

EMMANUEL ART GALLERY: GOTHIC & ROMANESQUE CHURCH TO SYNAGOGUE TO ART GALLERY

What are some other uses you can think of for a church building?

Located at what was once the corner of 10th and Lawrence Streets in the middle of the Auraria Campus, Emmanuel Shearith Israel Chapel is the oldest surviving religious building in Denver. Built in 1876–77 as the Emmanuel Episcopal Church, the building was sold in 1903 to the Shearith Israel Jewish congregation. It served as a synagogue until 1958, when it was sold to the artist Wolfgang Pogzeba and later converted into the art gallery for the Auraria campus. Auraria is the oldest continuously occupied neighborhood in Denver, with the buildings now occupied with campus offices (Fink, 1969).

Episcopal Church

In 1873, Episcopalians in west Denver formed the Emmanuel Mission. The group started holding Sunday School at a grammar school building at the corner of 11th and Lawrence Streets. It soon grew to seventy members. The group constructed a small stone church at the north corner of 10th and Lawrence. The church was designed using a combination of Romanesque and Gothic styles and was consecrated on September 24, 1877 (Etter, 1972).

The Emmanuel Episcopal Church was the second Episcopal church in Denver. It remained at its 10th and Lawrence location until the early 1890s. By that time the character of west Denver was changing as wealthier residents moved south of Colfax Avenue. Unable to maintain a congregation at 10th and Lawrence, Emmanuel Episcopal moved in 1893 to a new building several blocks south. The Episcopal Church continued to own the building at 10th and Lawrence. In the 1890s, the Young Ladies Guild of St. John's Cathedral operated a social welfare mission there. The building started to be known as St. Andrew's Church and was used as the meeting place for a group of Anglo-Catholics that included White members from England and Black members from Memphis, Tennessee (du Pont Breck, 1963).

Jewish Synagogue

In the 1880s and 1890s, a diverse mix of ethnic groups, including eastern European Jews, began to move into west Denver. These new Jewish immigrants did not quite fit in with the city's existing community of cosmopolitan German Jews, who had established the city's oldest Jewish congregation, Temple Emanuel, in 1874. Instead, the new Jewish immigrants started many small congregations of their own, such as Shomro Amuno (Keepers of the Faith), which tended to reflect the local dialect and customs of their homelands in Eastern Europe.

In the 1890s, Shomro Amuno had a synagogue on the east bank of Cherry Creek known as the Cherry Creek Shul. In 1898, Shomro Amuno moved out and started to hold its services in rented halls and stores. In 1899, it joined another group that also held services in nearby stores, and the combined congregation took the name Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel).

For four years Shearith Israel held services in rented halls, but in 1903 the group was able to buy the old Emmanuel Episcopal Church. Men from the congregation repaired the building and converted it into a

synagogue. Shearith Israel survived as long as there was a Jewish community in west Denver (Abrams, 2007).

After World War I, the city's Jewish community began to disperse from downtown and west Denver. Shearith Israel still had 60y members in 1920, but the area's Jewish population was already in decline. By 1942 the congregation counted only 15 members. Eventually, all the other west Denver shuls closed, leaving Shearith Israel as the last congregation in the area. The synagogue closed for good in 1958 (du Pont Breck, 1960).

Art Gallery

After the synagogue closed, the artists Wolfgang and Susan Pogzeba rented the building for several years before eventually buying it in 1963. They updated the building's wiring and plumbing but otherwise left it largely unchanged. As plans for a vast urban renewal project in west Denver took shape in the late 1960s, the old church and synagogue began to receive historic designations to protect it from potential destruction. In 1968, it became the city's first designated landmark, and in 1969 it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1973, the Auraria Higher Education Center bought the building. It was renovated in 1976 to become the campus art gallery. Now known as the Emmanuel Gallery, it regularly hosts exhibitions of work by students, professors and other artists. Although the building's interior has changed over the years, it still has a Hebrew inscription over its door as a reminder of its past.

References

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