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The Architecture of Charter Oak Temple

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Primary Research Methods 802
Elizabeth Rose
Final Paper

“Faith shapes the buildings, but the building also shapes the faith” – Mary M. Donohue¹

In this research project, I focus on the architecture of the temple built by Congregation Beth Israel in 1876. The importance of this building lies in the fact that it was the first synagogue built by its congregation in Connecticut. In order to understand the decisions made by the congregation and the architect in the design and erection of this temple, I explore the historical and social factors that surround and influence them. I believe that the architecture of this building relates to the congregation’s sense of self and the way non-Jewish society viewed the congregation. In addition, I discuss how George Keller, the building’s architect, might have viewed the congregation and how he chose to reflect its identity in the building’s design. Ultimately, I trace the path of Congregation Beth Israel through the different buildings it has resided and the ways it has modified and/or built these buildings to suit its needs and to reflect its members’ values.

In June 1843 the Connecticut General Assembly approved a special enactment that provided Jews the same rights given to Christians to worship and form religious societies.² In 1847 a group of Hartford Jews of German descent organized Congregation Beth Israel.³ In the next three years beginning on July 1847, Beth Israel met at different homes of congregation members. In 1850 the congregation started meeting at various public halls until 1856 when it obtained enough funds to purchase the former North Baptist Church located in Main Street Hartford.⁴ Congregation Beth Israel remodeled and expanded the newly

¹ “Jewish Congregations in Connecticut 1843-1943.” *New York Times*, August 11, 1991.

² Dalin, David G. and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Making a Life, Building a Community* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1997), p.13.

³ The precise date when Congregation Beth Israel organized has been widely debated since the earliest minutes available date from 1870. “First Synagogues Begun in Hartford by German Jews.” *Hartford Family Times*, January 5, 1971.

Furthermore, the fact should be considered that as soon as there is a *minyan* of Jews (a quorum of ten), Jews could unofficially worship at home. Therefore, Beth Israel could have been initially organized as a *minyan* before 1847.

⁴ The date on the Congregation Beth Israel’s deed of purchase of the former North Baptist Church is February 18, 1856.

acquired building renaming it Touro Hall after Judah Touro who donated \$5,000 to Beth Israel. By this time Congregation Beth Israel was composed of more than 50 members.⁵

Not unlike most Jewish congregations that were established in the United States before the Civil War, Beth Israel was founded as an Orthodox institution. In keeping with Orthodox observance and ritual, the congregation maintained a *Fleisch Komitee*, to supervise kosher preparation of meat and a Talmud Torah fund for the traditional religious education of the members' children, in addition to having a cantor and a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer).⁶ It was in Touro Hall that Congregation Beth Israel began to depart from Orthodox tradition. When the congregation purchased the former North Baptist Church in 1856 it found family pews already set up in the building; however, the congregation voted not to make the costly building alterations from American style family pews to the more traditional Jewish gender based separate seating.⁷ Although this decision was apparently based on economic reasons, it marks an important shift in Beth Israel's ideology because it indicates the congregation was open to depart from a Jewish Orthodox tradition, such as separate seating, and adapt to a practice characteristic of Christian and Jewish Reform congregations. In the same year, Congregation Beth Israel implemented another practice that departed from the Orthodox tradition by introducing a mixed (gender) choir.

The Touro Hall building not only served as an important gathering space for Hartford's German Jews but also for the city's non-Jewish community as well. Since its purchase in 1856, Congregation Beth Israel rented the hall's lower part to Jewish and non-Jewish organizations until 1864. According to newspaper advertisements placed by the congregation's rental agents, Meyer Stern and Henry Selling, Touro Hall was the "largest and best hall in the city".⁸ This claim was probably close to the truth since Touro Hall's lower part accommodated approximately 1,500 people.⁹ Not only did Jewish weddings, balls and other celebrations took place in Touro Hall, but also did most of Hartford's large-scale entertainment.

⁵ Silverman, Morris, *Hartford Jews 1659-1970* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1970), p.10.

⁶ Dalin, pg. 36

⁷ Dalin, pg. 38

⁸ Dalin, pg. 17

⁹ Silverman, pg. 10

The fact that Touro Hall played such an important function in Hartford's social life leads me to believe that Beth Israel's role began to change in 1856 when the congregation first acquired this building. As leaser of Touro Hall Congregation Beth Israel became exposed to Hartford's public eye; therefore, the congregation must have experienced a heightened awareness of its image in the eyes of non-Jews. The changes that the congregation implemented when it moved to Touro Hall might have been not only driven by the changing needs of the congregation but also by its desire to conform to American society. According to Leon A. Jick, "Jewish religious reform in nineteenth century America began with a series of modest ritual changes and shifts in emphasis which were primarily concerned with appearances and social conformity"¹⁰ and not with religious or theological ideology. During the period of the 1840's to the 1860's synagogues across the United States moved towards Reform Judaism by implementing small changes such as the adoption of the organ at synagogue services, a mixed (male and female choir), prayers in the vernacular, the abbreviation of the Hebrew litany of Psalms, and the discarding of the traditional skullcap and prayer shawl.

Congregation Beth Israel's decision to keep the family style pews might have also stemmed from its desire to appear as a more modern and americanized Jewish congregation. As early as 1829, various newspapers articles attacked the Jewish custom of separate seating during services by claiming: "the Jewess of these days is treated as an inferior being".¹¹ Amid this controversy, the most prominent Jewish leader who supported the change of Jewish women's status and thus, seating was Rabbi David Einhorn. According to Rabbi Einhorn, gallery seating was "misguided Oriental rabbinic strictures against women".¹² Coincidentally, some of the non-Jewish opposition to separate seating described this aspect of Judaism as "Oriental" and "primitive" and as being opposed to Christianity's "modern" treatment of women. The typecasting of Jews and Jewish traditional practices as "Oriental" and "primitive" might

¹⁰ Jick, Leon A., *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1976), pg.81.

¹¹ Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Debate Over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue" in Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pg. 369

¹² Sarna, Jack Wertheimer, ed., pg. 370

have also driven Congregation Beth Israel to keep the family style pews in Touro Hall and to make further smaller changes towards a less Orthodox institution.

In 1875 a fire partially destroyed Touro Hall. Beth Israel sold the building to Cheney Brothers¹³ and purchased a lot in Charter Oak Avenue.¹⁴ By this time many changes had taken place in Congregation Beth Israel. In 1862 Beth Israel was the second congregation in the United States to replace the traditional Bar Mitzvah, intended for boys alone, with Confirmation, a service for boys and girls. Interestingly, the introduction of Confirmation like the family pews and other later changes that took place in Beth Israel and other Jewish congregations around the United States were borrowed from contemporary Christian practices. In 1864 Beth Israel implemented a mixed choir in which non-Jewish singers participated and by 1870 it had incorporated an organ in its services. In addition, the 1865-1869 conflict between members committed to driving the congregation towards Reform Judaism and those who preferred Orthodox traditions had ended after. By 1871 the Orthodox fraction had lost most of its power in Congregation Beth Israel.

As a result of the economic success and rapid acculturation that German Jews experienced after the Civil War, by the late 1870's they felt established in the United States. Friendly relations and intellectual exchanges between prominent Jewish leaders and leaders in various Protestant churches resulted in Christian practices borrowed by Jewish leaders and adopted by their congregations. Important Jewish leaders in the Reform movement such as Rabbi Isaac Leeser had close ties with Episcopalian clergymen while Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise had close affinity to the Unitarian church. During most of the 19th century Hartford proved to be a city highly tolerant of Jews where amicable relations between the Christian and Jewish community flourished. According to Dalin and Rosenbaum, many Connecticut Protestants became fascinated with Judaism shortly after Jews in Connecticut were given the freedom to exercise their

¹³ According to David F. Ransom in his book *George Keller, Architect* (p.57), Touro Hall was demolished in 1876 in order to make space for H.H. Richardson's Cheney Block. The church was probably located approximately where the restaurant City Steam Brewery is present today (942 Main Street).

¹⁴ While the planning and building of the new temple at Charter Oak Avenue was taking place, Congregation Beth Israel continued to use Touro Hall for a year on lease from the new owners. *The Congregation Beth Israel Presents a Description "Temporal and Spiritual" of their New Temple at 701 Farmington Avenue, Hartford CT 5697=1936* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co: 1936)

religion in 1843.¹⁵ The Puritan elite of Hartford believed there was a close affinity, a kind of brotherhood, between Christians and Jews since the Hebrew Bible, i.e., the Old Testament, shaped both religions. Well known Connecticut figures such as Mark Twain, Calvin Stowe, and Henry Ward Beecher expressed their deep admiration for Jews. Calvin Stowe was a devout scholar of Judaism and Hebrew while Mark Twain often entertained Jewish friend and even attended services at Congregation Beth Israel.¹⁶

In addition, I found various newspaper articles that illustrate this interest of New Englanders in Jewish life and religion.¹⁷ A September 19, 1853 article in the *Connecticut Courant* reports the accomplishments and important events that are taking place amongst the Jewish community. It relates such events as the construction of synagogues in New York City and Cincinnati and the publishing of various works in Jewish literature. The article ends in an interesting note, which might be interpreted as praise towards Jews and their faith: “Efforts to convert Jews into other sects [have been] unsuccessful but Christians have embraced Judaism in New York City, Albany, Hartford, Chicago and other places”. Another article in a Connecticut newspaper dated May 15, 1865, explains in detail *Lag Beromer* as a day of marriages in Jewish tradition.¹⁸ A later article dated March 28, 1880 in the *New Haven Register* declares that it is the newspaper’s “pleasant duty” to explain the significance of Passover in Jewish faith and does so in detail.

A September 29, 1875 article in the *Hartford Daily Times* not only reports on the ceremonies of the laying the first stone for a new temple for Congregation Beth Israel in Charter Oak Avenue, but it illustrates the relationship between this Jewish congregation and the (mainly Protestant) community of Hartford. In Rabbi Solomon Deutsch’s sermon, he expresses his appreciation over the “esteem” and “sympathy” given to the congregation by “so many of the most distinguished citizens” of Hartford and thus, by “the spectacle that the children of the Old and the New Testament, fraternally reunite in honor of Almighty God”. Rabbi Deutsch elaborates on the idea of inclusiveness of Judaism by explaining that “

¹⁵ Dalin, pg. 25

¹⁶ Dalin, pg. 27

¹⁷ Newspaper articles found in the “WPA CT papers – Ethnic Groups Survey: Newspapers Excerpts on Ethnic Matters” in the Connecticut State Library.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the name of the newspaper was not listed in the WPA papers.

Judaism does not say and never has said: Those who do not adhere to my principles, do not partake of my promises of future bliss!" Instead, he claims that in Judaism "all men [Jews and non-Jews?] who practice justice and charity participate in the future life". Furthermore, Mayor Sprague's speech communicates a sense of fraternity and inclusion towards the Jewish community. Sprague compares Jewish perseverance over "persecutions and oppressions" with the "brave old [Charter] Oak" which "waved its defiant arms against the storms of centuries, and cherished and protected in its heart the political liberties of the Connecticut colony!"

Less than a year later, Beth Israel's new temple at Charter Oak Avenue is finished and its dedication ceremonies take place on May 26, 1876.¹⁹ Rabbi Deutsch's philosophy on Reform Judaism is best illustrated in his dedication speech printed in the *Hartford Courant* on May 27 1876. In it Deutsch urges his congregation to depart from the traditional Judaic practices and traditions and to embrace their citizenship as Americans. Rabbi Deutsch rejects Zionism and the hope of a personal messiah with the following words: "Our fathers saw the pinnacle of Judaism in the restoration of Jewish commonwealth with a messiah that is King for the House of David, its head...[but] We do not believe in a personal messiah. We do not wish to return to Jerusalem". Instead, he urges his congregation to accept the United States as their adoptive country and to "love this land, this great blessed country". Furthermore, Rabbi Deutsch believed in doing away with conducting worship services in Hebrew by asking: "Our fathers understood the Hebrew tongue; is it still with us? How many among us understand what they pray?" During his tenure at Beth Israel, Rabbi Deutsch implemented several changes such as abolishing the wearing of the traditional skullcap among men and changing several funeral practices. However, Rabbi Deutsch's radical philosophy proved to be too extreme for the congregation and in November 1876 he resigned.

I believe that the architecture of the temple at Charter Oak Avenue reflects Congregation Beth Israel's search to establish an identity and image as an affluent Reform Jewish congregation who has taken steps

¹⁹ By the time of the dedication of the temple at Charter Oak Avenue Beth Israel's membership had grown to 78 congregants.

towards Americanization but who continues to respect its Judaic tradition.²⁰ Although the congregation did not leave any records concerning the decisions made by its members regarding the architectural style of the planned building,²¹ the fact that the architect Henry Fernbach was initially considered to plan and design the new temple indicates that the congregation had a clear idea about the physical appearance of their new temple. Henry Fernbach had been the architect responsible for the design of Temple Emanu-El built in 1868 and Central Synagogue built in 1872. These two temples housed Reform congregations in New York City and were characteristic of the lavish Moorish-Byzantine style synagogue built during the 1860's and 1870's in the United States. According to Leon A. Jick, the decade of the 1860's and thereafter marked a period in which large, costly and ornate synagogues, as well as churches, were built in the major American cities.²² The style of choice for Jewish temples is Moorish-Byzantine, which is present in Fernbach's designs in New York City, characterizes those temples constructed in cities such as Philadelphia for Keneseth Israel (1864) and in Cincinnati for B'nai Yeshurun (1866). The temples built by Jewish congregations during the 1860's and 1870's exemplify Jews' desire to accommodate ancient Judaism to contemporary American life.²³ By incorporating a Moorish-Byzantine style in their buildings, these congregations alluded to Judaism's "Eastern" origins in Jerusalem/Palestine; however, by constructing large and lavish structures, Jewish congregations showed to the non-Jewish American society their economic success as established immigrants.

Unfortunately, Fernbach's plans proved to be too costly for Congregation Beth Israel and thus, George Keller, a Hartford architect, was hired to design it. Again, I did not find any records in which George Keller discussed his decision over the architectural or decorative style of the Charter Oak

²⁰ I have decided to refer to the building constructed in 1876 by its historical name: Charter Oak Temple. I believe this name is the most suitable since I will discuss the building's role as a synagogue or temple.

²¹ The only records regarding Congregation Beth Israel's decision about the construction of the Charter Oak Temple are congregation minutes in which the cost of the building is discussed.

²² Jick, pg. 179

²³ Silverstein, Alan. *Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of Reform Judaism to American Culture, 1840-1930* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994) pg. 20

Temple.²⁴ As a result, I have decided to reconstruct through various primary and secondary sources the influences that played a part in Keller's design of the Charter Oak Temple. By taking into consideration the historical and social context in which Congregation Beth Israel's existed which was described in the last paragraphs, I will try to answer following questions in the following paragraphs: What might have been his artistic influences and inspirations when he designed the Charter Oak Temple? What might have Keller known about Judaism and the congregation itself? What might have been Keller's assumptions as a Christian architect designing a Jewish temple?

Keller designed the Charter Oak Temple building during an exciting time in American arts and crafts. Art movements such as Gothic Revival²⁵, Arts-and Crafts revival, Japanism, and Orientalism were in full force during the 1870's and 1880's in the United States. Gothic Revival brought back medieval motifs into the language of architecture and the decorative arts while Japanism and Orientalism brought Eastern motifs of Japan and the Far East to American art. Gothic Revival emerged in Great Britain as early as the mid-1700's and was first introduced into American architecture by the British architect Richard Upjohn during the 1830's. British art scholars' interest on the Gothic style during the 19th century emerged out of their dissatisfaction with industrialized civilization and machine made objects. Architect A.W. Pugin and art critic John Ruskin looked back to Britain's Gothic cathedrals and medieval past because they believed that it was in this architectural and decorative style that Christian spirituality was present.

The opening of Japan in 1854 by Commodore Perry exposed the Western world to Japanese art. Japanism emerged as Americans and Europeans became obsessed with objects brought from Japan and thus, a desire emerged to create their own Japanese-style designs. Furthermore, the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition year 1876 fueled the excitement over these movements especially that over Japanism with arts and crafts displays from around the world. The interest in Egyptian culture surfaced after Napoleon's campaign into Egypt in 1798 and it stimulated interest in Egyptian, Moorish, and even

²⁴ The Keller collection is located in the Stowe Center Library. According to David F. Ransom, George Keller's office records have disappeared in total. Perhaps along with these disappeared office records were present Keller's drawings and plans of the Charter Oak Temple.

²⁵ The art movement Gothic Revival encompasses the Neo-Gothic and High Victorian Gothic styles of the mid- to late 19th Century. In this paper I will use Gothic Revival since it is a broader term and it concerns the revival of the Gothic *esprit* during this period.

Byzantine art in Europe and the United States. During the 19th century, European and American artists and architects amalgamated these different artistic styles into an “Oriental” exotic style called Orientalism. French painters like Eugene Delacroix and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres fueled the imagination of Westerners with paintings of harems and “exotic” Arab women.

As I have shown, the possible artistic vocabulary that George Keller had available was varied and large. However, the main style that Keller utilized in the ecclesiastical buildings he designed before the Charter Oak Temple project is Gothic Revival. Keller’s churches are characteristic of the High Victorian Gothic style buildings erected in New England during the 1860’s and 1870’s. The Grace Episcopal Church in Windsor, CT (1864) and the Elizabeth Chapel in Hartford, CT (1875) have clean lines, are not ornate, and while their masonry appears heavy, verticality is maintained. The fact that Keller was a non-Jew and his experience in architecture was mainly in designing Protestant churches and public buildings suggests that he probably had to formulate an innovative architectural language for the Charter Oak Temple building. The dilemma that Keller probably faced was designing a non-Christian religious building without having it look like the Gothic Revival Christian churches of the time, while respecting Beth Israel’s desire to be accepted and be recognized as members of the American society.

I believe that the architecture of the Charter Oak Temple building is the result of combined artistic movements of the 1870’s and a reflection of Beth Israel’s attitudes towards itself as a Reformed Jewish congregation in the United States during the latter part of the 19th century. According to a Connecticut Historic Buildings Resources Inventory form that David F. Ransom filled out on the Charter Oak Temple, the building is described as High Victorian Eclectic.²⁶ I interpret the meaning of this “style” as an amalgamation of the different styles that were influencing American architecture in the latter part of the 19th century such as the ones I described in the above paragraphs. I feel that it is difficult to categorize stylistically the Charter Oak Temple because George Keller combined various and a different architectural styles to suit the specific needs of Congregation Beth Israel. However, I will show that the

²⁶ I found this form in the Greater Hartford Jewish Historical Society

architectural shape of the Charter Oak Temple is characteristic of other Reform temples during the 1860's and 1870's.

The architectural shape of the Charter Oak Temple is strikingly similar to that of the B'nai Yeshurun Temple (1866) in Cincinnati and Fernbach's Temple Emanu-El (1868) and Central Synagogue (1872) in New York City. Furthermore, all of these buildings, including the Charter Oak Temple, share the basic architectural structure of the Reform Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue built in 1866 in Berlin, Germany. Twin towers on each side topped by Byzantine style "bulbous" domes flank the fenestrated central façade of these temples. The central façade generally contains 2 or 3 rounded arch doorways. Eastern inspired twin towers such as those implemented by Keller in the Charter Oak building, and present in the other temples discussed, was a popular motif in synagogue architecture at this time because it acknowledged and alluded to Judaism's "Eastern" origins in Jerusalem/Palestine. In addition, I believe that the architects of these temples chose this basic shape in order to differentiate them from the vertical gabled Gothic shape characteristic of Christian churches built in Europe and the United States during the 1860's and 1870's. The fact that the Charter Oak Temple's architectural shape is similar to the other temples discussed leads me to believe that Keller studied Reform synagogue architecture and wanted to accommodate Congregation Beth Israel's wishes to have a temple built similar to those designed by Fernbach.

The exterior of the Charter Oak Temple differs from that of the temples discussed above in that it is devoid of ornate Moorish style decoration. Instead, the Moorish style accents are subtly present in the Charter Oak Temple's polychrome masonry. I believe that Keller did not include ornate Moorish decoration in his design for two reasons: to cut costs for the congregation and more importantly, to avoid making the temple's exterior look too "Oriental" and "exotic". In addition, it seems that Keller took into consideration Beth Israel's identity as a Reform Jewish congregation by incorporating different "Eastern" style motifs, which allude to Judaism's Jerusalem/Palestinian past, with Gothic style motifs. The central section, flanked by the towers, is decorated by Gothic accents complemented by opposing Romanesque motifs. The rounded arch, which is the most distinctive characteristic of Romanesque architecture, can be

seen either alone or divided by pilasters in the two doorways and the nine windows of the temple. The distinctive bulkiness in mass of the building is also Romanesque in style as opposed to the lightness of the Gothic Revival Christian churches built around that time. However, Gothic Revival elements are such as three small octafoil rose windows on the façade and the high gabled roof are present in this building. In addition, I believe Jewish symbolism is present in the two entry doors whose shape alludes to the two tablets of the Ten Commandments.

The interior of the Charter Oak Temple reflects the compromise between Congregation Beth Israel's Judaic tradition and its contemporary Reform ideology. When the Charter Oak Temple was built in 1876, mixed family pews and an organ were made part of the interior design of the building.²⁷ However, more traditional elements were incorporated such as the Decalogue depicted in the center of the octafoil stained window in the back wall. Based on the photographs I have seen and my visits there, I have found that the interior is a combination of stylistic elements.²⁸ Underneath this octafoil window, Gothic Revival style tracery delineates the niche where the ark was located. The flying buttresses that appear to form a central nave in the interior space of the Charter Oak Temple are also stylistically Gothic. Surprisingly, these buttresses allude to the flying buttresses placed outside of Gothic French cathedrals for structural and aesthetic support. It is important to note that although Keller incorporated various Gothic Revival elements in the interior and exterior of the Charter Oak Temple, Keller never utilized the Gothic pointed arch in his design. Perhaps Keller believed the pointed arch would have been an inappropriate motif to incorporate in a synagogue since this arch was an important element in Gothic Revival church design during this time.

The stenciling on the wall, which is of stylized geometric flowers and leaves, has been attributed to George Keller.²⁹ The geometric aspect of the stenciling has Moorish elements; however, I think Japonism and the Arts & Crafts movements also influenced the simplified shapes of the stenciled plant life.

²⁷ *Hartford Daily Courant*, May 27, 1876

²⁸ Calvary Church, the Christian congregation that bought the Charter Oak Temple building in 1936, was a "kind owner" and "it did not make any significant alterations or additions during its stay [until 1972]". "History Made and Restored." *Hartford Courant*, October 14, 1982.

²⁹ "The Painted Decoration of Connecticut's First Synagogue Revealed." *Connecticut Preservation News*, January/February 1996 (vol. 19, no. 1).

Although the colors of the Charter Oak Temple are described in an 1876 dedication article as “pretty colors of pearl, blue drab...”³⁰, the colors revealed in 1992 by painting restorer John Canning are vibrant: yellow, orange, maroon, green and blue.³¹ The vibrant colors present on the walls of the now restored Charter Oak Temple are reminiscent of the palette of colors usually used in “Oriental” inspired decoration of the Victorian times. In addition, painting restorer John Canning points out that stenciling done in the Charter Oak Temple was also widely used in Hartford’s homes as a form of decoration.³² Perhaps, Keller referred to contemporary interior decoration books fashionable at the time and wallpaper patterns designed by Orientalists such as Christopher Dresser.³³ In incorporating Moorish and “Oriental” elements to the wall decoration, Keller achieved a decoration style that was pertinent with the congregation’s Judeo/Palestinian past and the Judaic tradition of not illustrating human form and at the same time, maintained the design contemporary with Victorian decoration styles of the day.

What sources might have George Keller been looking as assistance for his design of the Charter Oak Temple? In the Stowe Day Library, I found art and design books commonly owned by intellectuals or scholars of mid- to late 19th century Hartford³⁴. One of these books is Blanc’s *Grammaire des Arts du Dessine* (1874) formerly owned by George Keller himself.³⁵ In *Grammaire*, the author warns the reader to exercise caution by the brilliant colors of the Orient, Egypt, Morocco and Spain otherwise “high art sensibly declines and threatens to disappear”. Perhaps the author is also warning the reader of the excesses of the “exotic” and dangerous Orient and its art. Keller might have also been looking at Gothic art books such as *Examples of English Mediaeval Foliage and Decoration* (1874), which describes and

³⁰ *Hartford Evening Post*, May 26, 1876.

³¹ “A Faith Restored!” *Northeast Magazine*, January 28, 1996. The

³² “Restoration Work Leads to Discovery.” *Hartford Courant*, October 14, 1982.

³³ For example, Keller would have borrowed stenciling patterns from a book like A.P.Boyce’s *Modern Ornament and Interior Decorator: A Complete and Practical Illustration of the Art of Scroll, Arabesque and Ornamental Painting* (1874).

³⁴ The Stowe Day Library specializes in 19th century archival material collected from prominent figures and families in Hartford. Most of the design books that I was able to examine in the Stowe Day Library had belonged to a prominent or scholarly person in Hartford.

³⁵ Blanc, Charles. Kate Newell Doggett, trans. *Blanc’s Grammaire des Arts du Dessine* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1874)

illustrates the decorative language of English Gothic art.³⁶ In all likelihood, Keller must have also studied John Ruskin's 1849 *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, which proved to be a bible to architects working with the Gothic Revival vocabulary during the mid- to late 19th century. The most interesting of these books is *The Illustrated Magazine of Art* (1853) an encyclopedia-style book about art and architecture around the world.³⁷ I suspect that Keller might have looked at a book like this *The Illustrated Magazine* since it discusses and provides illustration of a wide variety of styles in art.

By designing the first Jewish temple in Connecticut, George Keller left a legacy in the state's synagogue building. Other Jewish congregations in Connecticut continued the practice first set by Germany's Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue in 1866, and later followed by Keller in his 1876 design of the Charter Oak Temple, to have built structures composed by a fenestrated central façade flanked by twin towers topped by Byzantine style "bulbous" domes. In addition, each of the buildings that followed the construction of Beth Israel's Charter Oak Temple exhibit(ed) Moorish, Byzantine and Romanesque elements to different degrees. The temple built by New Haven's Mishkan Israel (Reform) in 1897 exhibits strong Romanesque elements. Surprisingly, the other two buildings that exhibit the architectural shape shared by the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue and the Charter Oak Temple were not built by Reform congregations but by Orthodox ones. Such synagogues built by Orthodox congregations were the Ados Israel Synagogue (1898) in Hartford and the ornate Moorish B'nai Synagogue (1902) in New Haven. Clearly, the language of Reform synagogue building had reached Orthodox congregations in Connecticut.

By 1935 Congregation Beth Israel had grown from 125 members in 1899³⁸ to more than 600 congregants³⁹. The need of a larger space⁴⁰ and the desire to move towards the west side of Hartford, where many of Beth Israel's members resided⁴¹, drove the congregation to build a new temple in West

³⁶ Colling, James K., *Examples of English Mediaeval Foliage and Coloured Decoration, Taken from Buildings of the 12th to the 15th Century* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1874)

³⁷ *The Illustrated Magazine of Art* (New York: Alexander Montgomery, 1853)

³⁸ *The Congregation Beth Israel Presents a Description "Temporal and Spiritual" of their New Temple...*

³⁹ "Beth Israel Bids Temple Good-Bye" *Hartford Daily Times*, June 8, 1935.

⁴⁰ The Charter Oak Temple had a capacity of accommodating about 500 people. Silverman, pg. 12.

⁴¹ Dalin, pg. 97

Hartford. In 1936 the new temple was finished and Congregation Beth Israel moved to its present location at 701 Farmington Avenue in West Hartford, CT.

Similarly to the Charter Oak Temple, the design of the Beth Israel Temple⁴² is a compromise between contemporary and ancient stylistic elements. Structural elements such as the massing and the dome of the temple are strikingly similar to those of the Byzantine church Hagia Sophia (532-7 C.E.) in Constantinople; however, the angular and geometric masonry of the temple is obviously 1930's Art Deco. Unlike the congregation of 1876 that built Charter Oak Temple, the congregation of 1935 left evidence of the decisions made about the architectural style the Beth Israel Temple. Records exist that suggest that the building committee led by Rabbi Abraham J. Feldman of Congregation Beth Israel favored a Byzantine style.⁴³ The most telling of these records is the pamphlet published by the congregation to commemorate the dedication of Temple Beth Israel in 1936.⁴⁴ This informative pamphlet describes the materials, symbols and styles of each and every architectural element of the temple's interior, from the stained windows to the carved arches. The roundels on the walls and the stained windows are rich with Old Testament and Hebraic symbolism. The Byzantine style is referred in the various decorations and objects in the temple: "the coloring [of the stained windows] is that of the best period in glass, namely that of the 12th and 13th centuries, which in turn, was based on Byzantine enamels."⁴⁵ In addition, "the four chairs in the pulpit are hand carved in oak in true Byzantine style".⁴⁶ After careful examination of this pamphlet, I have reached the conclusion that by 1935 Congregation Beth Israel had a clear idea as to how to portray itself as a Jewish congregation confident with its Jewish faith in a non-Jewish American society.

⁴² I have decided to call the "new" 1936 building Beth Israel Temple because the congregation is still housed in this location.

⁴³ Dalin, pg. 98

⁴⁴ *The Congregation Beth Israel Presents a Description "Temporal and Spiritual" of their New Temple...*

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

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