

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Temple Beth-El

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 688 Broad Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Providence

N/A vicinity

state Rhode Island code RI

county Providence

code 007

zip code 02907

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

1 buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

1

_____ objects

1 Total

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official _____

Date _____

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

REVIVALS/Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

TERRA COTTA

roof

other. N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Temple Beth-El, erected in 1910-11 (Banning & Thornton, architects), is a two-story Classical Revival building of Roman brick and terra cotta, set on a high basement of rusticated brick with concrete underpinnings. It stands on Broad Street, one of the main radials leading southward from downtown Providence, at the corner of Glenham Street, on a lot bounded by an iron pale fence. The building is set well back from the property line on the front and south side, which emphasizes its presence in a mixed-use commercial and residential neighborhood in which most buildings are constructed close to or right on the sidewalk. A low two-story, flat-roof brick and concrete block addition built in 1958 is attached to the north side of the synagogue, and is dwarfed by the earlier structure.

The synagogue is a contained rectilinear block of symmetrical design. On the front a broad flight of steps leads up to a central portico with a pair of monumental Corinthian columns in antis. The columns and antae, the latter treated as piers, support an entablature and triangular pediment. The portico shelters three double-door entrances with architrave trim composed of alternating projecting and recessed blocks bordered by moldings. This same trim is used between the basement and first story to form a stringcourse, which steps up around the tops of two basement entrances flanking the portico. The entablature of the portico continues around the sides and rear of the building and is topped by a parapet which partially hides the building's hip roof from view. On the sides, shallow central pavilions, defined by broad pilasters and triangular pediments, are flanked by pairs of window bays, articulated in vertical groups with molded copper Star of David panels between the first- and second-story windows. The pavilions each contain narrow two-story windows framed by thin pilasters. The entablature cornice and raking cornices of the pediments are trimmed with modillions. The cornice moldings and coping of the parapet are of copper with a verdigris patina. The portico entablature has a Hebrew inscription in raised lettering in the frieze, and the tympana of the pediments contain Stars of David in blue and yellow glazed tile.

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Inside above basement level, the front and rear are divided into two stories of circulation and subsidiary spaces flanking a two-story auditorium at the center. At the front end of the first floor is a vestibule, which leads into the auditorium and also contains staircases on each side leading to the second floor and basement. The vestibule has dado paneling, architrave trim on doors and windows, Ionic pilasters, and entablature cornice trim and ceiling beams ornamented with dentils. The staircases have paneled closed strings and classical turned-baluster railings. The double doors leading to the auditorium, raised slightly above the floor level of the vestibule and reached by steps, are made of mahogany with stained glass windows set into the top.

The auditorium has truncated corners, creating an irregular octagonal plan with a deep recess opening off the east side. Each side wall contains four narrow, full-height windows (those visible in the side pavilions on the exterior) filled with stained glass. The walls are articulated with chair rails, corner pilasters, and entablature trim at the cornice, and the ceiling with beams forming a grid pattern. Electric sconces are mounted on the walls, and the ceiling contains a number of small downlights as well as three larger, recessed circular fixtures filled with stained glass in a Star of David pattern. At the back of the room, a balcony with a curved classical balustrade and stepped floor occupies the space over the vestibule. It is lit by side windows and windows opening out onto the front portico. At the front of the auditorium, the left corner contains a choir gallery raised slightly above floor level, surmounted by ranks of organ pipes, which extend around the corner into the recess. The right front corner contains a door leading into a rear entrance and stair hall, and a balcony on the upper level. Mahogany benches, with deep moldings and keystones on each end replicating the double-arch pattern of the tablets of the Decalogue, are arranged in four files upon a maple floor which slopes slightly down toward a raised platform in the recess. The platform is backed by a one-story screen wall with Corinthian pilaster and entablature trim and a pair of arched doorways. These doors open into a space originally divided into a choir room on the north, connecting by a corridor with the gallery under the organ pipes, and a rabbi's study on the south, also reached from the back hall. Between the platform doors, a curtain covers the Ark, which is framed by pairs of engaged

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Corinthian columns, an entablature, and a pediment now covered with a panel. Tablets of the Law, in white onyx, are mounted atop the pediment and framed with columns and an entablature. Behind this, over the former choir room and study, is another balcony, fronted by a classical balustrade, with three doors at the rear giving access to two small study rooms.

The present arrangement of furnishings in the auditorium reflects slight changes made after the Orthodox Congregation Shaare Zedek acquired the synagogue from the Reform Congregation Sons of Israel and David in 1954. In front of the platform is a balustraded bema with a reading table facing the Ark. On the platform are three wooden pulpits, one centered at the front and two flanking the Ark. An electric menorah is set in front of the central pulpit, and another menorah is set on top of a column set to the left of the Ark. The classical pediment above the Ark is covered by a wooden panel upon which the phrase "Open the gates of righteousness" is inscribed in Hebrew in gilded lettering. Originally, there was no bema, and the platform contained a central pulpit of white onyx flanked on each side by fluted columns supporting menorahs. Unlike the Reform Congregation of Sons of Israel and David, the Orthodox Congregation Shaare Zedek neither uses music in their services nor allows women to worship with men. Therefore, the choir loft is now partly concealed by a screen of stained glass panels, and the rear balcony is set aside for use as a women's gallery. The balustrades of both the front and rear balconies are now topped by brass railings, salvaged from the Modern Playhouse after its demolition in the late 1950s. Congregation Shaare Zedek has experienced a decline in membership in recent years, and now uses the main auditorium only on major religious holidays. The congregation has removed the partition between the former rabbi's study and choir room behind the platform, and has converted this enlarged space into a chapel for weekday services.

The basement is reached from the main floor by front and rear stairs and directly from outside by front and rear entrances that open onto the staircase landings a half-flight above the basement floor. At the front, under the front vestibule, is a vestibule providing access to men's and women's rooms and a cloak room on the west and a large vestry on the east. The vestry, rectangular in plan, occupies the space under the auditorium, and likewise has a recess at the east end with a raised platform or stage. The stage is flanked by a room on each side, the one on

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the north now used as an office. At the rear, in addition to the stair and entrance hall in the southeast corner, were three rooms, originally used as a classroom, a library, and a kitchen, respectively. In the mid-1950s, all three back rooms were converted to food-preparation use by the present occupants. The library became the meat kitchen, one of the two smaller rooms became the dairy kitchen, and the third room became a food storage space. The vestry was once divided with movable partitions into four separate classrooms for the religious school which met on Sunday mornings. These dividers were removed when Congregation Shaare Zedek took possession of the building.

The two-story, flat-roof, concrete block and brick addition attached to the north side of the synagogue was built by Congregation Shaare Zedek in 1958. Its asymmetrical facade is aligned with the front of the synagogue portico. The addition has a side-hall entrance sheltered by a plain portico topped with steel industrial railings; irregular fenestration of plate-glass, sash, and awning windows; and a cast-stone frieze with relief zig-zag ornamentation recalling Art Deco work of the 1920s. The addition was designed by Harry Marshak (d. ca 1973), who designed a number of houses on Providence's East Side during a long career, as well as the Congregation Sons of Jacob Synagogue (begun 1905, completed 1920), 24 Douglas Avenue, and Temple Beth Israel (1921, altered 1960s), 155 Niagara Street. Originally used as a mikveh (ritual bath) and a classroom building, the structure has been vacant for the past two decades and is now used only occasionally to provide accommodations for visiting rabbis and cantors in two upper-story rooms remodeled as guest rooms.

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TEMPLE BETH-EL
688 Broad Street
Providence, Rhode Island

Photographer: Robert O. Jones

Date: August 1988

Negative filed at: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission
150 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903

- #1. View of exterior facing northeasterly.
- #2. Interior view of the vestibule facing north.
- #3. Interior view of the auditorium facing northwesterly.
- #4. Interior view of the auditorium facing southwesterly.
- #5. Interior view of the auditorium from the rear balcony facing northeasterly.
- #6. Detail view of the front of the auditorium facing northeasterly, showing the organ, the bema, the platform, pulpits, menorahs, and the Ark topped by the Tablets of the Law.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
RELIGION

Period of Significance

1910-1911

Significant Dates

1910-1911

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Banning and Thornton

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Temple Beth-El, constructed in 1910-11 (Banning and Thornton, architects) as the new home of the Congregation Sons of Israel and David, is significant for its association with the religious and social life of one segment of Providence's Jewish community, and stands as a symbol of the growth and changing status of the Jewish community as a whole. The history of the congregation for which it was built offers insight into the social, economic, and geographic mobility of successive generations of local Jewish families, and the rise and growth of Reform Judaism in America. Architecturally, the synagogue represents a response to building a worship space for a cultural group without a particular historic architectural tradition, and illustrates a distinct phase in American synagogue architecture as it evolved from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century. The second building erected expressly for Providence's oldest Jewish congregation, this synagogue was the first in the city of such grand and monumental design. The interior arrangement, though slightly altered, still reflects the synagogue's original use for Reform services. The temple's change of ownership and adaptation to Orthodox ritual practices in the 1950s, though they occurred less than fifty years ago, are notable aspects of the building's history and may add to its significance in the future. Though religious buildings are normally not eligible for nomination to the National Register, Temple Beth-El derives its significance from its architectural distinction and historical importance, and is eligible for nomination under National Register Criteria A and C.

Unlike Newport, which had a substantial community of Sephardic Jews in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Providence did not have a significant number of Jewish inhabitants until the middle of the nineteenth century. Though documentation is sparse, it appears that the first Jewish

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families arrived in Providence in the 1820s or 1830s. The first wave of immigrants came from Germany, Holland, Hungary, and Poland. Many settled in the downtown and became proprietors of small shops. Although some were of Sephardic heritage, most were Ashkenazic Jews from German-speaking areas.

In January 1854, a handful of Jewish families formed the Congregation Sons of Israel, chartered by the General Assembly in June 1855. The new congregation worshipped first in members' homes and then in rented halls: from 1863 to about 1865 in a meeting place on Canal Street, then for awhile in another hall on South Main Street. This may have reflected limited financial resources, but also illustrated the fact that Jewish tradition does not require that religious services be held in a building specifically erected and set aside for worship. It is necessary, however, to have a hallowed burial ground, and the congregation first turned its efforts to securing a cemetery. In October of 1857, Solomon Pareira, first president of the congregation, conveyed land he had bought in 1849 to the congregation for use as a cemetery. It was located on what was then the New London Turnpike in the town of Cranston, now Reservoir Avenue in the city of Providence. The first burial, in 1859, was that of Solomon Cook, vice president of the congregation. Since enlarged by additional acquisitions of land, the Congregation Sons of Israel burial ground is the final resting place for many of the earliest and most prominent members of the Providence Jewish community.

Many Jews left Providence in the wake of the Panic of 1857, among them Solomon Pareira, who left the presidency of the Sons of Israel and moved to Cincinnati in 1858. The Jewish population of Providence began to expand once again after the Civil War. While the community remained small in number, it was bound together by a common religion, but as it increased, growing diversity led to segmentation. During its early years Congregation Sons of Israel served Jews from the entire Providence area and included both Sephardim and Ashkenazim. After 1870, a growing number of congregations came to be organized along particular ritualistic, national, and/or neighborhood lines. A new wave of Jewish immigrants came from Austria, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, and Russia. Their number increased dramatically with the advent of the Russian pogroms in 1881-2, and by the early 1900s the great majority of Providence Jews were of Russian background. The newcomers settled around

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Randall Square, in the adjoining Constitution Hill and Smith Hill areas, and the Willard Avenue-Prairie Avenue section of South Providence. They were generally poorer than the earlier immigrants, and more strongly dedicated to Orthodox religious practices. In the meantime, the earlier immigrants and their descendants were becoming a more established and integral part of the local socioeconomic structure. As they prospered, they moved to new homes in the side streets off Broad Street and Elmwood Avenue and, later, to Cranston suburbs such as Edgewood. By the 1870s, a group of well-to-do and prominent families constituted a sort of aristocracy among the Jewish community known as "the Deutschen," so named because most if not all were of German background. Increasing affluence and assimilation was accompanied by a tendency to religious liberalism.

Ten families, led by Abraham Jacobs, left the Sons of Israel to start the Congregation Sons of David, chartered in January 1871. This may have reflected some dissention regarding ritual practices. In 1874, the two factions reunited to form the Congregation Sons of Israel and David. This merger apparently stemmed from practical considerations, for the two small congregations had had a difficult time surviving as separate entities. Another congregation, Sons of Zion, was chartered in 1875, to serve Eastern European Orthodox Jews settled in the Randall Square area. According to one source, "While struggling for years under the Orthodox ritual, [the Sons of Israel and David] were not able to infuse new life into their congregation....As years went by the congregation...drifted from orthodoxy into what is known as 'Conservative Judaism'...." In 1877, at a local "convention of the Israelites" addressed by speakers from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Cincinnati, Congregation Sons of Israel and David voted to adopt Moderate Reform practices and the Conservative prayer book. Some dissenting members withdrew to form Congregation Sons of Abraham, incorporated in 1880. Over the years Sons of Israel and David became increasingly identified as the congregation for Reform Jews of German background. Most residual elements of Conservative practice were eliminated by 1896, and in 1901 the congregation formally affiliated with the Reform movement.

In 1877 the Sons of Israel and David rented the former Church of the New Jerusalem (built ca 1842, now demolished), a wooden Gothic Revival structure at the corner of Pine and Page Streets, and remained there until 1882. They then met in a

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rented hall at 98 Weybosset Street. In 1887 the congregation bought land at the corner of Friendship and Foster Streets upon which they built a new temple, their first and the first in Providence, in 1889-90 (demolished ca 1959). The dedication of this temple was attended by a host of prominent political, business, and religious leaders, both Jewish and Christian, and included an address by Rabbi Isaac M. Wise of Cincinnati, leader of the Reform movement in America. The building, designed by Providence architect W. H. Colwell, was a brick and brownstone Romanesque edifice with a corner tower, and was indistinguishable from a typical Protestant church of the period, except for a depiction the Tablets of the Law set over the large facade window. These efforts to establish a house of worship were typical of those made by American Jewish congregations in the nineteenth century. Very often Jews would take over abandoned churches. When congregations had the means to build anew, they were faced with a scarcity of Jewish architects, and--though the placement of interior religious furnishings was governed by long-standing traditions--a lack of particular building types or architectural styles with a long history of use for synagogue construction. Building committees turned to Christian architects, who often utilized elements reminiscent of the ecclesiastical architecture of non-ritualistic Protestant denominations or even theatre architecture when designing synagogues.

By 1908, the congregation had decided to move from Friendship Street. It sold the first temple to the First Swedish [Baptist] congregation for \$14,750, and began to meet in a rented hall at the corner of Weybosset and Eddy Street. The following year, it purchased a parcel of land for a new temple at the corner of Broad and Glenham Streets for \$10,300. Among the most active supporters of the plan to erect a new temple was Rabbi Henry Englander, who served as leader of the congregation from 1905 to 1910. The congregation's members decided to name the new building Temple Beth-El, while keeping their corporate name of Congregation Sons of Israel and David.

In 1910, the congregation's building committee, headed by Sigmund J. Lederer, a Providence jewelry manufacturer, selected the local firm of Banning & Thornton as architects for the new building. The choice of Banning & Thornton may have been influenced by Joseph and Leon Samuels, members of the congregation, who had hired the firm to plan an addition to the

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Outlet Building in 1903. Though Banning & Thornton was one of Providence's less prominent and less prestigious architectural firms, the partners, both individually and together, did execute a number of important commissions. Edwin T. Banning designed the Roger Williams Park Casino (1896-7; listed on the National Register) in Providence; D. Howard Thornton worked on St. Paul's Episcopal Church (1901) in Pawtucket and the State Sanatorium (1905) at Wallum Lake in Burrillville; and the firm carried out the 1906 remodeling of the Old State House in Providence (listed on the National Register) for the Sixth District Court.

The new Temple Beth-El reflected stylistic trends for synagogues as they were evolving at the turn of the twentieth century. The selection of a Roman Classical design was typical for this period. At the time there was a reaction against the eclecticism of the nineteenth century which had led to the construction of Gothic Revival, Romanesque, and Moorish synagogues. One scholar has suggested that as Jews became more assimilated in American society, they wanted synagogues that were more in line with "the mainstream of American architecture" [Wischnier]. If true, the growing popularity of classical design for synagogues throughout the United States in the early 1900s may be a manifestation of the widespread use of classicism for many types of secular public buildings in that period. In terms of particular relevancy to Jewish cultural traditions, archaeological excavations conducted in Palestine in the early years of the twentieth century, some sponsored by Jewish organizations, uncovered evidence of ancient synagogues of Graeco-Roman design. This contributed to a belief that antique classicism was the most suitable style for synagogue construction, and that its use represented a revival of Hebraic heritage.

Temple Beth-El's interior plan and furnishings were devised to conform with the congregation's Reform ritual practices. In the Orthodox tradition, women do not sit with men during worship, and services, conducted without music, focus on the reading of the Torah and recitation of prayers. As a consequence, Orthodox synagogues have separate galleries for women's seating, a bema from which the Holy Scriptures are read, and no organs or choir lofts. The bema, a raised platform with a large desk for holding the Torah scrolls, is placed in the center of the room or a little to the east, with the desk facing the Ark, which is located on or near the east wall. Seats are arranged facing the

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bema, with the area between the bema and Ark left empty. In the Reform tradition, families sit together, there is music, and the service is characterized by lesser emphasis on scriptural readings and greater emphasis on the rabbi's sermon. Thus, Reform synagogues have provisions for music, and no bema. Readings and sermon are delivered from a platform, furnished with one or two pulpits, set right in front of the Ark at the east end of the temple, and seats are arranged facing the front. The original interior elements of Temple Beth-El--its organ, choir gallery, eastern platform with pulpit in front of the Ark, and pew-like seating arrangement--reflect these conventions.

Temple Beth-El was completed in 1911, at an approximate cost of \$75,000, and dedication ceremonies were held from 15 through 17 September. Among those participating at the dedication were Rabbi Nathan Stern and Simon Elias, then president of the congregation. Considerably larger and more imposing than the small brick Romanesque structure the congregation had recently vacated, the new Roman edifice was the visible embodiment of its members's material prosperity. The new auditorium held considerably more people and the classroom area allowed the congregation to enlarge its educational program. In addition, space and facilities were now available for social events.

The Broad Street building served its congregation well for over four decades, although as early as 1926, Temple Beth-El began to consider building an addition to accommodate its expanding Sunday school and, in 1931, authorized a building committee to consider the location and construction of a new synagogue. The Depression may have contributed to postponement of this project. When the Congregation Sons of Israel and David began to discuss construction again in the late 1940s, they decided to build a new temple rather than to enlarge the old one. This decision was no doubt influenced by the fact that most of the congregation no longer lived in the immediate vicinity of the Broad Street temple. By this time, many had moved to the East Side, which had become the neighborhood of choice for prosperous Providence families, or out to the suburbs. The Jewish population remaining in the Willard Avenue area near the Broad Street temple was not part of the German Jewish community which had established the Congregation Sons of Israel and David; it consisted of Eastern European Jews who had formed a number of small Orthodox congregations of their own.

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In 1954, the Congregation Sons of Israel and David dedicated a new temple on Orchard Avenue on Providence's East Side. Four small South Providence congregations, Linnath Hazedek (inc. 1896), South Providence Hebrew (inc. 1901), Machzekas Hadas (inc. 1907), and Bais Isruel Anshoy Hestreich (inc. 1907), later joined by a fifth, took possession of the Broad Street synagogue, renaming themselves Congregation Shaare Zedek. Slight alterations to the temple, including installation of a bema near the eastern platform, were made at that time to conform with the new congregation's Orthodox beliefs and practices. Despite this undertaking, the Jewish population of the Willard Avenue section was declining, and most of the neighborhood was razed for an urban renewal project in the 1950s and 1960s; among the demolished buildings were the earlier synagogues of the congregations listed above (except for Linnath Hazedek, which was later demolished after 1975). Though the majority of members of Shaare Zedek do not live in the immediate vicinity of the temple, the present congregation's continuing presence here perpetuates the traditional ties of its predecessors with the South Providence neighborhood. These factors reflect social patterns common in metropolitan areas: how changes in residency often follow economic advancement, how some old institutions relocate to new facilities more conveniently reached by members that have moved, and how some institutions stay in old locations, maintaining a sense of historical continuity with a particular place.

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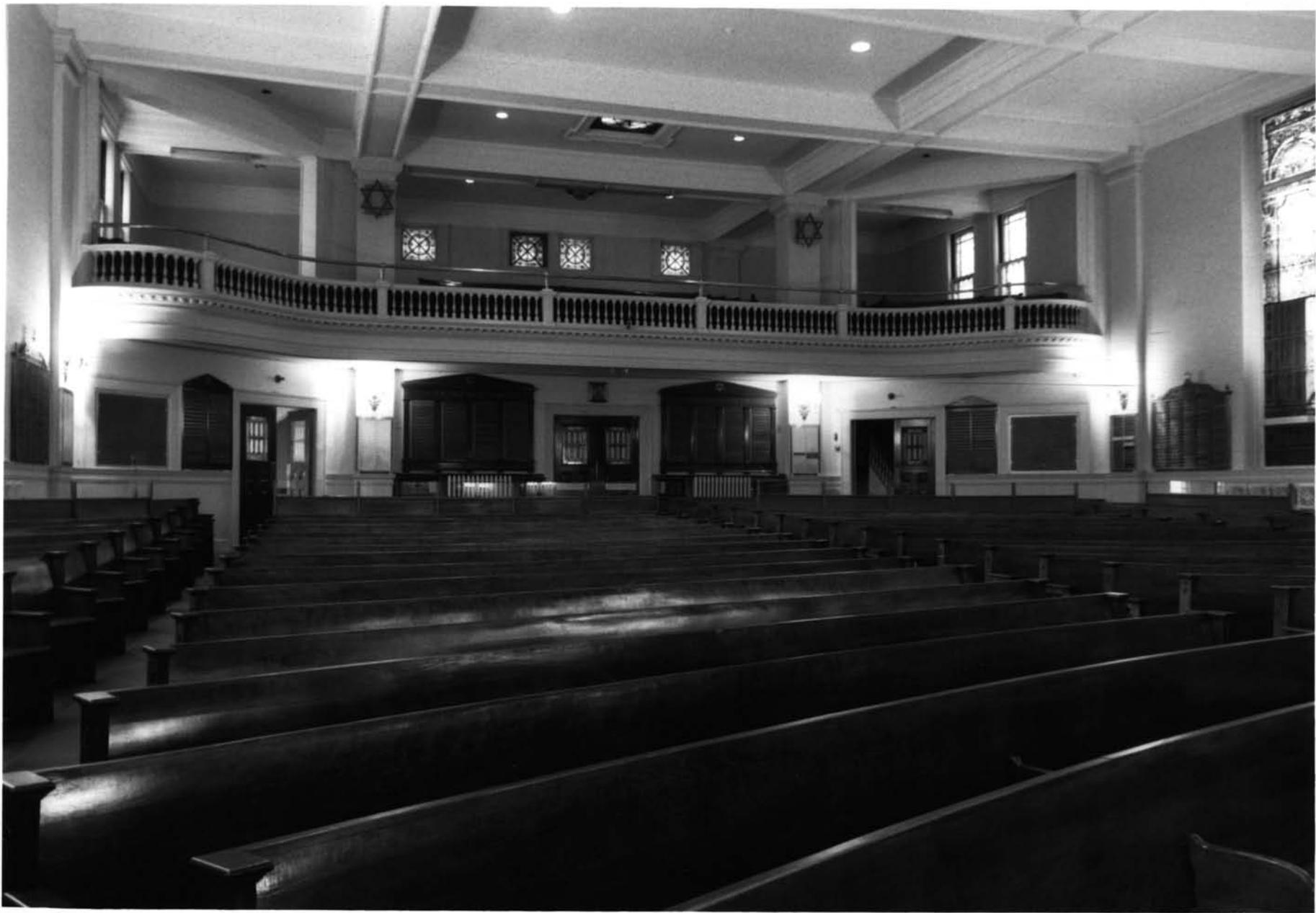
TEMPLE BETH-EL
688 BROAD STREET
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

PHOTO #. 1



TEMPLE BETH-EL
688 BROAD STREET
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

PHOTO #2



TEMPLE BETH-EL
688 BROAD STREET
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

PHOTO #3



TEMPLE BETH-EL
688 BROAD STREET
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

PHOTO # 4

PROV. IND. - 688 BROAD

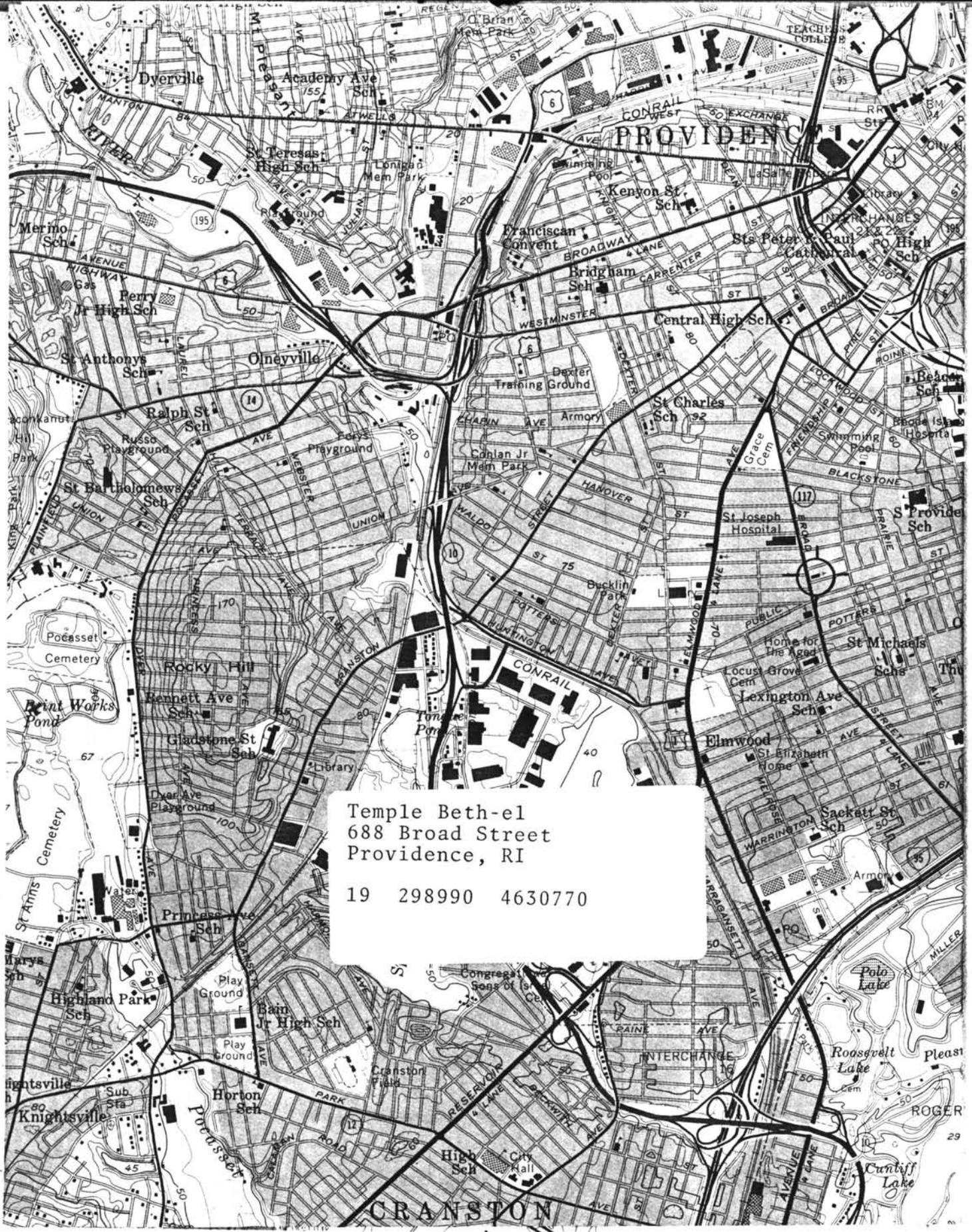


Providence, 688 Broad Street
The interior of the Temple Beth-El, now Congregation Shaare Zedek



TEMPLE BETH-EL
688 BROAD STREET
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

PHOTO #6



Temple Beth-el
688 Broad Street
Providence, RI
19 298990 4630770