

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received OCT 18 1983

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Temple Beth Israel

and/or common Ruth Denny Theatre

2. Location

street & number 3517 Austin Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Houston

N/A vicinity of

state Texas

code 048

county Harris

code 201

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Houston Independent School District

street & number 3830 Richmond Avenue

city, town Houston

N/A vicinity of

state Texas 77027

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of the County Clerk, Harris County Courthouse

street & number 1001 Preston

city, town Houston

state Texas 77002

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

(1) Houston Architectural Survey
 title (2) Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no
 (1) 1980
 date (2) 1983 federal state county local
 (1) Texas Room, Houston Central Public Library
 depositary for survey records (2) Texas Historical Commission
 (1) Houston
 city, town (2) Austin state Texas

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The former Temple Beth Israel, which occupies an entire city block near downtown Houston, is a large complex of masonry structures. The principal building, the Temple, features exterior and interior decoration that combines elements from Near Eastern and Classical vocabularies in a stylized Art Moderne manner. The Temple proper features a large, vaulted auditorium as its central space. The adjacent Community House, while less ornate than the Temple, follows the larger building's lead in terms of materials and detailing.

The complex of masonry buildings formerly occupied by Temple Beth Israel form a distinctive grouping located slightly southwest of the business district of downtown Houston. The dominant element of the complex is the Temple proper, which faces west onto Austin Street. Essentially square in form, the Temple is faced with tawny brick laid in English bond. The decorative trim elements are executed in limestone. The main Temple entrance is framed by a recessed columnar portico formed by four somewhat stylized Ionic columns set in antis between two heavy, square piers with matching detailing. The capitals of the columns and piers feature simple, repetitive, leaf carvings instead of a plain, undecorated cap. The frieze of the entablature above the portico contains two panels, with quotations from the Torah flanking large letters that spell out the name of the Temple. A stylized crest resembling a course of anthemion caps the entablature. To each side of the entablature is a series of square panels formed by dark-brown brick with decorative rosettes marking the corners of the squares. The uppermost of these three rows of panels contains a limestone block with ornamental carving. The parapet above contains a strip of carved limestone ornament which uses the Star of David as its central element. The crest of the parapet is formed by a row of stone blocks containing a carved roundel. At the peak of the parapet are the two tablets with the Ten Commandments written in bas-relief Hebrew script. Five doorways with limestone frames provide access to the interior of the Temple. Above each doorway is a window filled with somewhat milky stained glass, with the inner sections divided into rectangular panes surrounded by a narrow ornamental border of rosettes.

The north and south elevations of the Temple are virtually identical to one another, with the central section of each side elevation dominated by a grouping of four square pilasters supporting an entablature. The detailing of these elements is modeled closely on the entrance portico. The brickwork detailing of these flanking elevations, along with the paneled brick band flanking the entablatures, forms a continuous band around the structure. The westernmost bays of the north and south elevations feature rather classical door enframements with a single, tall window opening above them. The east, or rear, elevation is the plainest face of the Temple, although the band of patterned, square, brickwork panels noted on the other elevations also continues onto this facade.

On passing through one of the five entry doors, one enters the long, rectangular foyer that precedes the Temple auditorium proper. This foyer features a rather flat, tiled vault ceiling. At each end of the foyer are staircases that lead down into the basement, up to a classroom space, and to the second level of the auditorium seating. The main space of the auditorium is virtually square, and is spanned at the ceiling by a flattened barrel vault which is faced with tile laid in a herringbone pattern. The ceiling is divided into six panels by four elaborately detailed beams whose faces are adorned by

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Continuation sheet

Item number 7

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a continuous band of Greek fretwork. The largest of the ceiling panels is nearly filled by a large roundel defined by a heavy plaster molding decorated with rosettes. In the center of the roundel there is a skylight of colored glass, mainly amber in tone, which features the Star of David formed by the supporting mullions of the glazing. To the east and west sides of the auditorium are large square piers that rise to support the edges of the ceiling vault. The east end of the auditorium contains a large semicircular niche framed on its exterior by a tall round arch. At the center of the niche is a round-arch aedicula. The upper segment of this aedicula is elaborately decorated with a mosaic of dark-blue and gold tiles. The lower segment features a recessed space for the synagogue's Torah.

Some alterations were made to the former Temple in the years following World War II. The congregation had the large window openings on the north and south elevations bricked up in 1949-1950 at the time the Temple was air conditioned. While this work resulted in a change to the original design, it should be noted that the brick infill was executed with some care and with great attention to the English bond of the original walls. The earlier patterning was copied in a lighter shade of brick. In 1976, the Temple auditorium was remodeled for use by the Houston Community College of Fine Arts. This work resulted in the removal of the original first-level flooring and its replacement with a raked floor. A network of catwalks was installed across the ceiling, partially obscuring the decorative work there but, fortunately, avoiding the major elements of detail.

Located to the rear of the Temple is the former Levy Community House, built at the same time as the Temple, whose principal elevation faces north onto Holman Street. This two-story structure uses the same tawny brick found on the Temple itself. While it has simpler ornamentation, the Community House nonetheless carries a decorative, carved, limestone cornice band above the second-floor windows that is quite similar to detailing on the Temple; the treatment of the parapet also follows work on the larger structure. Above the second-story windows on the Holman Street elevation are carved limestone panels that appear as rather oversized lintels. The main entrance door faces Holman, with a secondary door around the corner on La Branch. Both of these doorways are classical in their design, with square pilasters supporting simple entablatures. The interior of the structure is taken up by a dance studio on the first floor and a multiuse auditorium on the second. As in the case of the Temple, the Community House also has been altered. On the exterior, the most prominent changes involved the bricking-in of the main entry. The interior was subject to considerable renovation. The original axis of the entry was changed, making the La Branch Street entry the major access point. Named in honor of Abe M. Levy, the Community House, in all likelihood, never contained interior fittings as important as those still in place in the Temple.

Attached to the south elevation of the Community House is the Freed Memorial Tower, which is open at its highest point. The massing of the tower is heavy, in keeping with the powerful forms of the synagogue, but its lack of any decorative detailing clearly marks it as a later work, although sympathetic in terms of materials and massing. Extending south, and then turning west to form an ell, is the one-story building of the Mendelsohn Memorial Religious School. Again, although this structure is several years younger than the Temple and Community House, the tawny brick used on its exterior blends well with the earlier buildings. Both the Freed Tower and the Mendelsohn School were erected in 1949-50.

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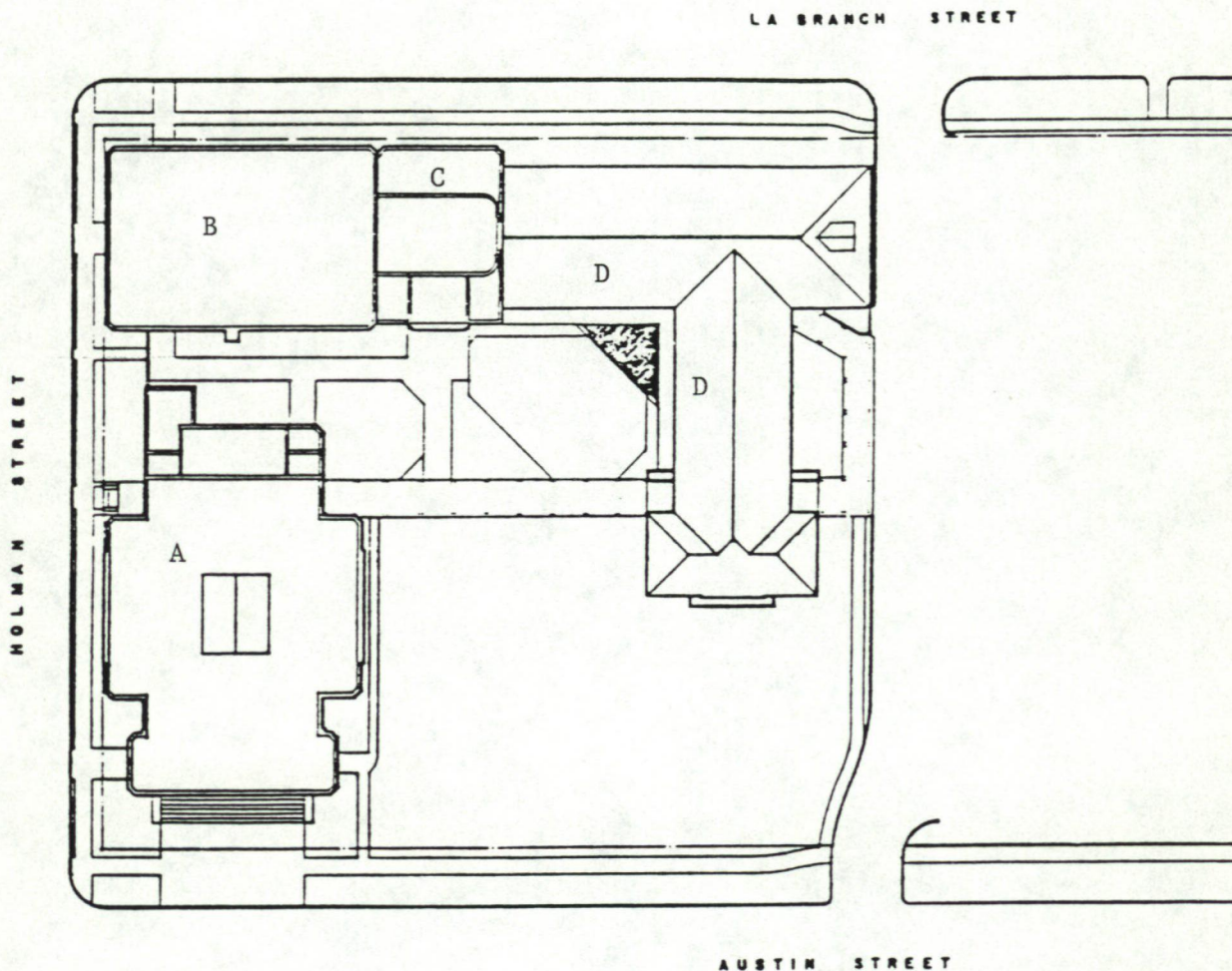
10/18/83

date entered

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PLOT PLAN

LEGEND

- A - Temple Auditorium
- B - Levy Community Center
- C - Freed Memorial Tower
- D - Mendelsohn Religious School

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> 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 1924-25; 1949-50

Builder/Architect Joseph Finger (1924-25); I.B. Klein & Theo. Keller (1949-50).

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Temple Beth Israel was one of the most important religious buildings to be built in Houston in the 1920s. It is the oldest remaining work of architecture associated with Congregation Beth Israel, the oldest Jewish congregation in Texas. The Temple and its related educational and community buildings are landmarks in the neighborhood where they were built, which is a section in the south end of Houston developed as a suburban civic center during the 1910s and 1920s.

Temple Beth Israel and its attendant facilities, the Abe M. Levy Community House, the Mendelsohn Memorial Religious School, and the Freed Memorial Tower (the last two added in 1949-1950), comprise a rare example of the use of Moderne architecture for religious buildings. In the case of the Temple, the blocky massing, the use of low relief and brick detailing on the exterior walls, and the abstract rendering of classical elements (notably the inset portico on Austin Street) are hallmarks of the Moderne style in American architecture of the 1920s.

The architect of Temple Beth Israel was Joseph Finger (1887-1953), a member of the congregation who was born in Austria. Shortly after immigrating to the United States, he settled in Houston in 1908. In 1913 Finger opened his own office to begin a 40-year career as one of Houston's most successful architects. Among his major works are the Plaza, Auditorium, and Texas State Hotels in Houston; several multistory hotels in Port Arthur, Lake Charles, and Texarkana; and the Keystone and National Cash Register Company buildings and the Levy's and Battlestein's department stores in downtown Houston. Finger also designed a number of fine Houston houses including the Tennison House in Montrose (now the Alliance Francaise), the West House at Clear Lake (now the Lunar Science Institute), the Edel House in Braeswood, the West and Platt houses in River Oaks, and houses for Joe Weingarten, Abe Weingarten, and Abe Battlestein in Riverside Terrace.

As early as 1914, Finger had experimented with a proto-Moderne style of architecture at the now demolished Concordia Club. Temple Beth Israel was his second major essay in this style. From the late 1920s, with such buildings as the Houston Turn-Verein Club-house (National Register, 1978), the Baker Brothers showroom, Jefferson Davis Hospital, the Clarke and Courts printing plant, the Montgomery County Courthouse, the Houston City Hall, Houston Municipal Airport, and the Harris County Courthouse (his last work), Finger became one of the Houston architects especially identified with the Moderne trend.

Finger's combination of what he described as Greek and Egyptian motifs in the architectural decoration of Beth Israel, reflected a nineteenth-century tradition of Jewish religious architecture. From the 1850s, a combination of exotic detail, variously labeled Levantine or Saracenic, and culled from the Islamic architecture of the Middle East and Spain, was employed for Jewish synagogues and temples. The earliest American example was the Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati of 1866-67. During the 1890s a certain architectural

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reaction to this High Victorian trend became evident as architects turned to classical forms. In part, this represented a general change in taste, but it also underlined the growing distinction within American Judaism between the orthodox and reform parties. For instance, when Congregation Beth Israel built its second house of worship in 1908, it constructed a classically detailed building. However, the breakaway orthodox congregation of Adath Yeshurin erected its synagogue at the same time in the "Saracenic" style.

In her architectural history of the American Synagogue, Rachel Wischnitzer noted the development of a distinct type for American temples built in the 1920s in which a central, squarish auditorium without galleries, centered beneath a shallow vaulted ceiling, was prefaced by a symmetrically composed entrance vestibule articulated as a separate massing element. Ancillary spaces--offices, classrooms, and community rooms--were accommodated in a rear or side wing. Temple Beth Israel conforms to this type and, by Wischnitzer's chronology, qualifies as an early example.

The rabbi of congregation Beth Israel at this time was the English-born Henry Barnston who, during the course of his 49-year tenure at Beth Israel, became one of Houston's most respected community leaders. The donors of the Abe M. Levy Community House, Harriet and Haskell Levy, were also outstanding community figures. Miss Levy contributed significantly to the cultural life of early 20th-century Houston. Haskell Levy, with his brother Abe, founded Levy Brothers, one of Houston's first department stores. Another notable Houston merchant, Simon Sakowitz, co-founder of the specialty store of Sakowitz Brothers, was the chairman of the building committee. Finger had also designed the Sakowitz House in Montrose.

Congregation Beth Israel is the oldest Jewish congregation in Texas. It was organized in 1854 and received its charter in 1859. The first permanent synagogue was built in 1874 on Crawford Street, in the Second Ward of Houston. The congregation, which became reform in 1899, relocated some blocks to the south of this site in 1908. By 1921, the continuing growth of the congregation made new facilities imperative. Property for a new temple was purchased at Austin Street and Holman Avenue in a then-fashionable suburban neighborhood in the South End.

Adjacent to the site at Austin and Holman, the monumental and classical South End Junior High School had been built between 1912 and 1914, at Holman Avenue and Caroline Street. Around it were located large, columned houses, of which the Richardson House and the Sewall and Horton houses in the 3200 block are the most important examples. In 1917, the Trinity Episcopal Church (National Register, 1983) was begun at Holman and Main Boulevard. The construction of Temple Beth Israel and the First Congregational Church of 1926-27 at Holman Avenue and Caroline Street, which was done in Italian Romanesque style, completed this grouping of imposing public and private buildings. Finger was to contribute further to this group when he designed the skewed wings flanking the central section of South End Junior High School, in 1936, notable for the Moderne sculptural detail of the towers.

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Congregation Beth Israel occupied the present temple until 1969, when it moved to a new site in Southwest Houston. The property was sold to the Houston Independent School District which, during the 1970s, used the Temple as the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. In 1977 the Texas Society of Architects presented an Award of Merit to the architects Harvin Moore-Barry Moore for their scheme of adaptively reusing the auditorium as a theater. Presently, Temple Beth Israel is scheduled to be used as an educational facility by Houston Community College.

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Houston Architectural Survey 1980, Volumes IV and VI, Prepared by the Southeast Center for Urban Research, Houston, Texas.

Yolita Schmidt. The Moderne Style in Architecture-A Houston Guide. Houston: Houston Public Library, 1978.

_____. A Guide to the Moderne in Houston. Houston: Architectural Thesis, 1978.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica, "History of Judaism," Vol. X. Chicago: Helen Hemingway Benton, 1973-1980.

Rachel Wischnitzer. Synagogue Architecture in the U.S.; History and Interpretation. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publishing Society of America, 1955.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Ann Nathan Cohen. The Centenary History, Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, 1854-1954. Houston: Privately Printed, 1954.

Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Grobe, editors. The New Encyclopedia of Texas. Vol. II, p. 1233. Dallas: Texas Development Bureau, c. 1926.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.7 acres

Quadrangle name Park Place, Texas

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	5	2	7	10	2	9	10	3	2	9	1	8	0	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification All of Block Two (2) of the Ed Smith Addition, City of Houston, bounded by Austin Street, Holman Avenue, La Branch Street, and Perry Avenue.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ann Marie Malden, President

organization Save the Arts, Restore, Inc.

date July 14, 1983

street & number 7100 Regency Square Blvd.

telephone 713 974-5077, Home 890-7430

city or town Houston

state Texas 77036

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 11 Oct. 1983

For NPS use only

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Temple Beth Israel
Harris County
TEXAS

Substantive Review

OCT 18 1983

Working No. _____

Fed. Reg. Date: _____

Date Due: 11/24/83 - 12/2/83

Action: ACCEPT

RETURN 11/29/83

REJECT _____

Federal Agency: _____

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review: sample request appeal NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

The significance, and therefore the inclusion, of the 1949/50 tower and school has not been justified

Recom./Criteria Return (c)

Reviewer Garwood

Discipline Historic

Date 11/29/83

_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: technical corrections cited below
 substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? yes no

7. Description

Condition

- excellent
- good
- fair
- deteriorated
- ruins
- unexposed

Check one

- unaltered
- altered

Check one

- original site
- moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection

X 8. Significance

Period Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

the second paragraph is a much more informative and appropriate summation of significance than the first.

It is implied, but not specifically stated, that Finger designed the Community House - is this true?

The 1949-50 tower and school have not been shown to relate to the significance of the two earlier buildings - it is not appropriate to include them just because they were built in the same organization as the Temple or that they compose part of the same complex so are located with a convenient set of boundaries. Why are these properties significant? Keep in mind that because they are less than 50 years old, they must have exceptional significance to be included.

9. Major Bibliographical References *otherwise, they should be excluded from the nomination.*

X 10. Geographical Data

- X Acreage of nominated property _____
- Quadrangle name _____
- UTM References _____

X Verbal boundary description and justification

See comments above. Revise if necessary.

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state ___ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

13. Other

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed Beth Grosvenor Date 11/29/83 Phone: _____

RECEIVED
JAN 10 1984
NATIONAL REGISTER DEPARTMENT

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date entered

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and/or common Ruth Denny Theatre

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<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

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street & number 3830 Richmond Avenue

city, town Houston N/A vicinity of state Texas 77027

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city, town Houston state Texas 77002

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(2) Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date (1) 1980
(2) 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records (1) Texas Room, Houston Central Public Library
(2) Texas Historical Commission

city, town (1) Houston
(2) Austin state Texas

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Condition		Check one	Check one
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<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The original Temple Beth Israel, which occupies an entire city block near downtown Houston, is a large complex of masonry structures. The principal building, the Temple, features exterior and interior decoration that combines elements from Near Eastern and Classical vocabularies in a stylized Art Moderne manner. The Temple proper features a large, vaulted auditorium as its central space. The adjacent Community House, while less ornate than the Temple, follows the larger building's lead in terms of materials and detailing.

The complex of masonry buildings formerly occupied by Temple Beth Israel form a distinctive grouping located slightly southwest of the business district of downtown Houston. The dominant element of the complex is the Temple proper, which faces west onto Austin Street. Essentially square in form, the Temple is faced with tawny brick laid in English bond. The decorative trim elements are executed in limestone. The main Temple entrance is framed by a recessed columnar portico formed by four somewhat stylized Ionic columns set in antis between two heavy, square piers with matching detailing. The capitals of the columns and piers feature simple, repetitive, leaf carvings instead of a plain, undecorated cap. The frieze of the entablature above the portico contains two panels, with quotations from the Torah flanking large letters that spell out the name of the Temple. A stylized crest resembling a course of anthemion caps the entablature. To each side of the entablature is a series of square panels formed by dark-brown brick with decorative rosettes marking the corners of the squares. The uppermost of these three rows of panels contains a limestone block with ornamental carving. The parapet above contains a strip of carved limestone ornament which uses the Star of David as its central element. The crest of the parapet is formed by a row of stone blocks containing a carved roundel. At the peak of the parapet are the two tablets with the Ten Commandments written in bas-relief Hebrew script. Five doorways with limestone frames provide access to the interior of the Temple. Above each doorway is a window filled with somewhat milky stained glass, with the inner sections divided into rectangular panes surrounded by a narrow ornamental border of rosettes.

The north and south elevations of the Temple are virtually identical to one another, with the central section of each side elevation dominated by a grouping of four square pilasters supporting an entablature. The detailing of these elements is modeled closely on the entrance portico. The brickwork detailing of these flanking elevations, along with the paneled brick band flanking the entablatures, forms a continuous band around the structure. The westernmost bays of the north and south elevations feature rather classical door enframements with a single, tall window opening above them. The east, or rear, elevation is the plainest face of the Temple, although the band of patterned, square, brickwork panels noted on the other elevations also continues onto this facade.

On passing through one of the five entry doors, one enters the long, rectangular foyer that precedes the Temple auditorium proper. This foyer features a rather flat, tiled vault ceiling. At each end of the foyer are staircases that lead down into the basement, up to a classroom space, and to the second level of the auditorium seating. The main space of the auditorium is virtually square, and is spanned at the ceiling by a flattened barrel vault which is faced with tile laid in a herringbone pattern. The ceiling is divided into six panels by four elaborately detailed beams whose faces are adorned by

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a continuous band of Greek fretwork. The largest of the ceiling panels is nearly filled by a large roundel defined by a heavy plaster molding decorated with rosettes. In the center of the roundel there is a skylight of colored glass, mainly amber in tone, which features the Star of David formed by the supporting mullions of the glazing. To the east and west sides of the auditorium are large square piers that rise to support the edges of the ceiling vault. The east end of the auditorium contains a large semicircular niche framed on its exterior by a tall round arch. At the center of the niche is a round-arch aedicula. The upper segment of this aedicula is elaborately decorated with a mosaic of dark-blue and gold tiles. The lower segment features a recessed space for the synagogue's Torah.

Some alterations were made to the former Temple in the years following World War II. The congregation had the large window openings on the north and south elevations bricked up in 1949-1950 at the time the Temple was air conditioned. While this work resulted in a change to the original design, it should be noted that the brick infill was executed with some care and with great attention to the English bond of the original walls. The earlier patterning was copied in a lighter shade of brick. In 1976, the Temple auditorium was remodeled for use by the Houston Community College of Fine Arts. This work resulted in the removal of the original first-level flooring and its replacement with a raked floor. A network of catwalks was installed across the ceiling, partially obscuring the decorative work there but, fortunately, avoiding the major elements of detail.

Located to the rear of the Temple is the former Levy Community House, built at the same time as the Temple, whose principal elevation faces north onto Holman Street. This two-story structure uses the same tawny brick found on the Temple itself. While it has simpler ornamentation, the Community House nonetheless carries a decorative, carved, limestone cornice band above the second-floor windows that is quite similar to detailing on the Temple; the treatment of the parapet also follows work on the larger structure. Above the second-story windows on the Holman Street elevation are carved limestone panels that appear as rather oversized lintels. The main entrance door faces Holman, with a secondary door around the corner on La Branch. Both of these doorways are classical in their design, with square pilasters supporting simple entablatures. The interior of the structure is taken up by a dance studio on the first floor and a multiuse auditorium on the second. As in the case of the Temple, the Community House also has been altered. On the exterior, the most prominent changes involved the bricking-in of the main entry. The interior was subject to considerable renovation. The original axis of the entry was changed, making the La Branch Street entry the major access point. Named in honor of Abe M. Levy, the Community House, in all likelihood, never contained interior fittings as important as those still in place in the Temple.

Attached to the south elevation of the Community House is the Freed Memorial Tower, which is open at its highest point. The massing of the tower is heavy, in keeping with the powerful forms of the synagogue, but its lack of any decorative detailing clearly marks it as a later work, although sympathetic in terms of materials and massing. Extending south, and then turning west to form an ell, is the one-story building of the Mendelsohn Memorial Religious School. Again, although this structure is several years younger than the Temple and Community House, the tawny brick used on its exterior blends well with the earlier buildings. Both the Freed Tower and the Mendelsohn School were erected in 1949-50.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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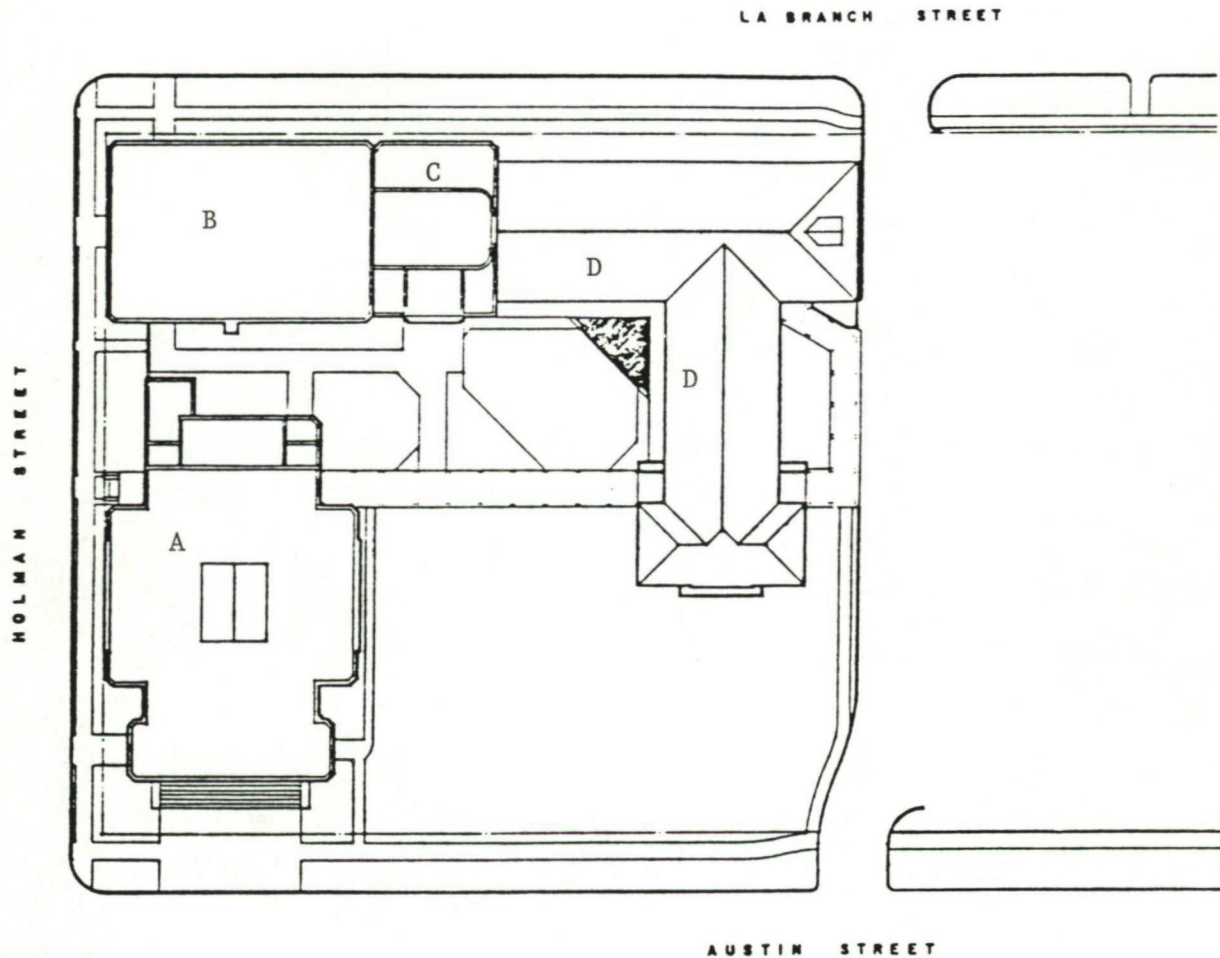
10/18/83

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Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2



PLOT PLAN

LEGEND

- A - Temple Auditorium
- B - Levy Community Center
- C - Freed Memorial Tower
- D - Mendelsohn Religious School

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1924-25; 1949-50 **Builder/Architect** Joseph Finger (1924-25); I.B. Klein &

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Theo. Keller (1949-50).

Temple Beth Israel and its attendant Abe M. Levy Community House comprise a rare example of the use of Moderne architecture for religious buildings. In the case of the Temple, the blocky massing, the use of low relief and brick detailing on the exterior walls, and the abstract rendering of classical elements (notably the inset portico on Austin Street) are hallmarks of the Moderne style in American architecture of the 1920s.

The architect of Temple Beth Israel and the Abe M. Levy Community House was Joseph Finger (1887-1953), a member of the congregation who was born in Austria. Shortly after immigrating to the United States, he settled in Houston in 1908. In 1913, Finger opened his own office to begin a 40-year career as one of Houston's most successful architects. Among his major works are the Plaza, Auditorium, and the Texas State hotels in Houston; several multi-story hotels in Port Arthur, Lake Charles, and Texarkana; and the Keystone and National Cash Register buildings and the Levy's and Battlestein's department stores in downtown Houston. Finger also designed a number of fine Houston houses including the Tennison House in Montrose (now the Alliance Francaise), the West House at Clear Lake (now the Lunar Science Institute), the Edel House in Braeswood, the West and Platt houses in River Oaks, and houses for Joe Weingarten, Abe Weingarten, and Abe Battlestein in Riverside Terrace.

As early as 1914, Finger had experimented with a proto-moderne style of architecture at the now demolished Concordia Club. Temple Beth Israel was his second major essay in this style. From the 1920s, with such buildings as the Houston Turn-Verein Clubhouse (National Register, 1978), the Baker Brothers showroom, Jefferson Davis Hospital, the Clarke and Courts printing plant, the Montgomery County Courthouse, the Houston City Hall, Houston Municipal Airport, and the Harris County Courthouse (his last work), Finger became one of the Houston architects especially identified with the Moderne trend.

Finger's combination of what he described as Greek and Egyptian motifs in the architectural decoration of Beth Israel, reflected a nineteenth-century tradition of Jewish religious architecture. From the 1850s, a combination of exotic detail, variously labeled Levantine or Saracenic, and culled from the Islamic architecture of the Middle East and Spain, was employed for Jewish synagogues and temples. The earliest American example was the Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati of 1866-67. During the 1890s a certain architectural

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National Park Service**

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10/18/83

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Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

reaction to this High Victorian trend became evident as architects turned to classical forms. In part, this represented a general change in taste, but it also underlined the growing distinction within American Judaism between the orthodox and reform parties. For instance, when Congregation Beth Israel built its second house of worship in 1908, it constructed a classically detailed building. However, the breakaway orthodox congregation of Adath Yeshurin erected its synagogue at the same time in the "Saracenic" style.

In her architectural history of the American Synagogue, Rachel Wischnitzer noted the development of a distinct type for American temples built in the 1920s in which a central, squarish auditorium without galleries, centered beneath a shallow vaulted ceiling, was prefaced by a symmetrically composed entrance vestibule articulated as a separate massing element. Ancillary spaces--offices, classrooms, and community rooms--were accommodated in a rear or side wing. Temple Beth Israel conforms to this type and, by Wischnitzer's chronology, qualifies as an early example.

The rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel at this time was the English-born Henry Barnston who, during the course of his 49-year tenure at Beth Israel, became one of Houston's most respected community leaders. The donors of the Abe M. Levy Community House, Harriet and Haskell Levy, were also outstanding community figures. Miss Levy contributed significantly to the cultural life of early 20th-century Houston. Haskell Levy, with his brother Abe, founded Levy Brothers, one of Houston's first department stores. Another notable Houston merchant, Simon Sakowitz, co-founder of the specialty store of Sakowitz Brothers, was the chairman of the building committee. Finger had also designed the Sakowitz House in Montrose.

Congregation Beth Israel is the oldest Jewish congregation in Texas. It was organized in 1854 and received its charter in 1859. The first permanent synagogue was built in 1874 on Crawford Street, in the Second Ward of Houston. The congregation, which became reform in 1899, relocated some blocks to the south of this site in 1908. By 1921, the continuing growth of the congregation made new facilities imperative. Property for a new temple was purchased at Austin Street and Holman Avenue in a then-fashionable suburban neighborhood in the South End.

Adjacent to the site at Austin and Holman, the monumental and classical South End Junior High School had been built between 1912 and 1914, at Holman Avenue and Caroline Street. Around it were located large, columned houses, of which the Richardson House and the Sewall and Horton houses in the 3200 block are the most important examples. In 1917, the Trinity Episcopal Church (National Register, 1983) was begun at Holman and Main Boulevard. The construction of Temple Beth Israel and the First Congregational Church of 1926-27 at Holman Avenue and Caroline Street, which was done in Italian Romanesque style, completed this grouping of imposing public and private buildings. Finger was to contribute further to this group when he designed the skewed wings flanking the central section of South End Junior High School, in 1936, notable for the Moderne sculptural detail of the towers.

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National Park Service**

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Item number 8

Page 2

The growth of Congregation Beth Israel in the years following World War II necessitated the construction of two additional buildings in 1949-50. The Freed Memorial Tower and the Mendelsohn Memorial Religious School, located to the rear of the Levy Community House on La Branch Street, were designed by I.B. Klein and Theo. Keller. Although attached to the Finger-designed Community House, these two structures are not considered as contributing elements in the nomination due to their recent construction history. They are unaltered, and should assume significance in their own right at some time in the future. Congregation Beth Israel occupied the Temple until 1969, when it moved to a new site in Southwest Houston. The property was sold to the Houston Independent School District which, during the 1970s, used the Temple as the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. In 1977, the Texas Society of Architects presented an Award of Merit to the architects Harvin Moore-Barry Moore for their scheme of adaptively reusing the auditorium as a theatre. Presently, Temple Beth Israel is scheduled to be used as an educational facility by the Houston Community College.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Ann Nathan Cohen. The Centenary History, Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, 1854-1954. Houston: Privately Printed, 1954.

Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Grobe, editors. The New Encyclopedia of Texas. Vol II, p. 1233. Dallas: Texas Development Bureau, c. 1926.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.7 acres

Quadrangle name Park Place, Texas

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	5
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2	7	0	2	9	0
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3	2	9	1	8	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification All of Block Two (2) of the Ed Smith Addition, City of Houston, bounded by Austin Street, Holman Avenue, La Branch Street, and Perry Avenue.

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

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ann Marie Malden, President

organization Save the Arts, Restore, Inc.

date July 14, 1983

street & number 7100 Regency Square Blvd.

telephone 713 974-5077, home 890-7430

city or town Houston

state Texas 77036

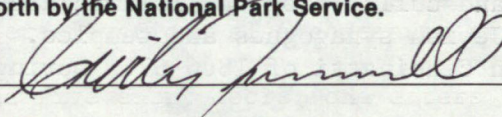
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 10 Jan. 1984

For NPS use only

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

Beth Groves
Keeper of the National Register

date 3/1/84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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

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received

10/18/83

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

Houston Architectural Survey 1980, Volumes IV and VI, Prepared by the Southeast Center for Urban Research, Houston, Texas.

Yolita Schmidt. The Moderne Style in Architecture-A Houston Guide. Houston: Houston Public Library, 1978.

_____. A Guide to the Moderne in Houston. Houston: Architectural Thesis, 1978.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica, "History of Judaism," Vol. X. Chicago: Helen Hemingway Benton, 1973-1980.

Rachel Wischnitzer. Synagogue Architecture in the U.S.; History and Interpretation. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publishing Society of America, 1955.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Temple Beth Israel
Harris County
TX

Substantive Review

Working No. 10-18-83

Fed. Reg. Date: 2-5-85

Date Due: 3/1/84

Action: ACCEPT 3/1/84

RETURN

REJECT

Federal Agency: _____

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review: sample request appeal NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

The best solution would have been to redraw the boundaries, but the additional continuation sheet explains that the 1949-50 fence and school are considered non-contributing additions to the historic resource.

Recom./Criteria Accept - c

Reviewer Gregorian

Discipline Historian

Date 3/1/84

_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? yes no

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection

8. Significance

Period _____ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates _____ Builder/Architect _____
Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- summary paragraph - *paragraph # 2*
- completeness
- clarity - *question of architect of Community Center not answered, but not critical.*
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____
Quadrangle name _____
UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

_____ national _____ state _____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

title _____ date _____

13. Other

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department.

Main (west) facade; looking east

Photo 1 of 13

OCT 18 1983



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Dept.

Parapet, entablature, and capitals of main (west)
facade; looking east

Photo 2 of 13

OCT 18 1983



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

Detail of capital, main (west) facade, looking east

Photo 3 of 13

OCT 18 1983



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

Side (south) elevation, looking north

Photo 4 of 13

OCT 18 1983



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Sice (north) elevation, looking north

Photo 5 of 13

OCT 18 1983



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

Oblique view along Holman Street, with Levy Community
Center in foreground and main Temple in back-
ground, looking northwest

Photo 6 of 13

OCT 18 1983



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

East facade of Levy Community Center, looking west

Photo 7 of 13

OCT 18 1983



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

Addition to south of Temple, Freed Memorial Tower
in right background, looking north.

Photo 8 of 13

OCT 18 1983



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

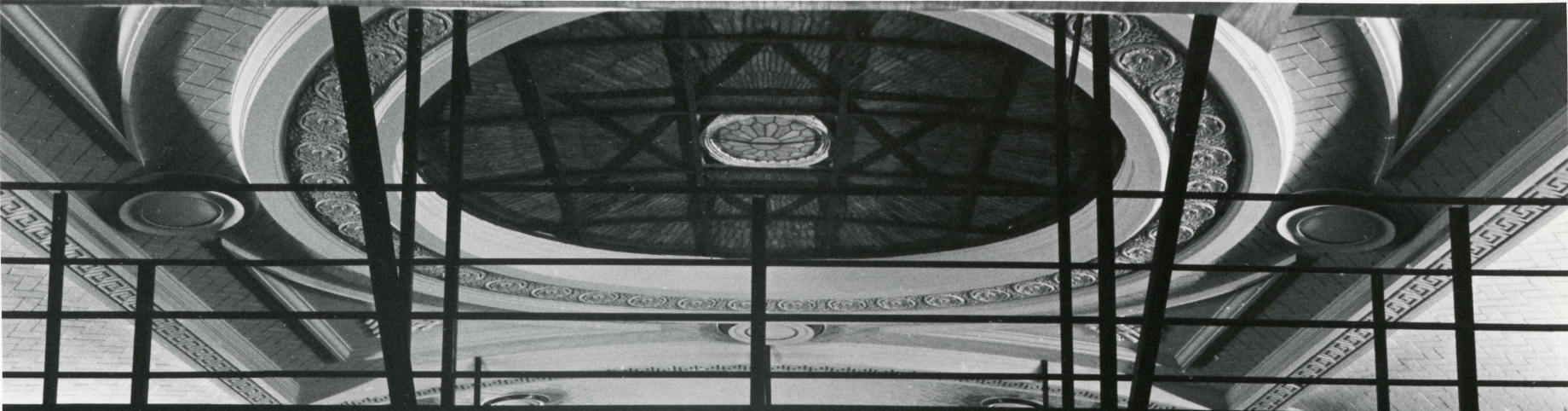
Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

Entrance foyer of main (west) entrance, the Temple

Photo 9 of 13

OCT 18 1983

Kevin Bowie
Bibby



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

Interior of Temple, facing east

Photo 10 of 13

OCT 18 1983

from looking east



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

Stained glass in ceiling of Temple

Photo 11 of 13

OCT 18 1983

*Coll. Beth Israel
Stained Glass
William*



Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street; Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department

Stained-glass center of Temple ceiling

Photo 12 of 13

OCT 18 1983

*Ceiling
Stained glass illuminated from above
Religious Installments
Also entrance to roof from inside*



FOR I GIVE

MY LAW

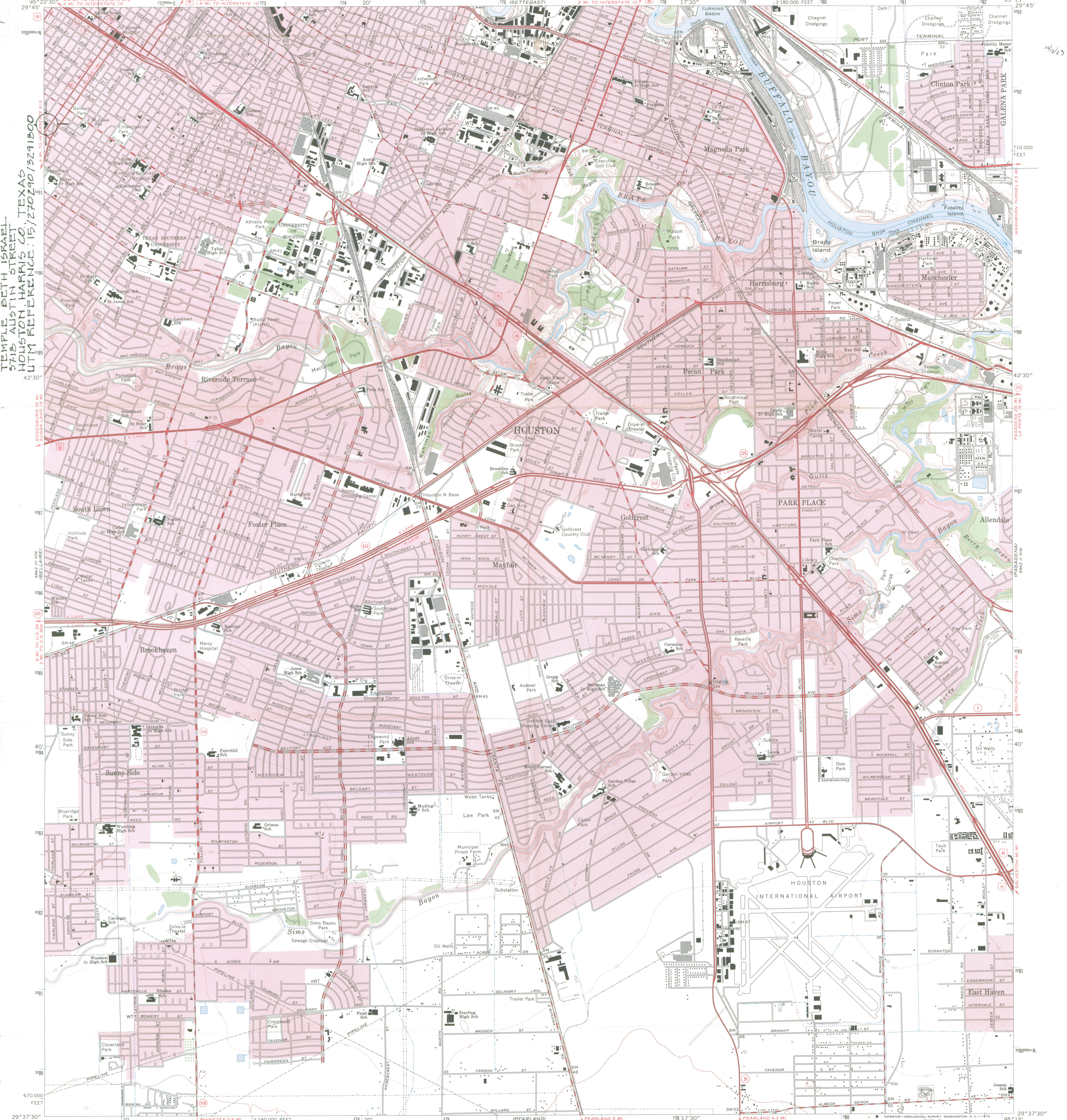
Temple Beth Israel
3718 Austin Street; Houston, Harris County, Texas

Photo by Kevin Bowie; March 2, 1983; neg. on file
with Houston Community College, Instructional
Development Department.

Exedra space of Temple, looking east

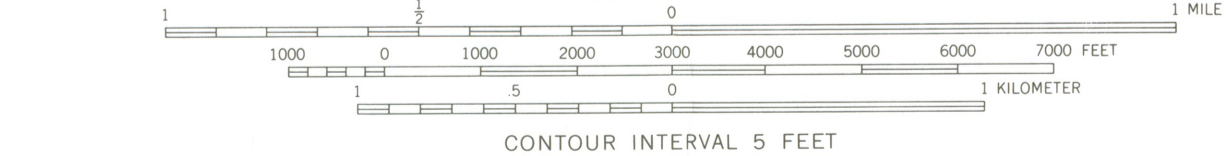
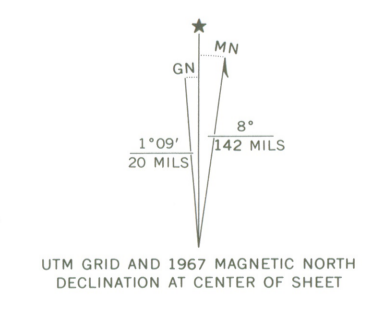
Photo 13 of 13

OCT 18 1983



TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL
 3718 AUSTIN STREET
 HOUSTON HARRIS CO. TEXAS
 UTM REFERENCE: 15N270290/3291800

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
 Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE
 Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1966. Topography enlarged from 1:31 680-scale AMS map of Park Place quadrangle. Original map by planetable surveys 1943. Revised 1967
 Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum 10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system, south central zone
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 15, shown in blue
 Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route



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 FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR WASHINGTON, D.C. 20242
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2995-424

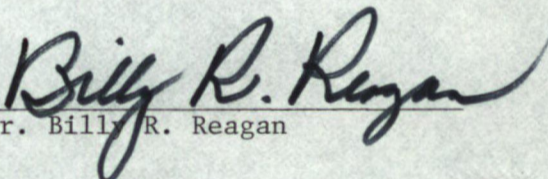
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COUNTY OF HARRIS X

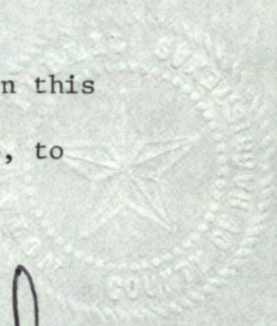
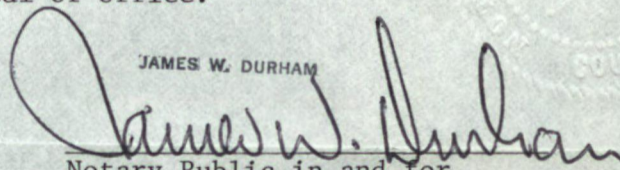
KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

Before Me, the undersigned authority, on this day personally appeared before me, Dr. Billy R. Reagan, who, on his oath did depose and state:

"My name is Dr. Billy R. Reagan. I am the General Superintendent for the Houston Independent School District and authorized to make this affidavit for said Houston Independent School District. The Houston Independent School District is the sole owner of the real property and improvements known as the Temple Beth Israel, 3517 Austin Street, Houston, Harris County, Texas, upon which a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places has been submitted. The Houston Independent School District objects to the listing of this property for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places."


Dr. Billy R. Reagan

Sworn and Subscribed to before me, the undersigned notary, on this the 27th day of July, 1983, to certify which witness my hand and seal of office.


JAMES W. DURHAM

Notary Public in and for
The State of Texas
465-28-8141

My Commission Expires:

8/31/84