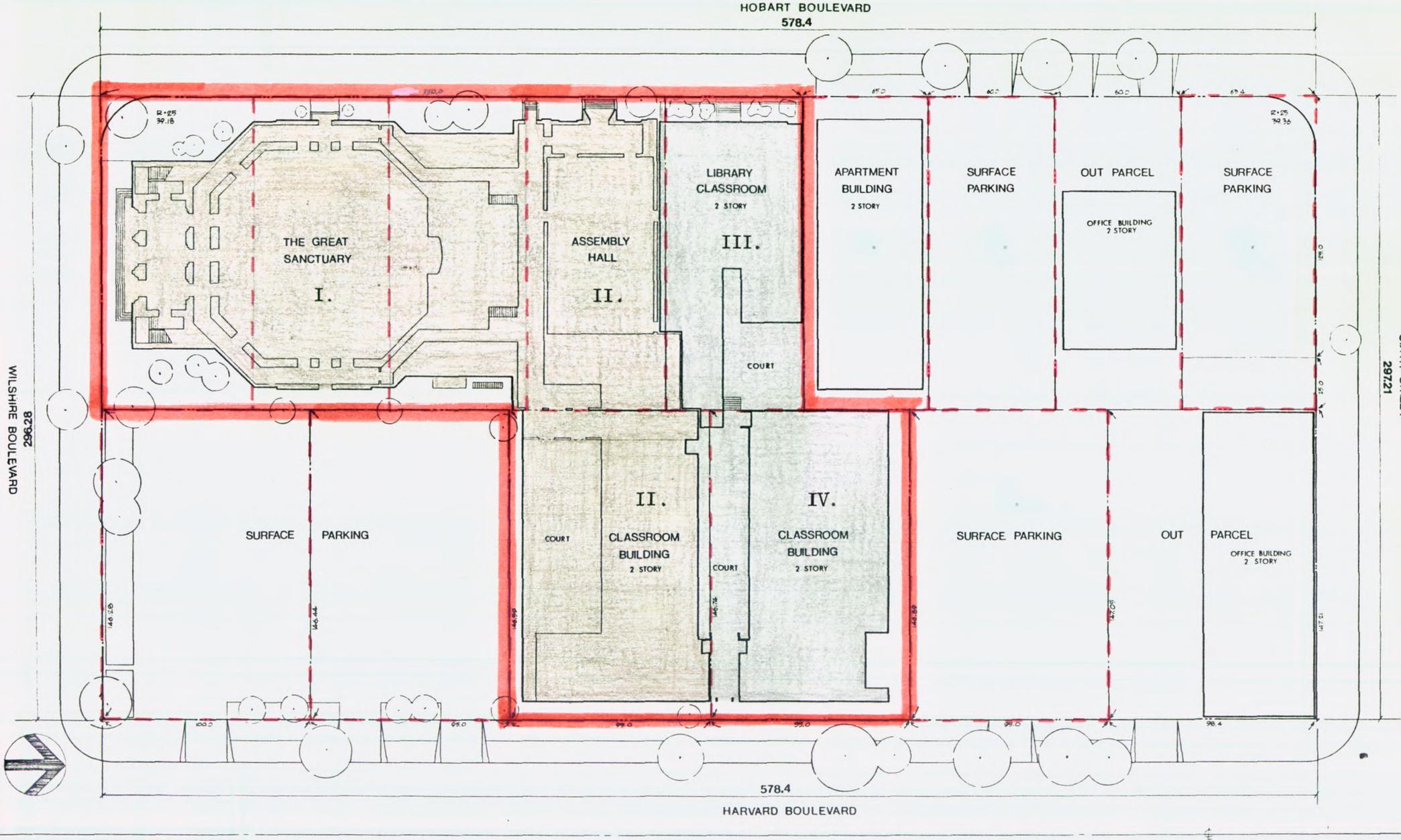
The Synagogue, Carl H. Kraeling, Final Report VIII, Part I of The Excavations at Dura-Europos., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.

Synagogue Architecture in the United States, Rachel Wischnitzer, The Jewish Publication Society of America: Philadelphia, 1955, pp. 70-108.

Sixty Years in Southern California, Harris Newmark, The Riverside Press: Cambridge, 1930, pp. 314, 608.

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WILSHIRE BOULEVARD TEMPLE



LEGEND:

■ Constructed 1929

■ Constructed 1963

--- Lot Boundaries

I - IV See Physical Description

— Nomination Boundary