

## THE TEMPLE: DENVER'S FIRST MAJOR SYNAGOGUE

**Why do you think the Jewish congregation that built this synagogue would choose to build in this eclectic style?**

Temple Emanuel, located at 24th Avenue and Curtis Street, became the first major Jewish synagogue in the Denver area when it was built in 1882, serving the Beth Emanuel Congregation. It is located in the Curtis Park neighborhood. This neighborhood, just to the northeast of downtown Denver, is called Curtis Park for the city park in its midst, and was the creation of the city's first golden age - that time between 1870, when the railroad came to town, and 1893, when the Silver Crash brought a rude end to Denver's early prosperity. During that brief period, the rate of Denver's population growth was higher than that of any other city in the country (Curtis Park).

### Structure

The Temple is constructed of hard-pressed brick with buttresses, stone trimmings, as well as a stone and concrete foundation. The corner tower is 90 feet tall topped with a golden ball, and the auditorium can seat 500. The altar is made of polished walnut, while Hebrew characters are written in gold over the shrine. The temple was a dominant feature for the neighborhood and it symbolized a spiritual significance. It was the first major Jewish synagogue in the Denver area, and it was built for \$20,000. The board specified that the temple should have 150 pews, one vestry room, schoolrooms, a choir gallery and a basement (Temple Emanuel National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form).

The original physical appearance of Temple Emanuel was eclectic Victorian with Moorish and Romanesque fenestration and detailing. The three-story structure, two asymmetrical towers and exposed buttresses were constructed of a light color brick with a contrasting dark stone trim work around doors, windows, foundation and belt courses. The principal facade, serving as the primary entrance to the building, was dominated by a large Moorish window element and smaller scaled Romanesque arched windows and main entrance doors. Of the two towers on the principal facade, the smaller, left hand tower was originally more ornate than it appears today with a hipped roof and overhanging fascia and trim. The larger right tower with its hipped roof became the dominant element of the facade as it anchored the corner of the block with its height and mass. Both towers rose above the main roof of the building, a gable roof structure, achieving a balance between the horizontal and vertical components of the building. The exposed buttresses on each side of the building supported the main roof and established a rhythm that helped provide human scale to the entire structure. The building became the dominant physical element in its immediate neighborhood, symbolizing its spiritual significance to the community (National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form).

### Restoration and Reuse

On November 5, 1887 a fire almost destroyed the temple auditorium and contents with only the lower floor remaining. Rebuilding took place in 1902 for \$70,000. The reconstruction reflects the original design with only minor changes (The Temple Denver Fact Sheet).

### Architects

Willoughby E. Edbrooke was a nationally prominent architect born in 1843. He was one of nine children. His first practice was in Chicago in partnership with F. Pierce Burnham. Together they designed the

Georgia State Capitol, buildings for the University of Notre Dame and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. When he moved to Washington D.C. he was the supervising architect of the Treasury Department and initiated the design of over 40 buildings. He was the first Temple Emanuel architect. He was architect Frank E. Edbrooke's brother. Willoughby's son worked with Frank.

Frank E. Edbrooke was born in 1840. He served in the Civil War. Frank was greatly influenced by his father who was a major architect in Chicago after the fire of 1871. He came to Denver to supervise the building of the Tabor Block and the Tabor Opera House. After completing these buildings he remained in Denver and became the city's premier architect. Some of his more notable designs are the Oxford and Brown Hotels, West High School, Central Presbyterian Church, the Denver Dry Goods Company Building and the Cranmer House. He was the architect for Temple Emanuel after the fire. He was a founding member of the Colorado AIA (Frank E. Edbrooke: Colorado Architects Biographical Sketch).

### **Denver's Jewish Community**

The history of the Jews in Denver extends from the discovery of gold in 1858 to the present day. Early Jewish pioneers were largely of German backgrounds and were deeply involved in politics and local affairs, and some were among the most prominent citizens of the time. Beginning in the 1880s, the influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to the U.S. expanded the Denver Jewish community and exposed cultural rifts between Jews from German versus Yiddish speaking backgrounds. As Denver became a center for those seeking tuberculosis treatment, Jews were among those who came seeking healing, and the Jewish community set up two important organizations that aided not only sick Jews, but also the sick poor of all backgrounds. In the early 20th century, the Orthodox community in the city's West Side attracted religious new immigrants and built up a number of communal institutions. The community, especially the poor in the West Side, had to deal with anti-Semitism, sometimes violent, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the state (The Jewish Community of Denver).

### **References**

Denver Public Library. Curtis Park. Retrieved from <https://history.denverlibrary.org/curtis-park-denvers-oldest-neighborhood-upgrade>.

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